

UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

**THE IMPACT OF LONG DISTANCE MARRIAGE ON THE FAMILY:
A STUDY OF FAMILIES WITH SPOUSES ABROAD IN KIAMBU COUNTY**

By

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Requirement for the Award of Masters of Arts in Sociology, Counseling.**

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DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been submitted for examination in any other University

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This research project has been submitted for examination with my approval as the University Supervisor

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DEDICATION

This research project is dedicated to all couples in long distance marriages.

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With gratitude in my heart, I wish to acknowledge the moral support accorded to me by my husband Emilio Kariuki during the period of my study.

My acknowledgements go to my daughters Ann and Esther. Your company reduced the loneliness spurts that I experienced. Your support in delivering and collecting questionnaires from the respondents contributed immensely to the success of this important study.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of long distance marriages on the families with spouses abroad in Kiambu County. Residents of this County are ambitious hardworking and aggressive in exploring ventures deemed to improve social-economic standards. The three main factors or reasons that contributed to individuals traveling abroad were employment, education and career advancement. Despite outward mobility contributing positively to the welfare of the family, it also had far reaching negative consequences. In order to assess the impact of a spouse's absence, three objectives guided this study that is; to analyze the state of long distance marriages, to assess the effects of long distance marriage on the family and thereafter to identify appropriate strategies to deal with challenges associated with long distance marriages in the County. Four main components of family focused on in this study were; couple's relationship, parenting, finances and communication.

This descriptive research was conducted in Kiambu County in the central region of Kenya. The target population comprised of married individuals living in the County who had spouses abroad. Questionnaires with open and closed questions were used to collect data while findings were presented by use of tables, graphs, pie charts and percentages. The study revealed that (73%) females and (27%) males were left in the county presenting a form of "single hood" for married individuals.

Three main factors/reasons contributed to a spouse's outward mobility. These were; employment at (68%), education (29%) and career advancement (27 %). Specifically the absence of a spouse impacted negatively on a couple's sexual relationship where (81%) of respondents were sexually unfulfilled, (72%) were emotionally distant with the absent spouse while (45%) cited the existence of infidelity in the family. Children who are significant members of a family were equally affected by the absence of a parent. This was evidenced by (83%) of the respondents saying that children were emotionally distant with the absent parent, (56%) respondents said that children lacked models while (35%) of respondents said that children became depressed. Family finances (51%) and communication (68%) were aspects of a family affected by absence of spouse /parent as recorded by the respondents. In conclusion, families

must possess the following virtues to survive; trust (81%), honesty (67%), open communication (57%) and integrity (48%). Family members must prepare adequately for a long distance marriage by; attending counseling (70%), consulting with those in long distance marriage (59%), consulting a religious leader (30%) and prayer. Respondents gave their peers the following advice useful for strengthening their long distance relationships; seek reunion; trust each other, being honest. They were informed that if they were not prepared to be left alone, they should never get married. They should also learn to cope with the absence of a spouse positively.

Finally, the following recommendations were made; need for healthy communication, the need for proper preparation prior to travel abroad by families attending counseling, sharing their experiences with peers and consulting with religious leaders. Reunion should be the ultimate goal for couples in long distance marriages. Further studies should be conducted focusing on the absent spouse and singles in long distance relationships.

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List of Acronyms

AMISON	African Union Mission in Somalia
KDF	Kenya Defense Forces
SWOT	Strength Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats
LDM	Long Distance Marriage

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Problem

Human beings transit through two main civil events in their lifespan that transform their civil status permanently; birth and marriage. Marriage is a key event in an individual's life. There are various types of marital unions in Kenya namely: Religious marriages, civil marriages, customary marriages and "Come we stay marriages." In the latter two arrangements couples live together as husband and wife without any recognized documents to proof their unions but carry out the functions of a family like any other legal unit. According to Erickson (Meier et al 1983) individuals enter marital unions at the stage of intimacy versus isolation (20-35) years. In marriages, couples live together geographically and emotionally and settle down to child bearing and parenting while still progressing with their careers. This is true for Kiambu residents' who's County is rich in agriculture. Residents engage in tea, coffee farming, horticulture and livestock rearing. Other individuals transact import and export businesses in an effort towards self-actualization. This need for self-improvement compelled individuals to travel to other towns or abroad creating long distance marriages.

In the early 1990's institutions of higher learning were few in the country a factor that contributed to individuals traveling abroad for further studies. Some individuals acquired academic scholarships which lacked provision for the entire family. That meant that part of the family was left behind. The situation was worsened by stringent visa regulations that made visits by the spouse left behind to visit spouse abroad difficult. After the task abroad was completed, some individuals sought permanent residency and if they were not successful, they lived as illegal immigrants abroad. Other individuals traveled abroad in disguise of attending functions such as graduation ceremonies, conferences and weddings never to return home while others fraudulently disguised their identities to remain abroad.

Another group of people who traveled abroad were the uniformed personnel on call of duty. Currently Kenya Defense Forces (KDF) is in Somalia on call of duty as they form both the United Nations and African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) peace keeping forces. Most of these officers are young people with young families. The short period together robs the couple

of the emotional connection necessary in laying a firm foundation for a family. The call to duty therefore separated the young couple temporarily in the duration of the assignment or permanently in the case of death as there are casualties to every conflict. Wafula and Gisesa The Standard(1st May 2014) wrote on a horrifying incident where a number KDF officers were killed in Somalia while communicating on phone with a wife back in Kenya.

Employment was a major factor that contributed to spouses traveling abroad as doctors, academicians, expatriates and diplomats who left their families behind. Career advancement was another key factor to outward mobility. Sport personalities traveled abroad to pursue careers in the field of sports. Personalities in athletics and football affords a decent life from sports with surplus proceeds being invested in projects such as farming and construction industry back in Kenya. However the spouses left behind experienced a lot of challenges such as focused scrutiny from in-laws. The in-laws observe their every move, plans, investments and their acquaintances. Other in-laws demanded more financial support from their relative abroad and prevail over the individual left behind in making critical family decisions.

Human beings get married for varied reasons such as for companionship, emotional support, sexual fulfillment and child bearing. Sexual fulfillment has a crucial role in a couple's life as it cements a couple's relationship. Women have a definite child bearing time frame (15-49) within which procreation must take place. Other individuals get married to acquire status in society and as proof of adherent to societal norms.

Whereas the issues highlighted above were not necessarily unique to families in long distance marriages, the absence of a spouse created unique challenges to these families hence this study.

1.1 Problem Statement

Society perceives long distance marriages as a form of relationship where couples are happy and stable financially. This perception arises from the purpose of marriage which is to bring a couple together physically, emotionally and mentally as they progress through life situations happily ever after. Ephesians (5:31, NIV) states that a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and the two will become one flesh.

There were two main factors that contributed to individuals traveling outside Kenya from the County namely; academic pursuit and employment.

A couple's relationship is crucial in providing companionship; friendship, emotional support, sexual fulfillment, key ingredients to a healthy marriage. Through sexual relationship, consummation of marriage and procreating occurs. Spouses also receive emotional fulfillment from each other through value recognition, companionship, praise, support in household chores, accomplishing tasks and contributing ideas for family investment and welfare. Some of the earlier cited ingredients to strong families lack in long distance marriages.

Parenting is a full time job that requires parenting inputs from both parents. The absence of a parent therefore leads to varied developmental gaps in children that include antisocial behavior, truancy and delinquency. Lack of mentorship from a father, especially to teenagers results in identity crisis and poor negotiation of developmental milestones. Sigmund Freud as cited in (Meier, et al 1983) states that child-parent relationship at the phallic stage (3-6years) is critical to the modification of a child's behavior. Parents left behind with the children, handle their needs single handed. Parents left behind with children get overwhelmed by the children's demands that range from provision of basic needs, school matters and their emotional needs. Families in long distance marriages require additional finances since they have to maintain two homes. In the event of low paying jobs abroad, the family finances get strained leading to unconventional means of wealth creation.

Communication is crucial to families for the development of strong interpersonal relationships which also serves as a conflict resolution tool. However communication for families in long distance marriages is faced by various challenges such as; cost of calls, time zone difference, conflicting work schedules among others.

The foregoing factors often impact on the marriage institution negatively. The presence of long distance marriages and the absence of studies conducted for such marriages in Kiambu County, informed this study.

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What factors contribute to long distance marriages?
2. What are the effects of long distance marriages on the family?

3. What strategies can adequately respond to the needs created by long distance marriages without destabilizing long distance marriage relationships?

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to identify the impact of the long distance marriages on the family. The specific objectives were:

1. To analyze the state of long distance marriages in the County.
2. To assess the effects of long distance marriages on the family in Kiambu county.
3. To identify appropriate strategies to deal with challenges associated with long distance marriages in the County.

