

**THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON NURTURING CHRISTIAN
CHILDREN IN NAMIREMBE DIOCESE: A CASE OF MENGO ARCHDEACONRY,
UGANDA**

JOEL SEKYANZI

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DECLARATION

I, **JOEL SEKYANZI** pronounce that this thesis is my novel scholarly work and has never been given in to any institution of higher learning for any declaration.

SIGNATURE: 

DATE: 28.10.2025

APPROVAL

The contemporary thesis, titled "The effects of parental divorce on nurturing Christian children in Namirembe Diocese: A Case of Mengo Archdeaconry," has been given in to the University with my authorization as the academic supervisor.

Signature : Edison Kalengyo Date: 28/10/2025

Supervisor:

REV. CANON. PROF. EDISON KALENGYO

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined the impact of parental divorce on the nurturing of Christian children in Namirembe Diocese, Uganda. In addition, Offspring exposed to parental break up in Namirembe Diocese encounter momentous contests, comprising expressive and emotional technical hitches, due to the collapse of customary family configurations and principles. In addition, the contemporary study further adopted a mixed-methods approach. Therefore, the study employed both qualitative and quantitative data paradigms. In relation, the study consisted of 57 participants and data was collected from Clergy, counsellors, Teachers, children from divorced families, as well as guardians. The participants to the study were designated using purposive and convenience sampling techniques. In addition, current study further reveals that parental separation has a deep and protracted emotional bearing on Christian children, resulting into mental state of loneliness, sadness, anxiety, anger, and low self-esteem. In relation, study reveal that, the effects can spill over into their divine lives hence, triggering some to quail God's affection and righteousness. In relation, the study further established that, divorce obstructs with the social progression of children, exposing them to isolation, stigma, poverty, and poor academic performance. The study identified positive and negative coping mechanisms employed by Christian children, including prayer, reading the Bible, finding peer support, and opening up to trusted adults. However, faith and community resources were not equally distributed, and developmental pastoral and education interventions were needed to improve the resilience of children and inhibit the formation of maladaptive coping mechanisms. The findings have policy implications for child welfare and family support programs, advocating for child protection policies and family strengthening initiatives that incorporate psychosocial and spiritual support systems for children in divorced families. The research recommends collaboration between the government and faith-based organisations in planning and implementing child-centred programs to support Christian children affected by divorce.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the study

This chapter presents the background to the study, statement of conceptual framework, scope of the study, significance of the study and the definitions of the key terms used in the study.

Divorce, is the formal dissolution of a marital union. Studies have shown that divorce has significant implications for individuals, families, and the society at large. Divorce among many Christian's families is caused by infidelity, sexual incompatibility, substance abuse, financial difficulties, poor communication, and workaholism¹. Despite the increasing prevalence of divorce among Christians, biblical teachings and doctrines detest it as marriage is meant to be a lifetime commitment . When divorce occurs, couples go through difficult situations; some manage amicable separations while others endure prolonged legal and emotional disputes leading to mental disorders, loss of employment etc. The most culprits in this debacle are the children².

Divorce, particularly if it happens during early childhood or adolescence, has enduring effects on children, leading to premature transitions to adulthood, behavioral issues, and academic struggles . These challenges manifest in various forms, including low self-esteem, difficulties in forming relationships, and long-term emotional instability. If unaddressed, these adverse effects may persist across generations, perpetuating cycles of academic underachievement, emotional distress, and skepticism toward marriage and family life³.

¹ Shabrina, R., D. Kusristanti, and R. A. Listiyandini. "Gratitude and Resilience among Adolescents Who Have Experienced Parental Divorce." *Psikohumaniora: Jurnal Penelitian Psikologi* 4, no. 1 (2019): 49-64.

² Priccilar Vengesai, 'African Initiated Churches and Gender Equality: Interpreting the Concept of Wife Submission in the Context of Marital Equality in Zimbabwe', *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ahead of print, 1 October 2024.

³ Rohrllich, Joan, Mary S. Raney, and Daniel E. Coleman. "The Effects of Divorce on Children's Emotional Adjustment." *Journal of Child and Family Studies* 25, no. 3 (2018): 312-329

Children are widely regarded as precious gifts from God, entrusted to parents to nurture and strengthen familial bonds. Divorce disrupts this balance, significantly affecting not only the parents but also the children. In African societies, divorce has particularly severe consequences due to the central role of family and community in child development.

The impact of divorce on children's holistic development within Mengo Archdeaconry in Namirembe Diocese, Uganda, requires a nuanced approach considering cultural, religious, and societal factors. The church's response to divorce within its congregation significantly influences the experiences of affected children. A compassionate and supportive approach can help mitigate negative outcomes, while a judgmental or exclusionary stance may exacerbate feelings of isolation and shame⁴.

1.2 Problem Statement:

Divorce and separation are prevalent across all societal strata in Uganda, affecting families irrespective of their social, religious, academic, political, and economic backgrounds. Various reasons, such as religious differences, economic strains, domestic violence, and other marital challenges, contribute to marital breakdowns. The social learning theory underscores parents as primary role models influencing children's behavioral development. Consequently, children raised in households where biological parents are absent due to divorce or separation often experience lower levels of well-being compared to those in intact nuclear families⁵.

The failure of children to adapt positively to the altered family structure can lead to negative coping mechanisms, including substance abuse, delinquency, and other behavioral disorders. In the context of Christian communities in Namirembe Diocese, where traditional family values are deeply ingrained, the impact of parental divorce on the holistic growth of children remains a critical but under-

⁴ Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Sylvia. 2017. "Changing Family Patterns and the African Church: Challenges of Divorce and Single Parenting in Uganda." *Uganda Journal of Religious Studies* 9, no. 1 (2017): 55-72

⁵ Baştan, Nesrin K., and Seda Dülek. "Learned Violence: Intergenerational Transmission of Aggression in Families." *International Journal of Human Sciences* 18, no. 1 (2021): 55-72.

researched issue. Therefore, this research aims to explore the specific experiences of children affected by parental divorce in Namirembe Diocese, identifying factors that influence their adjustment and proposing interventions to support their positive adaptation post-divorce.

1.3 Main Objective:

The main objective of this study is to investigate the effects of divorce on the holistic growth of Christian children in Uganda, focusing on Namirembe Diocese.

1.3.1 Research Objectives:

1. To examine the emotional impact of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese.
2. To assess the social consequences of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese.
3. To analyze the Coping Mechanisms Employed by Christian Children in Response to Parental Divorce

1.3.2 Research questions

1. What is the emotional impact of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese?
2. What are the social consequences of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese?
3. What Coping Mechanisms are employed by Christian Children in Response to Parental Divorce?

1.4.Theoretical Framework

This study's theory was underpinned by three theories that bring out how parental separation impacts children's emotional, social, spiritual, and cognitive development, as discussed below:

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) of 1977 emphasizes that children acquire behaviors, attitudes, and coping mechanisms through observation, imitation, and

modeling within social contexts . Research suggests that SLT plays a significant role in shaping children's behavioral and emotional responses, including aggression, substance abuse prevention, and prosocial behaviors . In the context of divorce, SLT explains how children in Mengo Archdeaconry may develop their views on marriage, family, and faith by observing their divorced parents and the Christian community around them⁶. Despite its limitations, SLT remains a valuable framework for analyzing how exposure to different social models impacts children's emotional and moral development (Evans, 2009).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979) that highlights the interconnected nature of a child's surroundings, emphasizing the influence of immediate settings like family and school and broader societal and cultural factors . In the context of divorce, this theory explains how disruptions in the family unit impact a child's emotional, social, and cognitive development.

Religious Coping Theory (1997) provides a valuable framework for understanding how faith and spirituality help individuals navigate stress and trauma, particularly in the context of divorce (Nikfarid et al., 2018). Pargament (1997) suggests that religious coping strategies such as prayer, church involvement, seeking pastoral guidance, and relying on scripture serve as sources of resilience. Positive religious coping has been associated with spiritual growth, improved emotional well-being, and enhanced stress-related adaptation .

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.5.1 Preliminary Literature Review

Parental divorce significantly impacts Christian children's psychological well-being, relationships, and spiritual development . Studies show that divorce weakens father-child attachment, while mother-child bonds remain crucial in shaping a child's image of God. This trauma can lead to behavioral issues, emotional instability, and

⁶ Ngugi Mary Wanjiku and Phelista Marura Musili, 2024. 'Relationship Between Accommodation Conflict Resolution Style And Marital Satisfaction Among Couples In Nairobi City County, Kenya', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 29, no. 11: 36-42.

diminished trust in parents. Children from divorced homes experience inconsistent parenting, emotional vulnerability, and long-term feelings of abandonment. Meta-analyses reveal that children of divorce scored lower on emotional well-being and had weaker bonds with both parents. Beyond childhood, divorce affects later relationships, with studies showing children from divorced families struggle with trust and commitment in romantic relationships⁷.