1.3 Justification of the study

Couples often face issues and challenges arising from their diverse family norms, backgrounds, social economic status, personality and individuals' perspectives to life. Couples living together frequently get into conflicts resulting from their subjective view on issues. However since they live together, they have an opportunity to resolve their issues amicably immediately they arise. They are also in a position to make critical decisions relating to investments, child bearing, and place of residence. As a family needs increases, a couple is forced to explore ways of meeting these needs at the same time fulfilling their ambitions and aspirations. A desire to improve a couple's standard of living, therefore catalyzes outward mobility in search of better paying jobs, education, employment, career development, business ventures and so on. This search for better life separates families presents unexpected problems to the members .Some of these problems include; estrangement of spouses from each other and parents with children, high cost of telephone calls, poor communication, lost period to have children, parenting, less finances, different time zones, suspicion, mistrust, infidelity and dishonesty. These problems weaken the couple's relationship, family cohesion and create emotional distance among members. Children in a long distance marriage experience a form of single parenthood since they are left under the care of one parent for many years. This leads to strong relationships with the available parent and estrangement with the absent one.

This study on long distance marriages was thus critical bearing in mind that despite the presence of families in this type of marriage, information on their plight, unique problems, challenges operations, functionality was scanty. This study therefore sought to seal the knowledge gap on the plight these families in the County. From the foregoing discussion on this phenomenon of long distance marriage, its complexities and lack of studies in this area in the Country, it was worth investigating it comprehensively. The study findings led to the development of appropriate strategies helpful to families in this type of marriage. Conclusions were drawn, and recommendations made. For the issues that were outside the scope of this study, recommendations for further studies were made.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study.

This study focused on the impact of long distance marriages on families in Kiambu County. The respondents were married individuals. The study excluded singles in long distance relationships. Four main aspects of a family that greatly affected by the absence of a spouse or parent were; emotional and sexual relationship of the couple, parenting, finances and communication. This quantitative research used questionnaires to collect data. However the study was faced with the following limitations: availability of a big group at one time, the vastness of the county presented a challenge in covering it. Some respondents declined to participate in the study due to fear of disclosing their valuable family issues to a stranger.

Such respondents only agreed to participate when they were introduced by a mutual friend who was in the same situation. Others preferred a friend to take a questionnaire to them, hence avoid any contact with the researcher. In some cases the respondents' spouses were abroad illegally and therefore feared that the researcher would expose them to foreign countries' governments to their disadvantage. They therefore declined to participate in the study.

The fact that this study was the first to be conducted in the County and given the fragile security situation in the country, suspicions were rife on the intentions of the researcher towards the respondents.

1.5 Operationalization of Terms

The study used the following listed terms as per the definition given.

Abroad: Any country outside Kenya.

Couple: Husband and wife in a marriage.

Diaspora: Countries outside the country of residence.

Distance: Absence geographically or emotionally.

Effects: The negative results that accrue from a situation.

Foreign land: A country outside Kenya.

Family: An institution comprised of husband, wife and children in a marriage.

Impact: The consequence resulting from an issue to an individual, group or a thing.

Long distance marriage: refers to a marriage where one spouse lived in Kiambu County while the other spouse resided outside Kenya.

Marriage: The union between a male and female in a marital relationship.

Spouse: A partner in a marriage.

Society: A group of individuals who share norms and live together in the same geographically.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter entails a critical review of key thematic issues derived from the study objectives with a special focus on four main aspects of a family; couples relationship, parenting, finances and communication.

2.1 Marriage

Marriage is defined as an emotional and legal commitment between two people who share emotional and physical intimacy, undertake tasks together, create wealth and utilize available resources. A marriage is a demographic event that joins two families to form a social network. It is also a legal contract between the couple and the state (Olson and De fraim 2003) and an arena where sexual encounters occur and procreation takes place. Marriage is said to resemble a pair of shears, so joined that they cannot be separated, often moving in opposite directions, yet always punishing anyone who comes between members Wright and Roberts (1997). In a marriage, certain conditions must be fulfilled and various functions undertaken. These functions includes socializing children into the norms of the society as well as providing them with an opportunity to develop intimate relationships

2.2 Family.

A family carries varied definitions depending on agenda, actors and the segment of the family focused on. A family is a dynamic, multi- faceted entity hence the frequent change in meaning. A Family exists in a marriage and is a private action of two persons in love. It is a public act of two people pledging to live together throughout their lives ensuring that various functions are articulated. Family members are so interwoven that anything that happens to any member of the family has a direct impact on the other. This is because family members are interconnected and operate as a group known as a family system (Olson and Defrain2003). A family has the following unique features; is fragile, rich in experience, resilient and has a potential to withstand difficult situations. A family is a fundamental social group consisting of one or two parents and their children. These individuals reside in the same dwelling, share goals, values and have long term commitments (Olson and Defrain2003). These individuals bring to a marriage their dreams, expectations, strengths and personalities from the family of origin. A

family has structures and functions that propel the members ahead in a particular direction. These structures are often interfered with in cases of long distance marriages where members of the family are called upon to take up another member's roles and responsibilities.

The family institution has further been defined; legally biologically, socially and religiously. Legally, Constitution of Kenya (2010) Chapter 4- Article 45: 1-4 defines the family as the natural and fundamental unit of the society and necessary basis of social order. Kenyan law serves the citizens as a guide to behavior, protects the interests of individuals in the family as well as setting up standards of behavior. The law addresses issues that range from marital relationships, responsibility to the children and guides on property distribution.

Biologically the family is defined as two or more people living together who are related by birth, blood, marriage or adoption Saccombe (2005), Williams, Sawyer, Wahlstrom (2006) The members of this family operate as a unit in fulfilling different roles and responsibilities such as child bearing and parenting, provision of emotional support and provision of basic needs. The family as a social institution possesses a set of beliefs and roles that are organized to meet basic human needs. These beliefs enable the family unit to fit into the norms of that society that provides sanctions and approvals to behavior. However, even with norms to guide behavior the family members still deviate from these norms. Frequent conflicts occur in these families as a result of varied interpretation of the rules and standards of behavior by members. When family members travel abroad, roles are reversed and normal operations of the family are interfered with. This interference of the family functions was clearly illustrated by a case of a wife who traveled to United States of America leaving her husband with three children for eleven years. This absence by the mother de-linked her emotionally with the children and threatened the survival of the marriage (kenyaupdate.blogspot.com 2011), retrieved on 21st February 2012. There are also instances where a spouse proceeds abroad in anticipation of being joined by the rest of the family members later. This plan does not always materialize due to difficulties in acquiring travel documents such as visas and work permits.

Family members occupy social positions which carry privileges and constraints. These family members take up roles and status, such as husband, father, pastor, employee etc. The individual who holds much status is said to have more authority than others in the family, a common scenario in many African patriarchal families (Saccombe 2005) where each spouse had culturally

defined roles. The patriarchal inclination socialized the society that men had a ritual right to be in a position of authority over women. This then led to confusion and disorganization of roles when the man travels. A family also serves as a religious unit, providing spiritual guidance as well as sharing inspiration books that serve as a source of strength to family members during times of crisis (Saccombe (2005).

2.3 Long Distance Marriage

A long distance marriage can be described as a marriage where the spouses live in separate geographical locations in kilometers, country or continent for short or long durations. The term distance is also applicable to the emotional state of a relationship. Long distance marriages are fragile, delicate and a handle with care units where members are at crossroads in many aspects of their lives especially when making critical decisions. Mishandling of issues in these families can lead to irreparable damage to members. Therefore in order to enable these families make appropriate decisions, they can benefit from the force field analysis tool created by Kurt Lewin in 1940s as cited in (Mind Tools ltd, 1996-2013 accessed on 27th march 2013). This tool describes two forces that are at play when individuals make crucial decisions. The couple would start by listing all factors that would work against their marriage and those that would strengthen it. The aim of the analysis is to strengthen the factors that enhance the marriage and weaken factors that destroy it. This tool is similar to an assessment of strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) to a situation .These two assessments mentioned above would then enable the couple to make appropriate decisions affecting their lives.

2.4 Background to long distance marriage.

This section focuses on the lifestyle and behavior of the residents. It also seeks to highlight the plight of these families by identifying the factors that contribute to spouses traveling abroad, challenges encountered and appropriate strategies useful in alleviating suffering to members.

Some residents work in towns bordering the county, others work in different towns while a significant number of individuals travel abroad for short or long durations. Kiambu residents engage in a variety of economic ventures such as; coffee, tea farming, horticulture, poultry, dairy farming, and other agribusinesses. Farmers sell their milk to milk processing plants spread around the county such as Limuru, palm house and Fresha dairies. Proceeds from these agri-businesses support families financially while the surplus is invested. Professionals working in the

agricultural sector are learned people who occasionally travel abroad to acquire specialized skills with the hope that when they return output improves. There are some residents who engage in manual labor, service sector, while others are employed in the academic institutions dotting the county. Professionals from the county travel abroad and provide expertise in their areas of specialization such as education and medical sectors while others travel abroad for; academic pursuit, career advancement, business ventures, diplomatic status, specialized treatment and asylum seeking.

Unavailability of employment opportunities in the county, low-paying jobs and increased demands by the family, compel individuals to seek better opportunities abroad. This outward mobility by family members robs the family of quality and quantity time. The urge to venture out from one's comfort zone, concurs with Erickson's (1969) stage of generativity versus stagnation. During this period, individuals experience a paradigm shift in their current careers and explore new careers that give them comparative advantage in search of employment such as nursing in United States of America.