Theological perspectives suggest that disrupted parental attachment can alter a child's spiritual development, potentially leading to a distant or punitive view of God . However, some children develop resilience and stronger independence. The church plays a vital role in offering emotional and spiritual support to mitigate these negative effects . Children from divorced families often experience emotional distress, including anxiety, aggression, and low self-esteem . Without emotional support from parents and faith communities, these children may struggle with long-term emotional scars. Providing structured guidance and nurturing environments can help mitigate the negative effects and promote resilience among affected children .

1.6 METHODOLOGY

1.7 Research Design

A research design is a structured framework that guides the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to address specific research objectives. It establishes a logical connection between research questions and data collection processes⁸. This study adopted an Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods research design, which involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data first, followed by a quantitative phase that builds upon the qualitative findings. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and key themes, followed by a structured questionnaire for children from divorced families to collect quantitative data. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

⁷ Bartkowski, John P., Xiaohe Xu, Christopher G. Ellison, and Gabriel A. Acevedo. "Faith, Family, and Forgiveness: Religious Involvement and Marital Stability." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 58, no. 2 (2019): 345-362

⁸ Bian, Xiaohui, and Yun Ji. "The Impact of Parental Divorce on Children's Mental Health." *Journal of Family Psychology* 34, no. 4 (2020): 452-468.

(SPSS) will be used to generate statistical insights. The results from both phases were integrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem, with the final report presenting a synthesis of qualitative and quantitative findings. This design is particularly suitable for studies where qualitative insights are needed to shape the quantitative phase, ensuring the research captures the depth and complexity of the phenomenon before validating findings with numerical data.

1.8 Area of the Study

This study focused on Mengo Archdeaconry, a part of Namirembe Diocese, a prominent diocese in Uganda, known for its high divorce rates and impact on Christian families. The urban center in Kampala faces socio-economic pressures that contribute to marital instability, leading to an increasing number of children raised in single-parent households or under guardianship. The study aims to understand the spiritual and social welfare of its members in this area.

1.9 Population

A study population is the set of individuals eligible for inclusion in a research study , including Christian children aged 6-18, parents or guardians of divorced children, church leaders, teachers, and counselors. The study will include 150 respondents from parent households or under guardianship.

1.10 Sampling

The researcher used purposive and simple random sampling techniques to determine the sample size for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select individuals with specific knowledge or experience relevant to the study, such as parents, teachers, church leaders, and counselors . Simple random sampling were used to select children from divorced families, ensuring equal opportunity for inclusion. This balanced approach enhanced the study's validity and generalizability, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the social consequences of parental divorce on Christian children.

1.11 Data collection Methods and Instruments

The study used a self-administered questionnaire to collect quantitative data; these will be divided into sections; Section A captured the demographic characteristics and the rest of the chapters on study variables. The other sections contained closed-ended questions with suitable alternatives given for section A and an ordinal scale based on the five-point Likert from a minimum of 1 through 5 for the next variables.

Interviews were used as a qualitative data collection method to gather in-depth information from experts like church leaders, teachers, and counselors. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing flexibility in exploring research questions and gathering rich, detailed data.

1.12 Limitations of the Study

This study anticipated to encounter certain challenges, which the researcher addressed the anticipated challenges through appropriate strategies. One potential limitation is the language barrier, as the research area consists of individuals from diverse linguistic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. To overcome this, the researcher employed interpreters during data collection to ensure effective communication and accurate responses.

Another anticipated challenge is transportation, as reaching all identified study locations within the diocese may be difficult. To mitigate this, the researcher sought logistical support from the Diocese, leveraging their position within the community.

Additionally, participant reluctance may arise, as some respondents may be hesitant to disclose personal or sensitive information regarding their experiences with parental divorce. To address this concern, the researcher emphasized the importance of confidentiality, assuring participants that all information shared will be handled with the utmost discretion and used solely for academic purposes.

1.13 Ethical Considerations

This study will adhere to strict ethical guidelines throughout the research process. Prior to data collection, informed consent were obtained from all participants, ensuring they fully understand the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights. Participants were assured that their involvement is voluntary, and they may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

To protect participants' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity, the researcher implemented measures to safeguard personal information, thereby minimizing potential risks and ensuring ethical integrity. Additionally, the study upheld academic integrity by properly citing all sources used, thereby avoiding plagiarism and ensuring credibility.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CONCEPT OF DIVORCE AND POSSIBLE CAUSES IN CHRISTIAN MARRIAGES

2.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the concept of divorce and the possible causes of divorce in Christian marriages, with particular attention to the African context. Understanding what divorce means theologically, legally and socially is necessary before examining the drivers that lead Christian couples to separate.

2.1 The Concept of Divorce

Divorce is generally defined as the legal termination of a marital union, which dissolves the rights and responsibilities between husband and wife⁹. Scholars argue that divorce represents not only the dissolution of a legal contract but also the breakdown of a social and emotional institution upon which children and society depend. In many societies, divorce affects family structures, community relations, and individual identities.

In Christian theology, marriage is considered a covenantal relationship ordained by God¹⁰. In Christian theology, marriage is viewed as a sacred covenant between a man and a woman, ordained by God. This divine institution is built on mutual love, respect, and commitment. Through marriage, couples experience a profound bond, reflecting God's relationship with His people.

This covenantal relationship is rooted in trust, loyalty, and selflessness. Christian couples are called to emulate Christ's love for His church, demonstrating sacrificial love, forgiveness, and patience. By understanding marriage as a divine covenant, couples can cultivate a deep and lasting relationship, built on faith, hope, and love. As such, divorce is viewed as a violation of a sacred bond, except in extreme circumstances such as adultery or abandonment. The Anglican Church in Uganda,

⁹ E. Njeru, 'Causes of Marital Conflicts among Young Married Christian Couples in Free Pentecostal Church-Embakasi, Nairobi County, Kenya', *Journal of Sociology, Psychology & Religious Studies*, ahead of print, 21 September 2021.

¹⁰ Genesis 2:24; Matthew 19:6.

and particularly in Namirembe Diocese, emphasizes the sanctity of marriage and regards divorce as both a moral and spiritual failure. Families that experience divorce often face stigma, as it is seen as a failure to uphold biblical values of fidelity, love, and commitment.

In Uganda, divorce is further shaped by cultural norms. Although the Marriage Act and Divorce Act provide legal grounds for divorce, many Christian communities, including those in Namirembe Diocese, discourage the practice and instead emphasize reconciliation and counseling. Despite this, divorce and informal separations are increasingly reported, with significant consequences for families and children¹¹.

2.2 Causes of Divorce in Christian Marriages

2.2.1 Infidelity and Marital Unfaithfulness

According to Amato^{Error! Bookmark not defined.}, marital infidelity remains one of the most frequently cited causes of divorce worldwide because it destroys trust and the emotional foundation of marriage. Similarly, Mbwirire John¹² argues that even in religious communities, repeated betrayal often overwhelms forgiveness and reconciliation mechanisms. Ugandan studies and pastoral reports indicate that unfaithfulness sometimes manifesting through secret relationships, transactional sex, or the influence of polygamous practices provokes shame and rupture in Christian marriages within Namirembe Diocese. Together these sources show that while Christian teaching formally proscribes infidelity, the lived reality of betrayal in Uganda requires deeper study, particularly on how church discipline and pastoral care either prevent or fail to repair marriages damaged by unfaithfulness.

¹¹ Kyokuhair, Grace Nyamahunge, and Kiyingi Frank Pio. "Influence of Conflict Management Counseling on Marriage Stability of Couples in Pentecostal Churches in Kampala, Uganda: A Cross-Sectional Study." *Student's Journal of Health Research Africa* 5, no. 9 (2024).

¹² Mbwirire, John. *Effects of Marital Conflicts in Christian Marriages in Domboshava Area, Mashonaland East Province Zimbabwe*. 2017. <https://consensus.app/papers/effects-of-marital-conflicts-in-christian-marriages-in-john/88df57821d125548a68dd4aa5591c2c8/>.

2.2.2 Financial Constraints and Economic Stress

Research by Patrick Maina Kamau¹³ finds that chronic economic stress is a consistent predictor of marital conflict and dissolution, especially where couples lack coping resources. In related studies, Wanjiru (2021) notes that unemployment and financial insecurity increase daily friction and unmet expectations within households. Evidence from Uganda shows that economic hardship marked by unstable incomes, dependence on subsistence livelihoods, and rising living costs exacerbates tensions in Christian marriages and frequently contributes to separation in Namirembe Diocese. These findings suggest that economic pressures interact with religious ideals about provision and stewardship, yet there is limited empirical work on how church-led social support or congregational safety nets mitigate divorce risk in low-resource Christian communities.