2.5 Effects of long distance marriage on families in Kiambu County

Marriage is a dynamic unit bringing together two people from different backgrounds. Since they have different personalities they are bound to disagree on issues. Couples living together handle their issues as they arise unlike those in long distance marriages who have to wait for long periods before they can comprehensively resolve their issues. ([Http: //marriage.about .com](http://marriage.about.com) retrieved on 7th February (2012). A family has diverse functions that enable it to operate as a whole unit. Some of these functions include sexual relationship between the couple, procreation, parenting, wealth creation and communication.

A family serves as a forum for inculcating values, observation of rules and an arena for impartation of life skills (Meier et al 2004.) When a spouse is away for a long period, roles are reversed and this has an impact on all aspects of a family. Ongoing investment projects stall or take long to be completed due to unprecedented flow of funds.

There also functions that require that the couple is physically together for their implementation e.g. procreation (this function cannot be delegated). Long periods of absence by a spouse lead to wide gaps in child spacing or miss the opportunity to have even one child. A couple's relationship is critical in providing an appropriate means of satisfying sexual needs. Beliefs and

values guide sexual behavior between couples (Williams, Sawyer and Wahlstrom2006). Sexual fulfillment is a very important ingredient of a healthy marriage (Harley1994). Sex is not just a physical act but a process of intimate communication with the act of physical intercourse. (Boehi, Nelson, Schulte and Shadrach 1997).Sexual encounters serves a number of purposes such as; recreation, communication and procreation. (Wright and Roberts1997) (Meier, Minirth, Wichern and Ratclff 2004). Unfulfilled sexual needs have been known to contribute to infidelity in marital relationship. The importance of sex in marriage cannot be overemphasized given its critical role in marriage. Procreation a result of sexual relationship has led couples to use ingenious methods to achieve the objective of bearing children especially in long distance marriages. A good example of the struggle to have children is the case of a Palestinian prisoner in Jerusalem who had to smuggle sperms to his wife for procreation (The Standard Newspaper of 16th August 2012). This latter action is necessary given a woman's biological clock that slowly ticks away to menopause, an irreversible state (Cohen 2000).

Men and women have different emotional needs hence diverse ways of meeting them e.g. a wife values the affection shown by her husband .This is evidenced by affirmations, touching, kisses and hugs. Affection is also important to a woman since it symbolizes availability of security, protection, comfort and approval. It also communicates a husband's presence physically, a valuable ingredient for a wife's wellbeing (Harley1997). In a marriage practical help and affection are part of enduring love (Hunter2000).

Murray Bowen (1999) in his family systems theory viewed the family as an emotional unit and uses systems thinking to describe the complex interactions in it. It is natural that members of a family are emotionally connected and therefore affect each other's thoughts, feelings, and actions so tightly to a point of being perceived as living in the "same skin". In such families, members seek attention, approval and support from each other as well as responding to each other's needs, expectations and distress spontaneously. This connectedness and reactivity make the functioning of family members interdependent. A change in one person's functioning is predictably followed by reciprocal changes in the functioning of others. This emotional interdependence presumably evolves to promote cohesiveness and cooperation among members. Lack of cohesion in families results in members becoming anxious, distressed, withdrawn and isolated. The absence of a spouse as in long distance marriages, leave members lonely, experience difficulties in interpersonal relationships that lead to depression, alcoholism, extramarital affairs among others.

The Standard Newspaper of 6th December 2012 cites a Kenyan woman who committed suicide due loneliness since her husband lived far from her in South Africa. According to Abraham Maslow, fulfillment of needs must follow the hierarchy thus; physiological, safety, belonging needs, esteem and self-actualization and must be met by family members if their unit is to function well (Geldard 2004). In families, members play certain roles, adhere to set rules, respect each one another and act in a way that leads to balance in the family. In long distance marriages, the spouse left behind takes up the roles of the absent spouse leading to an overwhelmed individual and an imbalanced dysfunctional family.

A critical function of the family is parenting which must be undertaken by the parents. This is because children learn by observing their parents. The absence of a parent leads to formation of dysfunctional families. These dysfunctional families produce four types of children namely: family Hero, who possesses negative traits such as being a workaholic, the Scape goat who is hostile, gets angry easily as well as displaying other negative traits, Lost child who is withdrawn and a loner, Mascot who is fragile, immature and needs a lot of protection and assurances from the parents (Gichinga 1999). Parents also interact with their children through four main parenting styles namely; authoritative, indulgent, permissive and authoritarian among others. These styles have a major impact on the behavior of children (Meier, et_ al 2004). The role of care givers is therefore critical in producing well balanced children. Erick Erickson (cited in Meier, et al 2004) in his eight developmental stages states that every individual must negotiate these stages well in order to achieve desirable behavior. Behaviorist Albert Bandura (cited in Hough 1994) viewed human beings as producers and products of their environment. That means, that what children observe from their parents, is replicated since males and females impart varied skills and competences in the formation of high performing children. Parents should therefore provide the children with autonomy and a sense of self-reliance critical for success of children within and without the family (Williams et al 2006, Saccombe2005 Meier, and etal2004). A reliable home environment with predictable routines enables children to feel secure.

Remote parenting denies children skills and competences since the role model, mentor and significant other person in a child's life is absent. This was clearly stated in the Daily Nation on Sunday 16th October, 2011 where a man shared his experience that included poor communication with the wife and emotional distance with the children. Another example was a case of a Kenyan father-Ali residing in Mombasa who left his two daughters as he proceeded to work in Saudi

Arabia for three years. His fear of returning was compounded by the experiences shared by Kenyans who had worked in that country where some never returned home alive (Star newspaper 27 October 2012).

Another case of emotional distance as well as financial neglect was cited in (The standard newspaper 24 July 2012) where children sued their father who resided in United States of America in a Kenyan court for failing to provide for them.

The family unit also serves as a correctional institution where deviation from family norms is shunned and desirable behavior encouraged. Families operate as miniature courts where sanctions for negative behavior are meted on the individual (Saccombe 2005). They also function as a health and social welfare institution. Finances play an integral part of a family in the provision of basic needs and for investments. The methods of creating and spending finances, increased responsibilities such as maintaining two homes, further education strains the family finances and becomes a source of family conflicts. Inadequate resources may lead to spouses engaging in unconventional means of searching for finances such as: drug trafficking, transactional sex among others. Adequate finances accrued from investments, can be a source of self-esteem to the individual or to the family members (Wright and Roberts 1997).

Communication plays a key role in the welfare of the family and is both verbal and non-verbal (Hough 1994). Individuals communicate non-verbally from their internal experiences and express themselves outwardly. An important aspect of communication in marriage is gender difference. Jane Tear (cited in Meier, 1991) states that in communication men use conversation in a competitive way in order, to establish dominance in the relationship, are less focused on listening but focus on responding. They disclose little information about themselves than women. Women on the other hand use communication in an affective way hoping to establish friendship. They use eye contact, facial expressions and are attentive to the speaker. They seek clarifications which are important for enhancing understanding of another person. Women also speak as a way of connecting with others (Olson and Defrain 2003.)

Through communication the roles of individuals are defined, members are able to resolve interpersonal conflicts and handle their issues constructively. Members are also able to meet each other's emotional needs, clarify role relations, create values, and strengthen the ability of each other to cope with life stresses (Meier, et al 2004). Communication is critical to the

survival of a marriage requiring couples to make an effort to keep the communication lines open and intact. Communication enables couples to share issues touching on every aspect of their lives; from things perceived petty, routine to major decisions. Poor communication breeds suspicions that results weakening the already vulnerable marriage. Scheduled phone calls, internet chats, Skype, enhances family relationships (<http://www.healthguidance.org> accessed on 15th February 2012).

Communication is very important to families since it fosters understanding and wholeness between spouses. Fritz Perls (Hough 1994) Gestalt therapy explains the concept of wholeness. Wholeness refers to the individual's total experience- physical, sensory, emotional and intellectual. To him the individual's non-verbal communication is often indicative of the real message which he seeks to convey to himself and to others. A spouse can express one view verbally while the body language conveys a different view. In a long distance marriage nonverbal communication is not possible unless through technology.

Visual connection as a communication tool is vital for the welfare of families in long-distance marriages. Visual communication is made possible by various media that includes internet-Skype and enables people to communicate in real time. This allows the couple to keep a picture of physical changes occurring to spouses. Photographs are also a good source of connection because it keeps the past with the separated individuals. Where this connection lacks, spouses may get shocked on seeing the physical changes in their spouses, a state they may not be able to live with.

In the contemporary world both men and women engage in gainful employment in order to improve their economic status as co-providers/dual- earner hence attain self actualization. Employment is a major factor for outward mobility with the primary motivation for couples living apart being financial stability, career advancement, education among others (<http://www.networkplaces.com> retrieved on 7th February 2012).

Economic changes have affected the family in diverse ways today. Some of these changes include; long-term inflation and the decline in purchasing power (Williams's et al 2006). The minimum wage has not kept up with the long term inflation, although minimum wage has never been sufficient to raise a family out of poverty especially if only one member of the family works. Another economic change that affects a family is the two tier labor market. In the two tier

labor market, people at the bottom lack education and other professional skills hence get low paying jobs. To improve their living standards, they move to other countries to seek better paying jobs. Those in the top- half continue to progress professionally, hence higher pay. Some of those in the top level travel from their countries to offer their expertise which in turn yields higher returns. The countries where Kenyans migrate to in search of better paying jobs from the health sector include: United States of America with 62% , United Kingdom 33%, Canada 13%, Australia 10% and 6% of applications to other African Countries. These Countries offer employment placement opportunities to Kenyans. In some cases people loose their jobs or circumstances compel them to look for alternative jobs abroad. The Kenya Workforce Report 2014 (The Standard 18th April 2014) states that between the years 2008-2012, 826 nurses left the public sector. The causes of departure ranged from retirement at 37 % death 28%, dismissal from service 19%, resignation at 10% and transfer at 6%.These professionals then explores other career paths or new opportunities in order to reduce stress caused by scarce resources in the country.

The National Association of Doctors stated during the 42nd Kenya Medical Association Symposium and Scientific conference that out of 500 doctors trained at any given time in the country, 42% go to other countries despite the pay in the country being competitive with an intern earning 100,000 Kenya shillings. The doctors' outward mobility can therefore act as an avenue to self actualization and prestige. However the medical practitioners' exodus abroad on the reverse, leaves a deficit in the sector eg 5,800 doctors attend to 43 million people while the accepted ratio is 1 doctor to 1000 patients (Beja ,P) The Standard 24th May 2014).Another category of professionals benefiting economically by traveling abroad are sports personalities. Some of these individuals travel for short or for long durations with others permanently residing abroad. The revenue they generate (81 billion in 2012- 2013) was ploughed back to the families who invest in real estates or as shareholders in profit- making firms in the country. Some of these sports personalities are young millionaires who in turn support the economy of Kenya. To some family members life abroad is a positive choice and is equivalent to a good life for the individual, family, community and the Nation. Kenyans in the Diaspora are known to work in groups where they form investment clubs with the proceeds being sent back to the country. Long distance marriage for these families therefore is a stable source of resources since it enables them to climb the social economic ladder and the same scenario applies to the Country.

Traditionally, it was believed that it was only a man who can work.” The good provider role” was hence emphasized where the man was seen as the sole economic provider. This view still exist even a woman is well economically. However the home maker traditional woman work that emphasizes that a woman should be principally a home maker has changed since it’s not considered “real work”. Gainful employment can then lead woman to work abroad and become a source of livelihood for the husband and children left behind.

Another benefit of employment is power. Money is a primary source of power in families since it creates independence and freedom from others hence reducing dependence syndrome.

Love is another benefit of employment. Where there is wealth, the couples are deemed to be in love because each of the partners can get what they ask for (Williams’s et al 2006). Some jobs attract prestige hence the efforts made by spouses to acquire skills in certain careers like aviation, medicine etc. Employment can therefore be viewed as having positive and negative effects on families in long distance marriages.

2.6 Qualities of a Strong Family.

The purpose of marriage is to provide family members with a strong foundation and an operational base for exploiting their talents and gifts as well as support each other. A strong and a functional family should have some of the following qualities; Commitment as evidenced by the presence of trust, honesty, dependability and faithfulness. Positive communication that occurs when sharing feelings, giving compliments, avoiding blame, being able to compromise and agreeing and disagreeing constructively. Spending quality and quantity time together as a couple provides the spouses with an opportunity to learn from each other and hence foster deep understanding. Sharing recreation time, playing and having fun together is an important ingredient of a healthy family that leads to appreciation, affection, friendship and respect for each other. A family in long distance marriage should have the ability to cope with stress and crises brought by physical separation. Family’s strength is also shown by its level of adaptability to situations, resilience, and openness in sharing issues, resolving conflicts and seizing opportunities. Family members should also be able to care for their spiritual life by having hope, humor, compassion, shared ethical values, and oneness with human kind (Olson& Defrain 2003). Where these qualities lack in marriages the family gets weak, the balance is lost and members become disoriented and frustrated.

2.7 Possible Strategies for Strengthening Long Distance Marriages.

Every marriage has its own expectations, strengths and challenges. These real expectations must be met in a functional family. Individuals possess ambitions, aspirations that require that a spouse travels abroad leaving part of the family behind. Some of the factors that contribute to outward mobility include; career advancement, educational pursuit, better health care facilities, employment, and business ventures among others.

Life situations present varied perspectives on issues from either a subjective or objective view of an individual. Individuals possess innate strength to handle with difficult situations where they devise strategies that enable them to manage and cope with challenges. The strategies utilized in the family determines whether the marriage survives or crumbles under the pressure of unique challenges.

Some of the pre-existing situations that can be strength to long distance marriages include; perception of distance arising from past experiences from the family of origin. Siblings whose parents have been separated geographically for long periods of time finds it easier to cope with a spouse in long distance marriage. While in situations where parents were always together the absence of a spouse was a major challenge. For the latter, being a couple means being together physically. Such partners are unlikely to be secure in long distance marriage since they lack previous experience. Past experiences therefore can determine how well an individual can cope with absent spouse. A couple in long distance marriage should be able to prepare for the absence by defining what needs to be put in place as an anchor to the family as well weighing what is important to them before the travel. They should plan for a period without a spouse by organizing visits for the spouse being left behind. Arranged short visits would provide an opportunity to re-energize the relationship. Couples should also let their relatives understand their role in the couple's relationship (The Standard Newspaper 28th march 2013). Trust between the couple is very important to the survival of the marriage.

The success of a long distance marriage largely depends on how each individual perceives the separation. For instance the spouse leaving may be anxious of venturing into an unknown environment with different culture, belief system and norms. When one is venturing into new situations stress is likely to be experienced. The spouse who remains behind is luckier since he/she has family and friends support network. However the individual may feel abandoned, lonely and trapped in a long distance marriage with its uncertainties

(<http://www.futurescopes.com> accessed on 15th February 2012). The purpose of a marriage is to have couples live together emotionally and physically. In instances where prior discussions around the expected challenges did not take place, it becomes difficult for a spouse to adjust to a solitary life. The attitude of these spouses is therefore important to the survival of the marriage.

Communication is a key factor to the survival of every marriage. Couples who are keen to have their long distance marriages work must make every effort to keep their communication lines open and intact. They should update each other about every aspect of their lives even in issues perceived to be petty or routine. It is important to note that issues that are considered petty by one spouse and hence are not shared can break a strong marriage.

Where communication is rare or is not deep enough to the satisfaction of each spouse, the bond between them diminishes. Poor communication is a breeding ground for suspicions that weaken the already vulnerable situation. Communication is the glue that joins two individuals with different personalities born and bred in different situations. These individuals continue learning how to relate, communicate with each other throughout life. If strong communication is absent then the relationship becomes weak. The couple's communication would be enhanced by finding out various ways of strengthening the relationship. Some of these may include: scheduled phone calls, internet chats, Skype, and snail mails among others. This enhanced togetherness albeit the spouses being far apart may become a "connecting meeting place" that enriches the relationship. This is due to the anticipation of hearing the voice of the spouse at an agreed time (<http://www.healthguidance.org/>) accessed on (15th February 2012), [futurescopes.com](http://www.futurescopes.com) accessed on (15th February 2012).

A long distance marriage is bound to fail if there is lack of trust between the partners (<http://marriage.about.com> retrieved on 7th February 2012). Mutual trust in long distance marriages cannot be over emphasized. When partners are apart, it is essential that they trust each other completely. When suspicion of infidelity exists in the marriage, the road to marital conflicts commences. The presence of mutual trust therefore becomes paramount in long distance marriages because unlike in regular marriages, partners cannot meet daily to iron out their differences. They then have to put their trust in each other that none of them will jeopardize their relationship. They must remain truthful, committed, and faithful and emotionally connected

to each other. They must commit to work on improving their marriage leaving no room for suspicion (<http://www.healthguidance.org> accessed on 15th February 2012).

Honesty in long distance marriage is essential for the survival of the marriage. Partners need to express their feelings about separation truthfully on their reservations, resentment to the situation and their concurrence. In situations where a spouse experiences difficulties in handling issues such as parenting, joblessness, housing, he/she should confide with the spouse before issues get out of control. Things can get worse especially if one spouse thinks that the partner has an easier time. Therefore, attitude towards each other should guide the survival of their marriage. They should focus on the purpose that separated them and stick to the duration of stay agreed upon. An anticipation that there is hope for future reunion helps to sustain the marriage (<http://www.futurescopes.com> accessed on 15th February 2012).