2.2.3 Domestic Violence and Abuse

Talbot¹⁴ reports that physical, emotional, and psychological abuse are primary reasons many spouses seek divorce, as violence undermines safety and mutual respect. Similarly, Umubyeyi et al¹⁵ demonstrates that prolonged exposure to spousal abuse compels victims to exit marriages even where religious injunctions counsel endurance. In Uganda, pastoral accounts and local studies indicate domestic violence frequently linked to alcoholism, patriarchal norms, and weak legal/pastoral recourse pushes Christian partners toward separation as a means of protection. While church teaching emphasizes reconciliation, the evidence points to a gap between doctrine and practical protection: more research is needed on how Namirembe Diocese's pastoral structures identify, respond to, and prevent abuse without re-victimizing survivors.

¹³ Patrick Maina Kamau, 2025. 'The Marriage Debate among African Christians in the 21st Century: Tradition, Faith, and Emerging Realities', *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, ahead of print.

¹⁴ D. Talbot, 2021. 'Marriage Problems', *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, ahead of print.

¹⁵ B. Umubyeyi et al, 2020. 'The Role of Religion and Religious Leaders in Marital Conflict Resolution: A Perspective of Congolese Migrants' Families Living in Durban, South Africa', *The Family Journal* 28:(413-19)

2.2.4 Infertility and Childlessness

Umubyeyi and Mtapuri¹⁶ finds that infertility often produces marital strain in many African societies because childbearing is central to marital expectations and social status. Uroko Uroko and Solomon Enobong¹⁷ provides similar evidence that blame and stigma around childlessness can lead to marital breakdown. In Africa, cultural emphasis on offspring and lineage means childlessness draws not only personal grief but also social pressure and in some Christian marriages and this leads to recrimination, polygamous solutions, or separation¹⁸. These combined strands imply that while theological perspectives may frame children as blessings, there is insufficient locally grounded research on pastoral counselling, stigma reduction strategies, and how faith communities in Namirembe support infertile couples to prevent marital collapse.

2.2.5 Cultural Clashes and Gender Role Expectations

Agadjanian¹⁹ argues that traditional gender role expectations and cultural norms shape marital relations and can become sources of conflict when partners adopt differing views. Kamau²⁰ shows that tensions arise when modern aspirations for gender equality clash with customary expectations of male authority. In Uganda, contested gender norms such as expectations of women's domesticity and men's financial provision create friction in contemporary Christian marriages and often

¹⁶ B. Umubyeyi and O. Mtapuri, 2019 'Approaches to Marital Conflict Resolution: A Perspective of Democratic Republic of Congo Migrants Living in Durban, South Africa', *Journal of Family Issues* 40: 1065-85,

¹⁷ F. Uroko and Solomon Enobong, 2022. 'Divorce amongst Christian Couples in Yoruba Land: Challenges and Implications', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, ahead of print.

¹⁸ Ngugi Mary Wanjiku and Phelista Marura Musili, 2024. 'Relationship Between Accommodation Conflict Resolution Style And Marital Satisfaction Among Couples In Nairobi City County, Kenya', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 29, no. 11: 36-42.

¹⁹ Victor Agadjanian, 2019 'Condemned and Condoned: Polygynous Marriage in Christian Africa.', *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 82 2: 751-68,

²⁰ Patrick Maina Kamau, 2021 'The Marriage Debate among African Christians in the 21st Century: Tradition, Faith, and Emerging Realities', *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, ahead of print.

precipitate separation as couples negotiate changing roles²¹. The literature indicates a need to probe how Christian messages about gender (from pulpit teaching to household practice) either reinforce harmful stereotypes or promote equitable partnerships that reduce divorce risk.

2.2.6 Migration, Separation, and Work-Related Absence

Uroko and Solomon Enobong²² shows that migration and prolonged spousal absence for work weaken conjugal ties and increase opportunities for mistrust and infidelity. Wambui Kiarie²³ reports that couples separated by employment frequently suffer communication breakdowns that escalate into separation. In Africa, internal rural-urban migration and increasing labor mobility mean many Christian spouses spend long periods apart, which is identified as a contributory factor to marital instability²⁴. These dynamics suggest a research gap concerning how the church's pastoral care and community networks in Namirembe support families experiencing occupational separation and whether specific interventions can strengthen marriages under migratory pressures.

2.2.7 Weakness of Counseling and Pastoral Support

Wanjiku²⁵ highlights that robust premarital and marital counseling reduces divorce by equipping couples with communication and conflict-resolution skills. Conversely, another study²⁶ finds that weak or absent church counseling structures leave couples without practical tools to manage crises. In the context of the African setting,

²¹ Grace Nyamahunge Kyokuhairie and Dr. Kiyingi Frank Pio, 2024. 'Influence Of Conflict Management Counseling On Marriage Stability Of Couples In Pentecostal Churches In Kampala, Uganda. A Cross-Sectional Study.

²²F. Uroko and Solomon Enobong, 2022, 'Divorce amongst Christian Couples in Yoruba Land: Challenges and Implications', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*

²³ Esther Wambui Kiarie, *Forgotten Grievers: Perspectives on Childhood Grief in the Baptist Church in Kenya*, n.d.

²⁴ B. Umubyeyi and O. Mtapuri, 2019. 'Approaches to Marital Conflict Resolution: A Perspective of Democratic Republic of Congo Migrants Living in Durban, South Africa', *Journal of Family Issues* 40:1065-85,

²⁵ Ngugi Mary Wanjiku and Phelista Marura Musili, 2024. 'Relationship Between Accommodation Conflict Resolution Style And Marital Satisfaction Among Couples In Nairobi City County, Kenya', *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 29, no. 11: 36-42.

²⁶ 'Effectiveness of Satisfactory Marriage Training Intervention in Marital Conflicts and Marital Disillusionment', *Avicenna Journal of Neuro Psych.o Physiology*, 12 July 2020, 13-18

several diocesan reports and parish observations note limited capacity for structured marriage preparation and follow-up—insufficient training for pastoral counselors, lack of standardized programs, and stigma about seeking help leading to preventable breakdowns in Christian marriages in Namirembe Diocese. Thus, while theology emphasizes reconciliation, there is a practical shortfall in pastoral systems; more empirical study is needed on scalable, culturally appropriate counseling models within the Diocese.

2.3 Summary and Research Gap

The reviewed literature indicates that, divorce in Christian marriages in Namirembe Diocese, Uganda are attributed to economic pressure, urbanization, and changing attitudes towards marriage²⁷. Disruption of family structures and parental relationships can further lead to divorce. Therefore, mitigate divorce among Christian families in Namirembe, the present study further focus on local drivers and the lived experience of Christian couples and families in Namirembe Diocese.

²⁷ Nannyonga-Tamusuza, Sylvia. 2022. *The Sacred and the Social in Ugandan Family Life*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 201-212.

CHAPTER THREE:

THE EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON CHRISTIAN CHILDREN IN NAMIREMBE DIOCESE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents findings on the emotional impact of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese, using both quantitative survey results and qualitative data from focus groups. These findings are also situated within broader scholarly debates to highlight points of agreement and variation in global and local contexts. Five thematic challenges were identified: sadness, loneliness, anger, anxiety about the future, and crying as an emotional expression.

Table 1: Emotional Impact of Parental Divorce on Christian Children in Namirembe Diocese

Indicator (Short Name / Question)	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	Mean
I am sad because my parents are not together.	8 17.02%	7 14.89%	4 8.51%	17 36.17%	11 23.40%	3.34%
I am often lonely or excluded	7 14.89%	6 12.77%	5 10.64%	11 23.4%	18 38.30%	3.57%
I get mad thinking about my family.	9 19.15%	8 17.02%	8 17.02%	11 23.4%	11 23.4%	3.15%
I worry about my future	4 8.51%	7 14.89%	4 8.51%	17 36.17%	15 31.91%	3.68%
I cry every time I think about my parents' separation	10 21.28%	7 14.89%	8 17.02%	10 21.28%	12 25.53%	3.15

Source: Research Data 2025

Sadness

Survey results revealed that 59.6% of children agreed (36.2%) or strongly agreed (23.4%) that they felt sad because their parents were not together, while 17.0% strongly disagreed and 14.9% disagreed. The mean score was 3.34 (SD = 1.16). This indicates that sadness is the most common emotional impact reported, though a notable minority expressed resilience or acceptance of the situation. The responses from focus group participants provided vivid illustrations of sadness. A 13-year-old girl expressed,

“When I see other children walking with both their parents to church, I feel something missing in my heart.” Similarly, a boy of 11 years shared, *“I don’t like going home after school because it is quiet and I miss how my father used to make us laugh.”*

Several children admitted that sadness was strongest during special events such as birthdays, Christmas, or Parents’ Day at school, when the absence of one parent was most visible. Guardians and teachers observed the behavioral consequences of sadness. Guardian 1AV remarked,

“These children often feel abandoned or unloved when one parent leaves. Some cry in silence and isolate themselves even from their friends.” Teacher 2MK echoed, *“There’s a visible drop in mood some of them stop participating in class or stop smiling altogether.”*

One Clergy member noted that sadness often spills into children’s spiritual lives, with some becoming withdrawn from Sunday school or church activities. These findings resonate with Coiro and Emery²⁸, who identifies sadness as a universal emotional response to divorce. However, according to the results, sadness is amplified by communal stigma and the erosion of shared family worship, aligning

²⁸ M. Coiro and R. Emery, (March 1998): ‘Do Marriage Problems Affect Fathering More than Mothering? A Quantitative and Qualitative Review’, *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 1: 23-40,

with Wambui Kiarie²⁹, who found that faith-based communities in Africa add layers of grief when children perceive spiritual disconnection.

Anger

Results from the survey indicated that 46.8% of children agreed or strongly agreed that they got angry when thinking about their family situation, while 36.2% disagreed and 17.0% were neutral. The mean score of 3.15 (SD = 1.14) suggests that while anger is less universal than sadness, it remains a significant emotional response. Additionally, in focus groups, children openly discussed feelings of anger directed at both parents. A 12-year-old boy explained,

“Sometimes I feel angry with my mother for chasing my father away, but other times I get angry with him for leaving us.” A 14-year-old girl added, *“I shout at my friends or siblings even when they do nothing, because inside I am hurting.”*

Some participants admitted that their anger was not always visible but would emerge suddenly when reminded of their parents’ conflict. This was further highlighted by one of the counselors who opined that that anger often manifests in behavioral problems.

“Children often internalize blame or redirect anger towards peers and guardians. This sometimes leads to fighting in school or defiance at home.” Counselor 3NM observed,

This was further confirmed by teachers. Teacher 2MK remarked,

“Some of them lash out at classmates or argue with teachers. One boy said he was tired of being told his father abandoned him.” Clergy 4JK added, *“They question God why He allowed their family to break apart—and this anger spills into their faith journey.”*

²⁹ Esther Wambui Kiarie, *Forgotten Griefers: Perspectives on Childhood Grief in the Baptist Church in Kenya*, n.d.

These findings confirm Uroko and Solomon Enobong's argument that anger is a common byproduct of divorce, stemming from feelings of betrayal or injustice from the parents. However, unlike in Western contexts, in Africa often the anger is directed towards God, suggesting that emotional struggles are intertwined with spiritual questioning³⁰.

Anxiety

A majority, 68.1% of the children responded in the affirmative or strongly affirmative, and only 23.4 percent said in the negative, when questioned on whether they were worried of their future or not. The highest score of 3.68 (SD = 1.16) was recorded on the indicator related to anxiety, showing it as a rather important emotional effect. The responses from children via focus groups disclosed that children have concerns regarding finances, education and status. One ten year old girl admitted, *"I keep thinking what I should do should my mother leave me too, like my father?"* One 15-year-old boy said he was afraid that his friends would make fun of him in case they learn about the divorce of his parents. Other respondents were also concerned with school expenses, one of them mentioned that they heard their mother cry because of money, and that they are afraid to be taken out of school. Teachers on the other hand associated anxiety with poor concentration. Said teacher 5LS,

"Some children are not able to concentrate in lessons; they are always worried". The counselors pointed out that the concerns tend to be long term. Counselor 4NA said that,

They tend to think and ask themselves all the time, who will pay their fees when mum cannot or will they also be sent away just like dad was? They are concerned about it in the long run.

³⁰ Mary Zacharia Charwi, 2025 'Semantic Expressions of Conflict and Emotion in African Religious Prayers: A Cross-Tradition Analysis', *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 12, no. 1.

As noted by Clergy 6BT, kids who are afraid of their eventual divorce in future or that God is punishing them have been counseled by him/her. This is in line with the findings of F. Uroko and Solomon Enobong¹⁷ who cite anxiety as one of the most persistent effects of divorce. However, the findings from the study introduce new dimensions of religious insecurity and that of communal stigma. The concerns of children are not limited to academic and social issues but also include questions of religion and their belief in God and divine justice, which indicates that the sense of anxiety is culturally specific.

Loneliness

The results of the survey revealed that the prevalent emotional issue was loneliness given that 61.7% of the children said that they frequently felt lonely or excluded (Mean = 3.57, SD = 1.16). The participants of the focus group highlighted the sense of being excluded. One 12 year old boy said,

“When my father left, my mother was too busy and I spent most of my time alone. One fourteen year old girl replied that she does not go to her friends anymore, as she is embarrassed that she has a broken family.

Children also talked of skipping out of school or church when they were sure that they would be asked about their parents. Guardians on the other side emphasized the dangerous lifestyle due to the feeling of loneliness. This was echoed by Guardian 2PK who observed that

“Some kids begin to move with bad groups as they desire to occupy the empty vacuum of the missing parents”.

Counselors 4NA stressed the susceptibility of lonely children, stating that the lack of attention to loneliness can result in depression. According to Kira Birditt et al³¹, one of the major consequences of divorce was loneliness because of interrupted parental contact. The findings from the field confirm this but also bring in a new level of

³¹ Kira Birditt et al., ‘The Development of Marital Tension: Implications for Divorce Among Married Couples’, *Developmental Psychology* 53 (October 2017): 1995.

community rejection and shame, which adds to loneliness beyond individual sentiments into social isolation.

Low Self-Esteem

Even though it is not reported as emphatically as sadness or anxiety, 33.5% of children admitted having a hard time with the feelings of low self-worth following the divorce of their parents. The stories of the children showed decreased confidence. One of the girls who are 13 years old said, *"I believe I am not as good as a child with both parents"*. One 15-year-old boy said: *"Sometimes I believe that my friends are better than I am because their families are united"*. Others were unwilling to assume leadership positions because they feared to be mocked by others.

One teacher observed that there was lower confidence in the classroom. Teacher 7MM noticed that, children in divorced families have the tendency of not responding to questions and taking up leadership roles. They shrink back." Clergy 8NS said, *"children sometimes put the question, Are we cursed, or do God love us less than he loves others?"*

This was reaffirmed by a Counselor who emphasized that the inferiority complex is usually long-term, and determines how children perceive themselves during adolescence and adulthood. These results are in line with those reported by Uroko and Solomon Enobong, ¹⁷who reported low self-esteem as a long-term consequence of divorce. However, in Namirembe, low self-esteem is not merely personal, it is also theological, because children see family breakdown as a sign of God disapproval. This highlights the overlapping of an emotional and spiritual identity within the African Christian settings.

Conclusion

The results show that Christian children in the Namirembe Diocese have a multifaceted emotional influence of parental divorce. The issues of sadness, anger, anxiety, loneliness along with low self-esteem were observed as the key problems, which are present in both personal challenges and observable actions. The facts also indicate that these feelings are more than merely reactions to parental absence; they are also influenced by the stigma of the community and theological explanations of suffering.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE SOCIAL IMPACT OF PARENTAL DIVORCE ON CHILDREN AND COPYING MECHANISMS AVAILABLE

4.0 Introduction

This chapter gives results of the societal effects of divorce of parents and how children cope with it. The information was induced by surveys, focus groups, and interviews with children, clergy, counselors, teachers, and guardians. The second part examines coping styles such as prayer, discussing with others, fellowship, activities, and support groups.

Every theme is a blend of statistics and narratives, as well as literature to present the total analysis.