Another factor that enhances survival of a long distance marriage is the realization that a long journey has an end. This therefore means that there is hope of reunion and continuation of the normal family life together. A spouse who bears in mind that the absence is for a stipulated timeframe is able to cope better with issues such as remote parenting, loneliness, time-zone changes and even weather changes. Couples can also find ways to do simple, everyday things together such as watching TV programmes as they talk on Skype, or online games. Another way for the couple to keep in touch is by sharing special occasions such as birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, or other significant days in the family. When a couple discuss their goals, dreams, investments plans, needs, wants and exchange ideas they broaden their scope of thought for the welfare of the marriage. Where a spouse makes his/her future plans known to their spouses, mutuality is achievable. Perspectives that are well thought out and reflected upon before decisions are made receive ownership by the source and the receiver. Therefore there must be a deliberate effort give priority to a marriage by keeping the contact firm and frequent despite the distance, otherwise it might result to a case of “out of sight out of mind”.

Spouses should also make their relationship a priority by discussing their schedules, plans, goals, dreams, needs and wants (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com>, retrieved on 7th February 2012.) The purpose of this is to involve each other as much as possible in each other’s life. This makes the spouses visible and audible to each other and prevents the tendency to “forget” that the other person exists. Hunter (2000) illustrates a case of Russian wife who assisted her husband to travel

to the United States of America in search of employment but founded another family and disowned the first one.

It is important to bear in mind that before the task abroad is accomplished, the couple should plan for reunion. This preparation for reunion should provide an opportunity for the returning spouse to re-adjust to the family routines and unwind from the previous situations smoothly. Prior planning for activities to be undertaken after reunion would help the family to integrate faster. This is because they would have identified areas that they need to work on especially on relationship with children. The returning spouse should avoid activities taking him/her away from the family immediately after the return. This leads to a smooth transition to the normal family life. (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com> retrieved on 7th February 2012). Daily journals kept while the spouse was away would also provide an entry point to the normal family settings. (<http://www.marriageabout.com> accessed on 7th February 2012).

2.8 Theoretical Framework

This section of the study focuses on theories that relate to the objectives of this study. Two main theories were used in the study-; Murray Bowen's family systems theory, behavioral – operant conditioning by B.F Skinner and social learning theory by Albert Bandura.

Bowen's theory basically focuses on the emotional interactions family members engage in. He states that family members affect each other's behavior. The relationships in the family can either be close knit or loose. However whatever happens to one family member directly affect the other member since they are emotionally intertwined. His theory describes five components of a family that determines how emotionally functional or dysfunctional a family is. These crucial family dynamics are explained in details below. The other key theory related to this study is the operant or instrumental conditioning by behaviorist B.F Skinner. He relates acquisition of behavior to rewards and punishments. He states that behavior that is rewarded lasts while behavior not rewarded disappears. Another behaviorist who influenced this study is Albert Bandura's with his social learning theory or observation learning which asserts that individuals learn by observing their models in their environment.

2.8.1 Family systems theory

This study borrows heavily from the work of Bowen's Family systems theory. Bowen states that everything that happens to a family member has a direct effect on other members who

are firmly interconnected and operate as a group known as a family system (Olson and Defrain 2003). Bowen's family system's theory (1974) focused on patterns that develop in families in order to diffuse anxiety. His main goal was to reduce anxiety by facilitating awareness on how emotional systems function. The level of differentiation focuses on self -change rather than trying to change others in the family. Bowen came up with eight concepts that explain how families operate.

His first concept, emotional fusion, illustrates how family members put aside individual choices and preferences for the sake of other family members. His other concept is triangulation. Bowen states that triangles are the smallest stable relationship units that can occur in families ([http://www. Genopro.com/](http://www.Genopro.com/) accessed on 4th October 2012), Brown J (1999). During conflicts, some family members seek emotional support from a particular family member e.g. a child is sucked in the communication between the couple, forming a triangle- hence triangulation. This situation is unhealthy since the child is not part of the conflict.

The third concept is the nuclear family emotional system. Here Bowen focuses on the undifferentiated family, where members of family deny themselves pleasure for the sake of others in order to avoid conflicts. The other concept in Bowen's family system's theory is the family projection process. In this concept, Bowen states that children caught up in the family conflicts display anxiety symptoms and especially the child with the least emotional separation with the parents being the most vulnerable. This is an important point to note for families in long distance marriages where children who have been very close with a parent suffer physically and emotionally when a parent leaves. Bowen also discusses the principle of emotional cutoff. This is a situation where family members manage the intensity of fusion between generations. To Bowen emotional cutoff is achieved through physical distance or emotional withdrawal where members live as if they were not related in any way. Bowen's other key concept is multigenerational transmission. According to him patterns, themes, positions and roles are passed from one generation to another through projection from parent to child. Another important concept is the sibling position. Bowen states that the sibling position could lead to an understanding of the roles individuals play in the family eg the eldest child is likely to take-up more responsibilities and leadership position than a middle or a last born child. These reversed roles, increases the burden on an eldest child in the absence of a parent especially in long distance marriages. The eighth concept was societal emotional process. This concept refers to the tendency of people within a society to be anxious and unstable at certain times than others.

Family members get anxious when they lack skills for living, when there is scarcity of resources or during epidemics (<http://www.vermontcenterforfamilystudies.org/> retrieved on 15th April 2014). The situation is made worse by absence of a spouse or parent in long distance relationship.

The marriage institution has also been viewed from “strengths framework” perspective. This view confines itself to the perspective that couples and families always succeed. This framework does not seek to establish why families fail; instead the framework focuses on the positive aspects of the family such as commitment, appreciation, affection, enjoyable time together, spiritual wellbeing and ability to cope with stress (Olson and Defrain 2003). This is a drawback to understanding families in long distance marriages since families fail when conditions are unfavorable.

2.8.2 Behavioral theory

Behaviorist B.F Skinner as cited in (Meier et al 2004) based his work on operant or instrumental conditioning. As a behaviorist, he viewed human personality as a collection of learned behaviors. His view was that, behavior that was rewarded was likely to be repeated while behavior that was not rewarded diminished.

Related to Skinner’s view was another behaviorist, Albert Bandura cited in (Meier et al 2004). In his social learning theory Bandura discusses the principles of rewards and punishment. He said that behavior is learned or modified by watching models engaging in particular activities. Such models include parents, teachers, peers and the media. He further explained how behavior is influenced by modeling, by articulating four processes; the first is the attention process. To him an individual learns from a model only if they are attending to the critical features of the model’s behaviors. Models that are more attractive to the observer are likely to be more influential in modifying behavior. This observation learning is common from media personalities where young observers model among other things, dress codes and gestures.

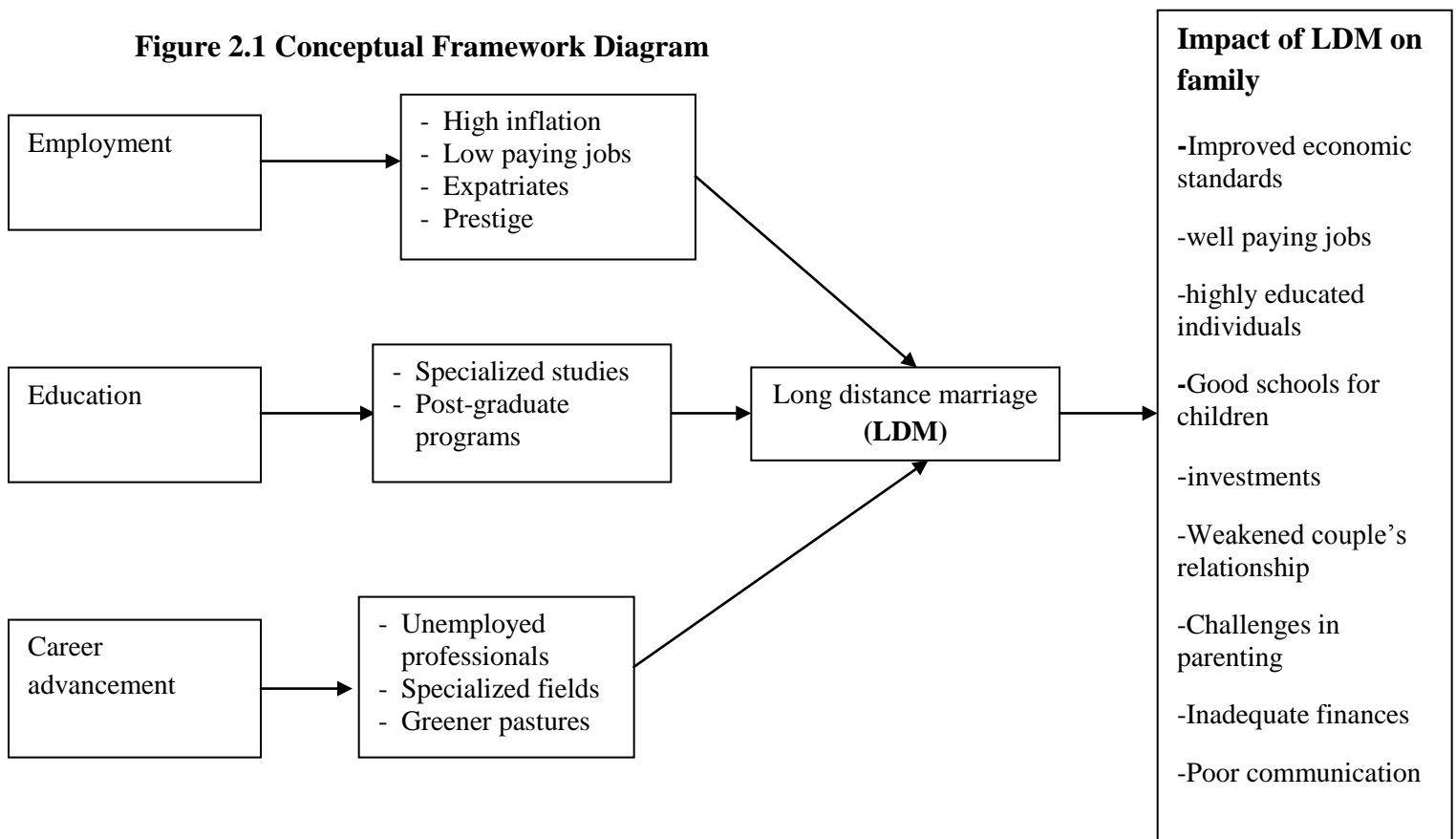
The other factor in behavior modification is the retention process and refers to the ability to remember the model’s actions. The third factor is the motoric reproduction process where the individual must be able to perform the modeled actions to change behavior. The final factor in reinforcement of behavior is motivational process. In this process performance of learned behavior depends on whether the behavior is rewarded or punished. This principle is important to children’s socialization to the norms of the family since they learn by observing their parents