4.1 Social Impact of Parental Divorce on Children

Key: *SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA = Strongly Agree*

Indicator (Short Name/Question)	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	Mean
I am different from other children because my parents are separated	14	12	9	6	6	
I don't like to talk about my family with friends.	5	5	2	20	15	
I am not happy at family activities at school.	2	3	10	17	15	
I have trouble concentrating at school	9	8	3	15	12	
My teachers and classmates support me	7	8	2	14	16	

Source: *Research Data 2025*

4.3 Anxiety and Fear

The results of the survey show that more than half of the children who were surveyed, 54.3 %, or to be more precise 31.9% agreed and 22.4% strongly agreed, that they regularly develop anxiety or fear after their parents separate. About a quarter (25.5%) did not agree, and 20.2% was also neutral. The average result of 3.44 out of five points with a standard deviation of 1.29 indicates that anxiety and fear occur in these children, but in different degrees. Such discoveries suggest that divorce destabilizes the family and enhances the feeling of insecurity among the children as regards to the current situation and the future.* Divorce can have a profound impact on children, leading to feelings of insecurity and instability. When parents separate, children may worry about their future and their place in the family. This uncertainty can affect their emotional well-being, making it challenging for them to feel safe and secure.

As a result, children may struggle with anxiety, fear, and uncertainty about their own future relationships. It's essential for parents, caregivers, and support systems to provide a nurturing environment, offering love, reassurance, and stability to help children navigate these complex emotions and challenges. The findings from focus-group discussion also indicated that they are afraid of abandonment, instability and conflict most. One child (10 years old) said:

Even when I fall asleep, I am always worried that my mother might leave me as well. I still wake up at night and check whether she is there or not. I don't feel safe anymore."

Teacher 2NM further noted:

"These children are very distractive in the classroom. You notice those bitten nails, no eye contact or they are just gawking into nothingness. They are anxious as though something worries their minds."

This opinion was not much distant what Clergy 4JM observed:

“The question that children usually ask is, Reverend, did God love families, why did he permit my family to be broken. This insecurity of abandonment does not end with their parents but goes on to the way they perceive the love and protection of God.

These empirical findings support the findings made by Umubyeyi and Mtapuri³² that children in divorced families tend to be more anxious due to apprehension of further loss and just take a chance in the future. Uroko and Solomon Enobong¹⁷ also found that children of divorce are also prone to the development of anxiety about being abandoned, leading to social withdrawal and difficulties in developing interpersonal relationships that are based on trust.

Children who experience parental divorce often face significant emotional challenges, including anxiety and apprehension about their future. Research has shown that these children are more likely to develop anxiety due to the uncertainty and insecurity that comes with divorce. This anxiety can stem from the fear of losing the other parent or feeling abandoned, which can lead to social withdrawal and difficulties in forming trusting relationships.

The emotional impact of divorce on children can be intense, and it's essential to consider the potential long-term effects on their mental health and well-being. When parents divorce, children may feel a sense of loss and grief, which can manifest in different ways, such as anxiety, depression, or behavioral problems.

In the context of Namirembe Diocese, where traditional family values are deeply rooted, children of divorced parents may face unique challenges. The societal pressure to maintain family unity can exacerbate the emotional struggles these children face. Moreover, the lack of parental care and supervision can lead to poor academic performance, psychological imbalance, and strained relationships.

³² B. Umubyeyi and O. Mtapuri, (March 2019). ‘Approaches to Marital Conflict Resolution: A Perspective of Democratic Republic of Congo Migrants Living in Durban, South Africa’, *Journal of Family Issues* 40:1065-85,

Anger and Aggression

The survey indicates that 46.8 of the children responded that they are angry by considering separation of their parents, 23.4% said that they agreed and strongly agreed. On the contrary, 36.2% (36.2) disagreed with it and 17.0% (17.0) were neutral. The score means of 3.15 (SD=1.14) indicate that, despite the fact that anger is not a universal reaction, it represents a major affective and social reaction in close to half the sample. The scatter plot of answers depicts the difference in the way children process anger: some of them absorb it without much say, and some of them are very aggressive or even defiant of authority. The children themselves described the problem of anger in emotional, personal terms in the focus groups: One of the 15-year-old boys in Focus Group 4 said:

“I am so angry at my mother sometimes when she chased my father away, and other times when I am angry at him when he left us. It is as though that nobody cared what I would think about it.”

A similar response was given by a 10 year old girl in Focus Group 3 that;

“When my classmates say things such as your father ran away, I also become so angry. I do not even want to speak, I am just in a mood to fight.”

It was observed by counselors and teachers on many occasions that anger of the children was often evident through behavioral disturbances: Counselor 3NM explained:

“Children would tend to take it out on the people surrounding them. They brawl in school, disobey in home, or push around others. At the bottom it is not bad behavior. it is great agony projected outwards. “

Clergy 4JK emphasized the religious aspect:

“Some children question me, why has God allowed this to happen? Did He not love our family? This rage is not only at their parents, but occasionally, at God himself, and shaketh their faith.”

The household effect was also observed by Guardian 1AV:

One of my children will bang doors and refuse to eat when she is reminded of her father. The rage is transferred into life and unless it is addressed, it may turn to be a permanent bitterness.

Such results are in line with the research of Uroko and Enobong¹⁷, who noted that anger is a rather common by-product of divorce that is caused by the sense of betrayal, injustice, and abandonment. On the same note, Coiro and Emery³³ points out that children whose parents have divorced often act aggressively which may be mistakenly interpreted as delinquency and not emotional anguish.

Problems with Concentrating at School.

The respondents to the survey stated that 59.6% of the children either agreed (34.0%) or strongly agreed (25.6%) that they were unable to concentrate on their studies after the divorce of their parents. The remainder (21.3%) was neutral, and 19.1% was disagree or strongly disagree. The average of 3.42 (SD -1.27) indicates a large sample of children who are facing academic disturbances due to the emotional effects of the divorce. This observation highlights the fact that divorce does not only disrupt the home setting but also affects school performance where children lack concentration and desire to study. Children from different age groups expressed personal stories based on the disruption of their academic performance by parental separation.

In Focus Group 3, one boy of nine years old explained:

“When I am sitting in the classroom, then I only continue thinking about the reasons why my father did not stay. My mind drifts away even when the teacher is speaking”.

In Focus Group 4, one girl, fifteen years old, told:

³³ M. Coiro and R. Emery, (March 1998). ‘Do Marriage Problems Affect Fathering More than Mothering? A Quantitative and Qualitative Review’, *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 1: 23-40,

“I even shed tears in class without making any noise since I miss the way the family was. I believe that my heart is heavy because the teacher thinks I am not serious with studying.”

Teacher 1MK remarked:

“There are learners who go to schools physically, but their minds are not present. They are empty, they do not want to participate and their academic performance starts to decline.”

These results can be compared with Amato³⁴ who proved that the academic performance of children in the affected families tends to decrease as a result of emotional suffering and turmoil. Similarly, Amato³⁴ also discovered that common among children whose parents separated were distraction, absenteeism and poor test scores.

Loneliness and Isolation

According to the survey responses, loneliness would become one of the most widespread emotional issues among the children surveyed. Sixty-one point seven percent of respondents said they agreed (34.0%) or strongly agreed (27.7%) with the statement of them being lonely or excluded most of the time after the divorce of their parents. The only difference is that only 17.0 6.5% of them disagreed, and 21.3 12.8% of them were indifferent. The average (3.57) and standard deviation (SD 1.16) also highlight the pervasiveness of the feeling of isolation. All these evidence all point to the conclusion that on top of the direct loss of a parent, there is a substantive void that the children find harder to fill during the divorce process and this makes them vulnerable to social withdrawal and even emotional distress. The qualitative stories provided by the children within the focus groups are very bright descriptions of how loneliness manifests itself in everyday life. A one 10-year-old girl made the following observation:

³⁴ Paul Amato and S. Rogers, ‘A Longitudinal Study of Marital Problems and Subsequent Divorce’, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 59 (August 1997): 612-24.

“At home, which I get to after school, it is very quiet. I am sitting alone as my mother works and my father does not visit anymore. At times I even talk to myself.”

The adult stakeholders who are in close contact with such children are in support of how profound loneliness can be as one of the main after effects of divorce. Guardian 2PK noted:

“Others just join bad circles so as to fill the vacuum caused by the death of both parents. They want to belong and sometimes this drives them to the negative company.”

However Counselor 4NA warned that:

“Loneliness, when not dealt with, may easily translate into depression. Such children feel neglected and unwanted and unless they are intervened with early enough they carry this responsibility silently.”

The school perspective was reported by the teacher 3MK:

“You find them sitting isolated at the time of break or group activities. They avoid their peers and do not talk, which negatively affects not only the social life of the person but also his or her ability to collaborate in the classroom.”

These empirical results are in line with the findings of Birditt³⁵ who highlighted that loneliness is one of the most frequent psychological outcomes of the divorce because of the broken parental contact and reduced emotional support. Similarly, Coiro and Emery³⁶ has also found out that children of divorced parents often have impairments in the integration with their peers thus heightening social withdrawal.

However, there are two unique layers added to the Namirembe Diocese context. To begin with, there is the feeling of loneliness which is enhanced by the rejection of

³⁵ Kira Birditt et al., ‘The Development of Marital Tension: Implications for Divorce Among Married Couples’, *Developmental Psychology* 53 (October 2017): 1995.

³⁶³⁶ M. Coiro and R. Emery, ‘Do Marriage Problems Affect Fathering More than Mothering? A Quantitative and Qualitative Review’, *Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review* 1 (March 1998): 23-40.

the community- children feel embarrassed about their non-functioning families and face peer and neighbor stigma. Second, spiritual loneliness arises when the children doubt the role of God in their predicament, and thus pull out of church and prayer. In this way, the problem of loneliness goes beyond personal feelings and becomes the issue of social exclusion and spiritual alienation and is a complex issue that needs a multi-faceted approach.

Anger and Aggression

The instrument demonstrated that 54.3% of the children supported their feelings of anger or aggression upon the divorce of their parents with 32.6% and 21.7% agreeing and strongly agreeing that they were frequently angry or became aggressive. Only a lower percentage of 19.1% did not agree and 26.6% were indifferent. The average of 3.29 (SD=1.22) implies that anger is an important emotional issue, rather than as widespread as loneliness. These conclusions imply that even though not every child can use aggression as an outlet to their emotions, a large portion of them internalize anger in coping with abandonment, frustration, or confusion. Children often described how divorce caused anger and even violent outbursts in some cases. A 13 year old boy in Focus Group 1 said:

“When my father abandoned us, I began to fight with other boys at school. In case any person irritated me in the slightest, I used to beat him since I was already angry within me.”

Adults who worked with children found anger to be one of the main issues, which often resulted in disruptive behavior. Teacher 1AN observed:

“The infants of the fragmented households are quite a number of them, temper tantrums. During group work in classes, they are quick to lose temper and at times become violent. This interferes with learning and their fellow learners.”

Guardian 3LM noted:

“Some of them accuse one of their parents and harbor the frustration through the years. This resentment renders them aggressive, both in the household and in the community at large.”

Counselor 2CK underlined the latent pain:

The rage usually conceals great pain. They are not aware of how to show sadness, and thus they portray it with aggression. When unchecked it may develop into ant-social behaviour in the later life.

Such observations have been consistent with those of Onyela³⁷ who indicated that the children of divorce often display signs of distress in terms of aggression and irritability; an indication of internalised frustration. In the same manner, umubeyi³⁸ reported increased behavioural ills such as aggression and defiance in the children of divorced families.

4.2 Copying Mechanisms Available for Children undergoing consequences of parental divorce

Key: SD= Strongly Disagree, D= Disagree, N= Neutral, A= Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Indicator (Short Name / Question)	SD%	D%	N%	A%	SA%	Mean
I pray or read the Bible when I am sad.	10 (21.3%)	5 (10.6%)	13 (27.7%)	13 (27.7%)	8 (17%)	3.11
I talk to a person when I am anxious or stressed	7 (17.9%)	9 (19.1%)	4 (8.5%)	13 (27.7%)	14 (29.8%)	3.4
I attend church or fellowship for comfort	14 (29.8%)	10 (21.3%)	4 (8.5%)	8 (17%)	11 (23.4%)	3.02
I try to forget being	10	10	5	14	8	3.02

³⁷ Onyela Felix, Adeola Adams, and Osagie Odobo Samuel, ‘Effect and Management of Marital Conflicts among Christian Couples in Kosofe Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria.’, *Kampala International University Interdisciplinary Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, ahead of print, 30 May 2024,

³⁸ B. Umubeyi, O. Mtapuri, and M. Naidu, ‘The Role of Religion and Religious Leaders in Marital Conflict Resolution: A Perspective of Congolese Migrants’ Families Living in Durban, South Africa’, *The Family Journal* 28 (April 2020): 413-19,

unhappy by doing things I enjoy (for example, playing games or listening to music)	(21.3%)	(21.3%)	(10.6%)	(29.8%)	(17%)	
I try to forget being unhappy by doing things I enjoy (for example, playing games or listening to music)	3 (6.4%)	9 (19.1%)	4 (8.5%)	20 (42.6%)	11 (23.4%)	3.72

Source Research Data 2025.

Surviving by praying and reading the Bible.

According to the survey, 51.1 percent of the children (including 27.7% with the agree and 17.0% with the strongly agree) respondents make use of prayer or reading the Bible when feeling sad. On the other hand, 21.3% strongly disagreed, 10.6% disagreed, and 27.7% was neutral. The mean score was 3.11 (SD= 1.38) indicating that most children find comfort in spiritual practices but a significant proportion of children do not find spiritual practices useful or do not believe in them at all indicating variation in spiritual maturity and personal faith among the children of the diocese. The children who were younger also tended to describe prayer as comforting. For example a participant aged 8 elaborated:

“I pray to Jesus when I am sad and demand that my father should be returned home. But I feel better after I have prayed, even in case he does not come back.”

Similarly, a ten-year-old girl explained:

“I read the Bible sometimes because my mother tells me that now God is my Father. It makes me less alone as I think of Him thus.”

The children of the older age associated prayer with feelings. One of the respondents in Focus Group 4, aged fifteen, said:

“In my prayer, I explain everything to God. This is chatting with a person who will not laugh at me. I feel lighter after prayer.”

Clergy and educators confirmed the importance of spiritual coping but with limitations. Clergy 2DA observed:

“The children also come to the chapel and silently kneel down and pray. They will not talk much, however, we can tell that they take comfort in the presence of God.”

These results are consistent with the study conducted by¹⁵ according to whom religion and spirituality are frequently used by children facing family breakages. African Christians depend on faith as one of the sources of resilience³⁹. Nonetheless, Smith (2015) noted that the usefulness of prayer as a coping mechanism is related to the stage of child development and the manner which faith is instructed both at home and in church.

Children facing family breakups, such as parental divorce, often turn to religion and spirituality as a coping mechanism. This is particularly true in African Christian contexts, where faith plays a significant role in daily life. For many children, prayer and spiritual practices provide a sense of comfort, security, and hope for the future. However, the effectiveness of prayer as a coping mechanism depends on the child’s developmental stage and how faith is taught and modeled at home and in church.

A child’s understanding of faith and prayer evolves as they grow. Younger children may rely on literal interpretations of religious teachings, while older children and adolescents may grapple with more complex theological questions. Moreover, the way faith is instructed can significantly impact its usefulness as a coping mechanism.

When faith is presented in a loving, supportive, and nuanced manner, children are more likely to find solace in their spirituality. In contrast, if faith is taught in a rigid or judgmental way, it may exacerbate feelings of guilt, shame, or anxiety. By

³⁹ Priccilar Vengesaj, ‘African Initiated Churches and Gender Equality: Interpreting the Concept of Wife Submission in the Context of Marital Equality in Zimbabwe’, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ahead of print, 1 October 2024.

understanding the interplay between faith, family, and child development, parents, caregivers, and spiritual leaders can provide more effective support to children navigating family breakups.

Surviving by reading the Bible.

According to the survey, 51.1% of the children (including 27.7% with agree and 17.0% with the strongly agree) respondents make use of prayer or reading the Bible when feeling sad. On the other hand, 21.3% strongly disagreed, 10.6% disagreed, and 27.7% was neutral. The mean score was 3.11 (SD= 1.38) indicating that most children find comfort in spiritual practices but a significant proportion of children do not find spiritual practices useful or do not believe in them at all indicating variation in spiritual maturity and personal faith among the children of the diocese.

The survey showed that many children in the diocese turn to prayer or Bible reading when they're feeling sad. About 51.1% of the children said they use spiritual practices to cope with their emotions, with 27.7% agreeing and 17% strongly agreeing. This suggests that for many children, faith plays an important role in helping them deal with difficult feelings.

However, the survey also revealed that not all children find comfort in spiritual practices. About 21.3% strongly disagreed and 10.6% disagreed that they use prayer or Bible reading to cope with sadness. Additionally, 27.7% of the children were neutral, indicating that they may not be sure or may not use spiritual practices to deal with their emotions. This variation highlights that children in the diocese have different levels of spiritual maturity and personal faith, and that spiritual practices may not be a universal source of comfort for all of them.

The children who were younger also tended to describe prayer as comforting. A participant of Focus Group 3 aged 8 elaborated:

“I pray to Jesus when I am sad and demand that my father should be returned home. But I feel better after I have prayed, even in case he does not come back.”

Clergy and educators confirmed the importance of spiritual coping but with limitations. Clergy 2DA observed:

“The children also come to the chapel and silently kneel down and pray. They will not talk much, however, we can tell that they take comfort in the presence of God.”