through vicarious conditioning. Vicarious learning is a process of acquiring skills simultaneously with other individuals in that environment-home, school etc. Bandura’s concept of ‘vicarious conditioning’ therefore confirms the importance of parents being present in children’s upbringing (Hough 1994). This means that remote parenting would not provide the child with this important opportunity to learn from the parents.

2.9 Conceptual framework

Families in long distance marriages are unique in that their situation gives rise to varied experiences. This study made an assessment of the presence of long distance marriages in the county and the effects it had on the family members.

Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework Diagram



2.10 Factors contributing to long distance marriages

There are various factors that contribute to individuals traveling abroad. The three main factors crucial to this study were; search for better paying jobs abroad, in pursuit of further education and career advancement. Whatever the reason for a spouse traveling abroad, the consequences are enormous to the family.

Employment

Self actualization and prestige is innate in every human being making him/her struggle to improve their current status. They engage in different social economic activities, change careers, professions all geared towards self actualization. Some of the following factors contribute to individuals seeking employment away from their families; high rate of inflation in the country so that there is low purchasing power in the family, low paying jobs that cannot allow for adequate provision of the diverse needs of the family, individuals work as expatriates in foreign countries providing needed but unavailable skills in those countries eg teachers, health workers in China, Rwanda etc. Some Kenyans have investments in real estates, health sector among other businesses in foreign countries that enable them to create wealth which is ploughed to more investment in back home in Kenya. The search economic independence is a two edged sword in that it has both benefits as seen above and shortcomings to the family as follows; the absence of a spouse/ parent hence created an imbalance to the functionality of the family in general. Employment abroad robbed the family of wisdom, companionship, and parenthood from a significant member of the family. This absence of a spouse also triggered a chain of experiences, reactions from the family members which contributed to the conflicts, emotional distance and loose ties between the couple. Finances became scarce, since the couple maintained two homes. Some children became depressed, emotionally distant with the absent parent, while others became delinquents and truants. Communication among family members became distant, weak and finally diminished.

Education

Education is continuous aspect of a human- being carried out formally or informally. Married individuals traveled abroad to acquire or further their education. Courses abroad took varied durations. The student / spouse/parent had to juggle between the different roles and responsibilities abroad and at home. This multiple role situation overwhelms the individual so that some roles are relegated to the back seat. The roles that are not properly planned for and executed create a range of emotions such as frustration, betrayal among family members etc. Education in specialized careers such as in medical sector or post graduate degrees enables the individual to get better paying jobs.

Career development

Professionals in various fields travel abroad to advance their careers, especially in fields that are not available in the country. There are graduates in various fields that do not have jobs. Such individuals travel abroad in search of jobs. Some travel as expert in the medical, security or in education sectors etc. As these individuals work they also advance their careers which are profitable to the family. However some of these individuals take very long periods of time before traveling back to their families. They achieve their goal for travel but the absence weakens the relationship with family members back home.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction.

This chapter highlights the key research methods that were adopted in the study. Research design, research site, population, sampling techniques, research instruments, and data collection procedures are also covered in this chapter.

3.1 Research Design

According to Kasomo (2006), a research design spells out the methods used in the study as well as how the study should be conducted (Kombo and Tromp 2006). This study adopted a descriptive design which describes the state of affairs as they exist. Descriptive studies are used in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solution to significant problems. A descriptive survey is another method for collecting data by interviewing or administering questionnaires to a sample. Descriptive studies are useful for collecting data on people's attitudes, opinions or habits, central concepts to this study.

3.2 Research site

This study was conducted in Kiambu County, located in the Central region of Kenya. It borders Nyandarua, Muranga, Kirinyaga, Nakuru and Nyeri counties. The county is made up of eight districts namely, Kiambu, Githunguri, Lari, Thika, Gatundu, Limuru, Ruiru and Kikuyu. The residents engage in different economic sectors such as; agribusinesses, other businesses, teaching, working in industries among others. The County is largely inhabited by the Kikuyu community. However there are other communities residing in the counties especially civil servants working in public offices, personnel working in the banking sector and in institution of learning. There are also members from other communities who are married in the county as well as those residing in the county but working in Nairobi due to the County's proximity to the city. The selection of the county was based on availability of respondents to the researcher who reside in the County.

3.3 Population

Population in this study refers to married individuals residing in the County who had a spouse abroad. The population demographics considered in this study were age and gender. The respondents had to be married by the time of departure of the spouse. The family unit provides the couple with companionship, an opportunity to bond, learn from each other and procreate.

3.4 Sampling

Sampling is the process of selecting a number of individuals or objects from a population such that the selected group contains elements representative of the whole population (Kombo and Tromp 2006), (Kasomo 2006). Two types of purposive sampling were used in this study; extreme case sampling that focuses on small cases that are rich in information and are homogeneous. The 37 rich cases who participated in the study were purposefully sampled since they fitted the description of extremely information rich cases. The other purposive sampling method used was snow balling or chain sampling. Chain sampling then became crucial to this study since individuals in this type of marriage linked the researcher with respondents in their circle of friends. The successful use of chain sampling in this study showed that there were strong social networks since almost every individual contacted knew another in this type of marriage. This method was useful since the researcher's circle of friends would not have yielded the desired numbers of respondents. Respondents for this study were also sourced from places of worship, learning institutions; work places and homes. Primary data was collected directly from the respondents by use of questionnaires. The study had a target of hundred respondents.

3.5 Methods of Data collection

Data collection refers to the gathering of specific information aimed at proofing or refuting facts. Data collection is important in research as it allows for dissemination of accurate information, development of appropriate and meaningful interventional programs (Kombo and Tromp 2006). In research, data is collected to further a researcher's understanding of a puzzling issue, bridge a knowledge gap or clarify facts in a study. Data is also collected for various reasons that range from stimulating ideas, informing decision, highlighting a situation or creating awareness on an issue leading to interventions. The researcher collected data by interviewing the respondents by use of questionnaires which had both close and open ended questions.

Observation

3.6 Data collection Procedure

The following data collection procedures were adopted. The researcher made announcements in places of worship through the respective religious leaders and requested to meet the respondents who filled the questionnaires. Other questionnaires were filled at work places, places of worship and homes. Some religious leaders requested faithful in long distance marriages to fill the questionnaires.

3.7 Unit of analysis

Unit of analysis is the major entity that a researcher analysis in a study. (William 2006) retrieved on 9th June 2014. The unit of analysis and observation for this study was the spouse living in Kiambu County whose spouse was residing outside Kenya

3.8 Data Analysis

Data collected was cleaned for obvious errors. Findings derived from chapter four by the researcher were presented by use of percentages, tables, graphs and pie charts. Conclusions and recommendations were then drawn.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter entails the presentation of data used in the study, subsequent analysis and interpretation. A hundred questionnaires were printed for distribution to the respondents. However due to the earlier highlighted challenges in chapter one in getting equal number of respondents to questionnaires, only thirty seven questionnaires were returned. The thirty seven questionnaires were then analyzed to provide the findings presented in this chapter.

4.1.1 Respondents' Gender

Table 4.1 below shows the respondents' gender.

Table 4.1: Respondents' Gender

Male		Female	
Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
10	27%	27	73%

Table 4.1 above shows that, 27 (73%) respondents were females while 10 (27%) were males. This means that married individuals were living single lives yet married. This situation then presents a scenario where married individuals live partly as singles resulting to a special form of 'single- parenthood'. It also means that a large number of households are female headed which denies the wife the comfort, companionship, presence and guidance from a husband. It also robs children of a mentor, role model and an authority figure. On the other hand the absence of a wife disorients the husband who now lives as a "bachelor", "single parent", lonely yet married. Children are thus denied a nurturer and emotional care from their parents.

4.1.2 Respondents' age at time of Marriage

Table 4.2 below indicates the respondents' ages at the time of marriage.

Table 4.2: Respondents' age at time of Marriage

Age	Number	Percentage
20 – 30	31	84%
30 – 40	6	16%
40 – 50	-	-
50+	-	-

As shown in table 4.2 above, majority of the respondents 31 (84%) got married between ages 20-30 years. This age bracket corresponds with Erickson's concepts of intimacy versus isolation Meier et al (2004), a stage when a couple concentrates their energies towards each other and a time when they start families. Only (16%) of the respondents got married after 30 years. This means that majority of these individuals got married while quite young.

4.1.3 Current age of respondents

In table 4.3 below, the current age of the respondents is presented. This shows the wide age spectrum of the respondents hence valued wealth of experience from them.

Table 4.3: Current age of respondents

Age	Number	Percentage
20 – 30	9	24%
30 – 40	16	43%
40 – 50	12	32%
50+	0	-

As indicated in table 4.3 above, majority of respondents' current age shifted from 20-30 age brackets to 30-40 age brackets (43%). The latter group had therefore been married for about 10 years. This meant that the spouses who had children had to grapple with wide spacing gaps

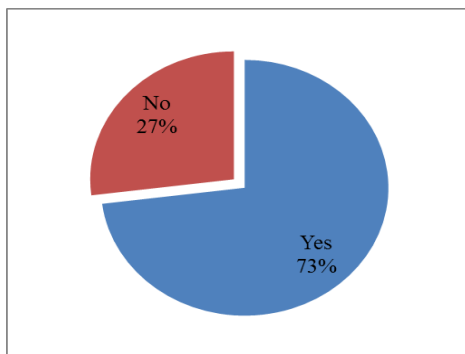
between children or never got any other child. Thirty two percent of the respondents were between 40 and 50 years. They had been married for about 30 years.

It is important to mention here that a woman has a timeframe (15-49 years) within which she must bear children. In the event that the couple is apart, the wife might attain menopause losing any chance of bearing children. However there was a group of respondents (24%) who by the time of this study were still in the same age bracket as they were at the time of marriage. It is worth noting that no respondent was over fifty years of age. That meant that respondents in this study were generally young people and at the prime of their lives.

4.1.4 Existence of long distance marriages in the County

The pie chart figure 4.1 below shows the respondents' responses to the question on whether long distance marriages were common in the County.

Figure 4.1: Existence of long distance marriages in the County



The pie chart figure 4.1 above, 27 (73%) respondents said that long distance marriages were common in the county while 10 (27%) said those marriages were not common. The respondents, who said that long distance marriages were common had the following views; the aggressive nature of Kiambu residents to seek greener pastures motivated them to travel abroad, (“grass is always greener on the other side”), residents are ambitious and take up any opportunities that would improve their living standards. Others said that residents sought further education abroad.

4.1.5 To be or not to be in long distance marriages?

The respondents were asked to indicate whether they chose to be or not to be in long distance marriage. This yes or no question was set to establish whether the respondents were in this setting by choice.

Table 4.4: To be or not to be in long distance marriages

Yes	Number	NO	Number	missing	Number
3%	1	92%	34	5%	2

Thirty four (92%) respondents overwhelmingly said that they did not choose to be in long distance marriage. This means that their situation did not meet one of the objectives of marriage which is to live together physically. This perspective to long distance marriage shows that the respondents were compelled by circumstances to be in this type of marriage. However, the saying that, “when life gives you lemons make lemonade” is true for these families. One respondent (3%) said that he was in long distance marriage by choice but did not give reasons and 2 (5%) respondents did not answer this question.

4.1.6 Factors that contributed to spouses traveling abroad

As shown in table 4.5 below, three main factors contributed to spouses traveling abroad. These factors were employment, education, and career advancement.

Table 4.5: Factors that contribute to spouses traveling abroad

Reasons	No	Percentage
Career advancement	10	27%
Education	11	30%
Employment	25	68%

It is important to note that this question received multiple responses. More than half 25 (68%) respondents attributed the spouse outward mobility to employment as shown in table 4.5 above. This meant that more spouses traveled abroad in search of better paying jobs, greener pastures with a view to improve their economic status. Eleven (30%) respondents cited education as a factor contributing to a spouse traveling abroad while ten (27%) respondents picked career advancement. It is therefore clear that the three main reasons for outward mobility were; career advancement, education and employment, all geared towards social economic developments. No respondent chose treatment or asylum seeking as a reason for travel.

4.1.7 View of respondents on long distance marriage

As table 4.6 below indicates, the respondents viewed long distance marriages as having a negative effect on the family. This question received multiple responses.

Table 4.6: View of respondents on long distance marriage

View	No	Percentage
It separates families	19	51%
It weakens a couple's relationship	25	67%
It enables a couple to take up opportunities in life	1	2%

Table 4.6 above presents a strong inclination to family values. More than half 25(67%) of respondents said that long distance marriages weaken a couple's relationship. The adage "out of sight out of mind" seems true that a couple's relationship is weakened by absence of a spouse.

Nineteen (51%) respondents said that this type of marriage separated families. For instance some spouses abroad were unable to renew their travel documents hence were unable to return home for fear of being denied re-entry documents to that country. In situations where the spouse abroad was an illegal immigrant, the spouse in Kenya feared to seek travel documents to visit a person without a legal status to avoid exposing them to immigration agencies. The illegal immigrant can be deported if discovered. The situation is worsened by the stigma associated with deportation that an individual must have committed a crime.

This situation then separates the family so that as much as they communicate through media they can never reunite physically. However one respondent indicated that the spouse’s travel was positive since it enabled the couple to take up new opportunities.

4.1.8 Challenges faced by families with spouses abroad

Table 4.7 below shows a myriad of challenges encountered by families with spouses abroad. There were multiple responses to this question.

Table 4.7: Challenges faced by families with spouses abroad

Challenges	No	Percentage
Loneliness	35	95%
Frequent conflicts	17	50%
Lack Finances	10	27%
Suspicion from friends and relatives	29	78%
Loose family ties	26	70%
Lost period to have children	23	62%
Parenting	31	83%
Divorce	17	45%
Others/Various	10	27%

The challenge that had the highest scores as shown in table 4.7 above was loneliness with 35 (95%) responses .Marriage is supposed to provide companionship to the couple. Companionship from spouses was lacking among the 35 respondents to this question.

Another critical area cited as a challenge was parenting that scored 31 (83%) responses. Parenting is a full time job and should be undertaken by both parents. The absence of one parent leads to a gap in modeling and mentoring. Children learn by observing the significant others in their environment as noted by Bandura in Margaret Hough (1999). Bandura emphasizes the importance of observational learning. He states that behavior is learned, can be unlearned and can be re-learned. The child brought up in a long distance marriage setup lacks an opportunity for acquiring skills from the absent parent. This often leads to undesirable behavior in children such as drug and substance abuse, truancy among others.

Another challenge experienced by spouses in this type of marriage was suspicion from friends and relatives since 29 (78%) respondents picked it. This meant that individuals felt scrutinized, their movements monitored and their privacy intruded.

Loose family ties was ranked third 29 (70%) in the scale of challenges. As mentioned earlier in this chapter the absence of a spouse or parent weakens the family bond. There were even instances where children grew up and completed school programs with an absent. Bowen's family systems theory is therefore relevant to these families because it stresses the importance of emotional wellbeing of all the family members. Lost period to have children was important to 23 (62%) respondents. Drawing from the current ages of the respondents (20-50 years) mentioned earlier and bearing in mind that the bulk of respondents were females, child bearing was a concern to the respondents. This meant that they were forced to be contented with the children they already had before the spouse left or grapple with wide child spacing.

Lack of finances (27%) was another challenge to these families. This challenge comes against the backdrop of huge revenue remittances by Kenyans in the Diaspora- 81 billion shillings was remitted back to the country between September 2012 and 2013 (Ochieng 2013). Despite the huge revenues ploughed back to the country, there are families struggling financially. This defeats the myth that those with spouses abroad are financially stable, a myth advanced by the idea that those who go to "the land of opportunity" live in plenty. This fact ignores the individual families that struggle with very little resources with the absence of a co-provider.

Frequent conflicts, 17 (45%) Divorce, 17 (45%), 10 (27%) were among challenges cited albeit lower than the ones discussed above. Conflicts had led to emotional distance between the couple to an extent that the absent spouse made telephone calls to children and did not talk to the spouse. Apart from the major challenges cited above, one respondent added a challenge when she wrote;

"Children feel abandoned by their parents"

Despite the highlighted challenges above being similar to those experienced by ordinary couples, families in long distance marriages felt their situation was worsened by the physical separation.

4.1.9 Effects of long distance marriage on couple's relationship

Couples have needs that must be met for healthy relationships to thrive. Table 4.8 below highlights the needs of a spouse in a long distance marriage. The respondents had more than one need hence multiple responses.