Counselor 1FA added:

“Prayer can be effective, but in the case of certain children it is a ritual instead of an emotional release. They need supportive people to assist them to interpret their faith in curing manners.”

These results are consistent with the study conducted by Kenneth I. Pargament⁴⁰ according to whom religion and spirituality are frequently used by children facing family breakages. African Christians depend on faith as one of the sources of resilience⁴¹. Nonetheless, Smith (2015) noted that the usefulness of prayer as a coping mechanism is related to the stage of child development and the manner which faith is instructed both at home and in church.

Through talking to someone.

According to the survey, 57.5 % children responded that they discuss with someone when they feel anxiety or stressed (27.7%) or strongly agree (29.8%). Conversely, 17.9 % strongly disagreed, 19.1% disagreed and 8.5% were neutral. The average of the score of 3.40 (SD = 1.42) results in the fact that Interpersonal communication is a rather powerful coping mechanism but is not implemented in all cases. The distribution indicates variations in access of children to adults or peers someone they can trust or as open as they can be with their private feelings. A lot of children told about the relief they experience when opening up to someone. A 12-year-old girl shared:

⁴⁰ Kenneth I. Pargament et al., ‘Patterns of Positive and Negative Religious Coping with Major Life Stressors’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 37, no. 4 (December 1998): 710.

⁴¹ Priccilar Vengesai, ‘African Initiated Churches and Gender Equality: Interpreting the Concept of Wife Submission in the Context of Marital Equality in Zimbabwe’, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ahead of print, 1 October 2024.

“I think that when I confide in my aunt about my concerns, I can say that the pain is faded. She hearkens and answers me that I am not alone.”

A 13-year-old boy explained:

“I sometimes talk to my best friend. He realizes since he too lives with one of his parents. We don't laugh at each other.”

There are some older children who were reluctant. A 15-year-old girl said:

“I would like to speak, and I am afraid that everyone will talk against me. This is the reason why I keep silent most of the time even when I am hurting.”

This demonstrates that interpersonal coping is a strong one, but stigma and mistrust have certain situations when children cannot apply it. Counselors stressed on the use of listening ears. Counselor 1FA remarked:

“When kids know someone who can listen to them they empty their hearts. This helps them to reduce their stress and even avoid depression.”

Clergy 5MK added a caution:

“The risk is when children do not find a safe individual. They can hold their plight within them and this manifests itself in deviant conduct.”

These results are in line with those made by Priccilar Vengesai⁴² who have emphasized interpersonal support as one of the most effective coping mechanisms that young people can use. Kinship networks are used in most African settings as shock absorbers to an emotional distress⁴³. Nevertheless, research indicated by Amato⁴³ warns that disclosure can only work well in cases when it is received with empathy and confidentiality otherwise it could strengthen children who are afraid of being rejected.

⁴² Priccilar Vengesai, ‘African Initiated Churches and Gender Equality: Interpreting the Concept of Wife Submission in the Context of Marital Equality in Zimbabwe’, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ahead of print, 1 October 2024.

⁴³ Nancy Nungari, Gooreka Okahabwa, and Samuel Ojuade, ‘Severity of Marital Distress and Subsequent Activation of Support Systems among Christians in an East African Metropolis’, *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, ahead of print, 1 January 2024.

In many African cultures, kinship networks play a vital role in providing emotional support to young people, serving as a safety net during times of distress. This interpersonal support system allows individuals to share their concerns and feelings with trusted family members or community elders, who offer guidance, empathy, and reassurance. By leveraging these existing social structures, young people can access emotional support, practical assistance, and valuable life experience, helping them navigate life's challenges.

Effective coping mechanisms like interpersonal support require empathy and confidentiality to be truly beneficial. When young people feel heard and understood without fear of judgment or rejection, they're more likely to open up and share their struggles. However, if disclosure is met with criticism, dismissal, or ridicule, it can exacerbate feelings of anxiety, shame, and isolation. It's important to create a supportive environment where young people feel safe speaking openly about their emotions and experiences without fear of reprisal or judgment

Coping by Attending Church or Fellowship

According to the survey, 40.4% of children (17.0% and 23.4% respectively) agreed (or strongly agreed) that they went to church or fellowship to find comfort. Nonetheless, 29.8% strongly declined, 21.3% declined, and 8.5% were indifferent. The average was 3.02 (SD = 1.59), which is a moderate dependence on communal religious gatherings as coping strategies. The standard deviation is large indicating a difference in experiences- some children derived power in fellowship whereas others shunned it. The church was a place of refuge to some of the children. A 10-year-old boy shared:

“When I attend Sunday school, I forget my sadness. I love singing with other people.”

A 13-year-old girl explained:

“I like being a part of the choir, this is because when I sing I feel close to God and I do not remember the fights of my parents.”

Nevertheless, there were other children who avoided activities in church. A 14-year-old girl said:

“I do not like attending church, there people would question me where my father is. Feels bad to me and I keep me at home.”

Clergy 5MK observed:

“Fellowship with other children gives a sense of identity and healing to some children, particularly when they are in choirs or prayer groups.”

However, Teacher 2EK observed a different course of action:

“Others skip school or church events and they are embarrassed when they do not attend together as both parents. They will even interpret such occurrences as reminders of their incompleteness.”

This observation is also similar to the findings of ⁴⁴who discovered that religious involvement may be effective as a protective source to children out of disrupted families, which provides them with a sense of belonging and meaning. Nonetheless, the participation may also serve to increase the stigma as argued by ⁴⁵when communities are not sensitive. However, Namirembe results show that church attendance is a two-sided sword: on the one hand, it gives people a sense of safety and acceptance, and on the other, it exacerbates feelings of being rejected. This underscores why the church needs to be more inclusive and sensitive to children of divorced families.

⁴⁴ Priccilar Vengesai, ‘African Initiated Churches and Gender Equality: Interpreting the Concept of Wife Submission in the Context of Marital Equality in Zimbabwe’, *Pharos Journal of Theology*, ahead of print, 1 October 2024.

⁴⁵ Paul Amato and S. Rogers, ‘A Longitudinal Study of Marital Problems and Subsequent Divorce’, *Journal of Marriage and Family* 59 (August 1997): 612-24.

Distractions by ways of activities.

The survey showed that most of the children engaged in hobbies or activities like sports and music and chores done in the home to keep their minds off the suffering caused by the separation of parents. Approximately, 46.8% of the respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed that activities made them feel better, 19.1% of the respondents said no, and the rest 34.0% said that they remained neutral. The average was 3.08 (SD = 1.29) meaning that there was a moderate dependence on the activity-based coping. Children freely explained how they resorted to activities in order to keep their minds active. A 15-year-old boy explained:

“When I go out to play football with my friends I forget all that at home. During the two hours, I am simply happy and free”.

Another 13-year-old girl said:

My favorite activity is singing in the school choir. I do not think of my parents quarrelling when I am singing. It makes me feel light.”

Additionally, counselors said that although activities are good outlets of coping, they can hide grief. One counselor explained:

“To prevent working with emotions, children can invest too much in activities. It is good in short, but when not in a processed form, the pain will come back later.”

Scholars observe that structured activities can be a coping mechanism of distraction. Research report that sports and creative arts offer a healthy way to get rid of stress among suffering children. On the same note, discovered that extracurricular activities promote resilience through self-esteem and social connectedness. Nevertheless, in line with the field research, there are also indications that distraction without emotional processing can cause delayed psychological adaptation.

Look for Supportive People

In the surveys, it was revealed that children used to seek emotional support among the people who they trusted. Regarding the question of whether they told their feelings to their friends, siblings or guardians, 54.3% of the respondents were in agreement or strongly agreed, 24.5% were in disagreement with it, and 21.3% were neutral. The average score was 3.24 (SD = 1.31) and it is possible to conclude that supportive relationships are a significant but not a universal way of coping. The children emphasized on the importance of sharing with others. A 12-year-old girl explained:

"I do the same thing to my best friend when I am sad. She says not to feel guilty of it, and it takes the burden off my hands."

One 14-year-old boy insisted on the importance of siblings:

"I talk to my older brother. He knows, as he too is like that. We encourage each other."

Religious and counselors placed importance on the support networks. One clergy member stated:

Children usually do not present themselves to us in search of doctrines but in search of an ear. They desire to feel secure, listened to as well as to be assured that God does not stop loving them in spite of the divorce.

A counselor explained:

"Peer support is something that is not taken seriously but when it comes to adolescents their friends are their lifeline. Educating them on healthy friendships may greatly ease the loneliness and anger burden."

The results are resonant with the existing literature. As Amato and James **Error! Bookmark not defined.** allow us to believe, positive relationships are protective factors against the negative impact of divorce. Family and peer support decrease the

threat of depression and increase the coping resilience. Talbot ⁴⁶ also maintain that the presence of at least one trusted adult also helps a great deal to buffer children against rejection feelings. The Ugandan background introduces an additional culture factor: extended families and church groups tend to intervene as invaluable sources of emotional support and give children more social safety nets.

⁴⁶ D. Talbot, 'Marriage Problems', *Woman's Mysteries of a Primitive People*, ahead of print, 8 October 2021,

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to study the impact of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese with the help of three major objectives: (i) to examine the emotional impact of parental divorce on Christian children in Namirembe Diocese. (ii) to examine the social impact of parental divorce on children, and (iii) analyze the coping mechanisms employed by Christian children in response to parental divorce. The data collection was in form of surveys, focus groups, interviews with clergy, counsellors, teachers, and guardians. The results that follow are outlined below.

In reference to the first objective, the study shows that the divorce of parents causes such deep emotional turmoil in children. Loneliness, sadness, anger and anxiety, the other hand are the most prominent results of the study. The findings of the study further indicate that, 50% of the children (54.3%) experienced anxiety or fear after parental divorce, while 46.8% highlighted anger.

The analysed data indicates that, the emotional toll of parental separation children within Christian families in Namirembe Diocese with loneliness, anger, sadness and anxiety emerging as overriding emotions. The findings therefore suggest that such feelings originate from the loss of a constant and secure family atmosphere hence resulting into feelings of abandonment, fear and insecurity about their future. In relation, Children may find it hard to cope with the deviations brought about by parental divorce, resulting in amplified fear and anxiety. Therefore, anxiety can manifest in numerous ways that include but not limited to anxiety of being left alone, anxiety of the unknown, or anxiety of losing the other parent.

The findings of the study further indicate that, when parents divorce, children encounter drifts in their life and their sense of safety and stability is troubled hence leaving them feeling lost and undefined.

In view of the above, the upheaval can activate a range of feelings such as anxiety and anxiety to sadness along with anger. Therefore, Children may find it hard to comprehend why their parentages are no longer living together hence, leading to a sense of guilt, selfblame and shame.

In view of the above, appreciating the cardinal causes of their uncertainties, parents can provide encouragement and support to aid children go around such challenging situations which not only creates havoc in their emotional but also social standings. Children need unwavering affection, stability and care during these gruesome periods of time. Therefore, parents can offer the right support with the right facilities as to enable these children to pick up the crumble with the fluctuations in marriages and blossom withstanding the challenges of parental divorce.

In relation, the high scores of children encountering anxiety (54.3%) and anger (46.8%) is high. Anger in a number of cases is utilized as a coping mechanism by children battling with the emotional discomfort of parental divorce. It may in most cases be directed towards their parents, themselves and to a less extent, others. In addition, unresolved anger can result into behavioral glitches including but not limited to aggression. Therefore, It's indispensable for caregivers, support systems and parents to recognize and authenticate children's sentiments by offering a safe and supportive atmosphere for them to work on their feelings. Finally, children can cultivate healthy coping apparatuses and work towards healing and modification.

These findings were supported by qualitative narratives and children reported about constant fears of being abandoned and anger towards one or both parents. The teachers noted the following challenges; distraction, nail biting, and lack of eye contact, but the clergy noted that some children went further to doubt the love that God had on families. It was observed that external aggression often masked internal pain by counsellors. They are consistent with the literature available: ⁴⁷focus on the fact that divorce is the most common antecedent that triggers anxiety and anger in

⁴⁷ B. Umubyeyi et al,2020. 'The Role of Religion and Religious Leaders in Marital Conflict Resolution: A Perspective of Congolese Migrants'

children, and ⁴⁸illustrates that children of divorce have to face the problem of low emotional stability and low self-esteem.

The research in regard to the second objective came up with the realization that the divorce of parents has far reaching social impact on children. The survey results showed that 59.6% of the respondents had difficulties concentrating at school after their parents divorced, and 61.7% of them felt lonely and excluded. Educators reported deteriorating performance and lack of engagement in group activities, whereas parents reported that some of the students had found themselves in bad peer groups in their efforts to fit in. It was reported in focus groups that peer and community stigma would worsen the suffering of the children as most of them were ridiculed due to their family situations. Clergy also observed that children would carry their feelings of being rejected into the spiritual world and they felt they were not part of the church. This evidence confirms previous research by ⁴⁹, who had attributed divorce to social isolation, and by ⁵⁰ who reported that children of divorced parents tend to have academic problems and be rejected by their peers.

In the context of the third objective, the research has brought to the fore a wide range of coping strategies used by Christian children. The results of the survey showed that 51.1% of the participants used prayer or reading the Bible as a comforting factor, and 57.5% sought comfort in opening up to someone they trusted. About 40.4% resorted to church or fellowship to find a way to cope with sadness and 46.8% were preoccupied with sports or music so as not to be sad. The qualitative results provided a touch of color, as younger children often prayed the parent who had left come back, whereas older ones referred to prayer as a safe place to express the suppressed feelings. Talking to friends, siblings or trusted adults was one of the most effective coping mechanisms but stigma and mistrust were sometimes hindering disclosure. Counsellors emphasized the importance of interpersonal

⁴⁸ F. Uroko and Solomon Enobong, 2022. 'Divorce amongst Christian Couples in Yoruba Land: Challenges and Implications', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies*, ahead of print.

⁴⁹ Baloyi Joseph, 2021. *Living Beyond Brokenness: A Christian Perspective on Healing after Divorce*. Pretoria: University of South Africa Press.

⁵⁰ Arkorful, Vera. "Parental Divorce and Its Impact on Adolescent Behaviour: A Ghanaian Perspective." *African Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 12, no. 1 (2020): 77-92

support and organized activities to experience resilience, and clergy emphasized the need to have a sensitive and inclusive church atmosphere. These findings are supported by the literature: ⁵¹show that faith practices, peer support, and mentorship provide the protective effect though it depends on the sensitivity of the receiving situation.

In relation, the role of peer support, faith practices and mentorship in moderating the negative impacts of parental divorce on children cannot be overstated. The available literature clearly shows that these dynamics can offer a protective effect, aiding children in circumnavigating the emotional trials associated with family divorce. For example, faith practices provide a sense of comfort, security, and hope for the future. When children feel supported by their faith community and have opportunities to engage in spiritual practices, they may encounter a deeper sense of resilience and coping.

In addition, the efficacy of these protective dynamics, nevertheless, hang on the precise needs and statuses of the child. For instance, a supportive peer network can offer a sense of belonging and authentication, whereas mentorship can provide guidance and role-modeling. Similarly, the key is to guarantee that these support structures are superficial to the child's exceptional desires and experiences.

Similarly, when peer support, mentorship, faith practices are tailored to the individual child's needs, they can help foster resilience and promote positive outcomes. By acknowledging the complexities of each child's situation, caregivers and support systemsj can provide more effective and targeted support, ultimately enhancing the child's ability to cope with adversity.

In addition, the findings of the current study indicate that a reasonable number of the Christian children lost one of the parents, creating life-threatening emotional trauma and behavioral syndrome. In addition, the mitigating measures can be effected by the application of the arbitration services which would permit for joint

⁵¹ Baştan, Nesrin K., and Seda Dülek. "Learned Violence: Intergenerational Transmission of Aggression in Families." *International Journal of Human Sciences* 18, no. 1 (2021): 55-72.

co-parenting when there occurs a divorce. The female as well as the male administration staff need to advocate for the support for family consultations, the focus remaining the theme of forgiveness, love, as well as the sharing of the responsibility of raising children.

5.2 RECOMMENDATION

The current study recommends that;

Namirembe Diocese, Church of Uganda should design and execute a structured mentorship and peer-support programs to help children with psychological and emotional desires from divorced Christian families. The mentorship programs should aim at pairing children with committed and responsible Christians to furnish them with encouragement, Christian values and moral guidance. Mentorship initiative should further encompass active participation in church programs, Bible study and prayer.

Namirembe Diocese, Church of Uganda should heavily invest in continuing professional development programs of it's childrens church teachers and ministers to improve on their competencies so as to respond to childrens needs effectively and with love. Therefore, the CPD programs for church ministers should encompass modules on pastoral counselling, child psychology and informed trauma-informed care.

Namirembe Diocese should comeup with a formal institutional support systems to guarantee sustainability and continuity of care for childrens principally from divorced families. Specifically, Namirembe Diocese should create of referral networks connecting the Church with psychologists, social workers, family ministries and counsellors in order to offer comprehensive support.

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APPENDIX I: TURNITIN REPORT



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