Table 4.8: Effects of long distance marriage on couple's relationship

Effects	No	Percentage
Unfulfilled conjugal relationship	30	81 %
Emotional distance	27	72%
Frequent conflicts	8	21%
Infidelity	17	45%

Table 4.8 above indicates the highest rated effect on a couple's relationship as; unfulfilled conjugal relationship with 30 (81%) respondents selecting it. This places sexual encounter with a spouse in an elevated position. A healthy sexual relationship is a crucial ingredient to a health marriage. Sex in marriage serves various purposes such as; glue to a marriage, physical satisfaction, as well as consummation of a marriage- a legal component of a marriage. Sexual encounter facilitates conception and procreation. This means that spouses in long distance marriages are unfulfilled sexually since their partners rarely came back home, never visited or when visits were possible, they were short term. Unfulfilled sexual need is a conduit to sexual frustration and presents a possibility for infidelity.

Emotional distance was cited by 27 (72%) respondents as an effect to the couple's relationship. Emotional needs include verbal utterances that assure the individuals of each other of continued love. These verbal utterances accompanied with a touch, a kiss and sexual intercourse strengthens a marriage. The absence of emotional relationship, results in emotional distance. The respondents who gave integrity prominence 17 (45%) shows the value attached to faithfulness in a marriage. Where a spouse is absent, suspicion of infidelity occurs whether real

or imagined. The talk from friends, relatives that no one can remain faithful to an absent spouse, worsens the situation. Frequent fights 8 (21%) was the lowest among the effects mentioned. These are verbal disagreements that occurred during telephone calls. Disagreements originate from different perspectives on important decisions on the welfare of the family as well as from rumors from friends and in-laws within or abroad.

4.1.10 Effects of long distance marriage on children/parenting

When a parent travels abroad for long a period, children are affected in various ways. Table 4.9 below shows effects of a parent’s absence to children. This question also received multiple responses.

Table 4.9: Effects of long distance marriage on children

Effect	No	Percentage
Truancy	2	5%
Depression	13	35%
Emotional Distance with absent parent	31	83%
Lack Models	21	56%
Lack basic provisions	8	22%

In table 4.9 above 31 (83 %) respondents said that children were emotionally detached from the absent parent. An absent spouse misses an opportunity to connect emotionally with the child and no chance to witness a child’s crucial developmental milestones. As duration of stay abroad extends, the child becomes independent from the influence of the absent parent. The estrangement is so serious to a point where during visits/ reunion of the parent and child, the emotional connection does not exist at all. Bowen calls this emotional distance, emotional cutoff. Twenty one (56%) respondents cited lack of models as a critical effect on children. The responses confirmed the importance of a complete family geographically, emotionally and intellectually.

Depression was cited as an effect on children by 13 (35%) respondents. Bowen wrote about triangulation in the family. This is a situation where a child is emotionally sucked into the parents’ conflicts .This child is then predisposed to psychosomatic illnesses such as depression, hysteria, and stomach ulcers. Some children have even been known to display suicidal

tendencies as well as engaging in antisocial behavior as a result of the stress in the family. During play with peers, some children regard their parents highly out of what they do for them. A child with an absent parent may not have the same privileges as the peers. Such a child is hence susceptible to low self esteem which affects their overall functioning.

Lack of basic provisions was scored 8 (22%). The results posted here shows that not all families with a spouse abroad are financially stable as presumed.

4.2.1 Effects of long distance marriage on finances

Table 4.10 below shows how family finances were affected by the absence of spouse.

Table 4.10: Effects of long distance marriage on finances

Response	No	Percentage
Positively	15	41%
Negatively	19	51%
Missing	3	8%
Totals	37	100%

As shown in table 4.10 above, about half 19 of the respondents (51%) said that long distance marriages affected their finances negatively. This was obvious since the available finances were shared in order to maintain two households- in Kenya and abroad.

The reasons cited by the respondents to prove that family finances were negatively affected included: Lack of proper planning in the use of available finances since couples operated two homes, extravagance by the spouse abroad while entertaining friends. This extravagant spending resulted to little finances trickling back home. Some spouses landed on low paying jobs abroad making it difficult for them to provide adequately to the family back home. Three respondents said that pressure from in-laws to share the money, left them with less than what they required for upkeep. Four respondents said that projects that were started before the departure of the spouse got stalled while other projects' progress slowed down. Another reason that affected the flow of funds back home was because some individuals enrolled into academic institutions to further their education. This resulted to some children being transferred from private to public schools while other families moved from up market estates to lower end estates.

Fifteen (41%) respondents said that family finances improved when the spouse left. They said that the family's standards of living improved because they were able to invest more resources. They were also able to self-actualize by achieving their desired goals. Others said that they were able to place their children in better schools as well as afford recreation.

4.2.2 Effect of long distance marriage on a couple's communication

Communication is an important ingredient to a healthy family. Poor communication triggers a chain of reactions in interpersonal relationships. Wholesome communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Table 4.11 below shows how a couple's communication was affected by the absence of a spouse.

Table 4.11: Effect of long distance marriage on a couple's communication

Response	No	Percentage
Yes	25	68%
No	12	32%

Table 4.11 above shows that more than half of respondents 25 (68%) attributed deterioration of a couple's communication to the absence of spouse. Spouses require communicating at all times but this was not possible because cost of telephone calls were too high. The cost was incurred through purchase of airtime or in long hours spent on the internet. To those who value face to face communication, calling cards were inadequate to enable the spouses express themselves deeply. They also felt misunderstood as a result of shallow communication due to disconnections arising from poor network connections. Others felt inferior in cases where they were not technologically savvy. To other respondents, difference in time zones affected a couple's communication. This was especially so with spouses in America where during the day in Kenya is at night in America. The spaced and short interval calls meant

inadequate time to exhaustively address issues between the couple. During telephone communication only facts are communicated hence relegating emotions to the back seat.

Three respondents said that the couple’s communication was good immediately after the spouse’ departure but as time went on calls became less frequent then the gap widened to an extent of communication ceasing. One respondent had this to say on telephone communication;

*“Children need more than telephone calls,
they need to feel and be touched by their parents”.*

Another respondent said that the reason that made the spouse not to call was because the spouse worked in essential services sector (medical, security). These individuals are not allowed to receive phone calls while on duty. Others had work schedules that conflicted with the work schedules here in Kenya. This lack of understanding of the circumstances became breeding grounds for suspicion and mistrust. Twelve respondents (32%) said that the absence of a spouse did not affect their communication in any way. However the question did not require respondents to give reasons to their responses but one respondent said that the media of communication were varied such as telephone, emails, Skype hence no reason for problems in communication.

4.2.3 Aspects that couples should possess to strengthen long distance marriages

Every family possesses varied levels of strengths for overcoming obstacles in life. Some of these unwritten forms of coping mechanisms guide families into functional units. Table 4.12 below shows the virtues that individuals in long distance marriages should possess to sustain their fragile marriages. This question received multiple responses.

Table 4.12: Aspects that couples should possess to strengthen long distance marriages

Response	No	Percentages
Should have open Communication	21	57%
Trust each other	30	81%
Be honest	25	67%
Integrity	18	48%

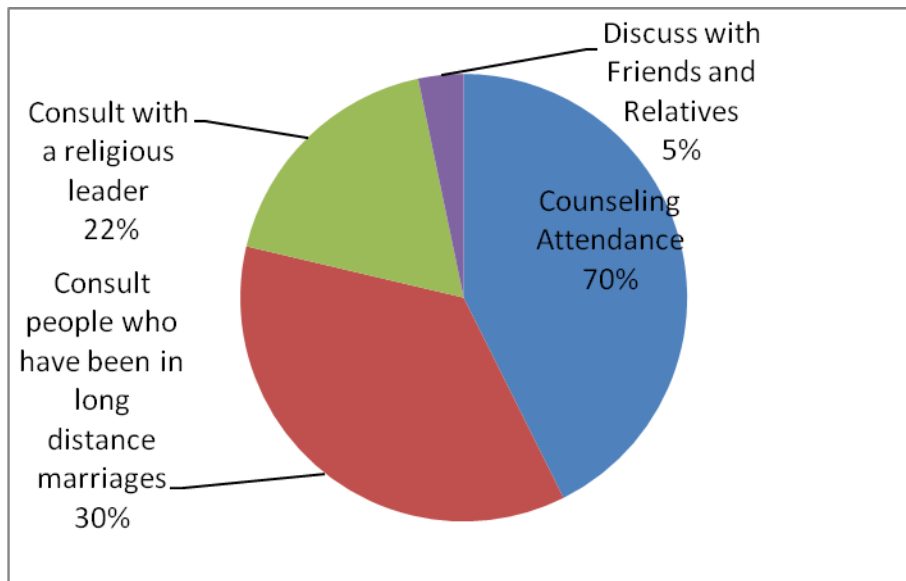
Thirty (81%) respondents placed trust at the top of the list of ingredients that strengthens a couple's relationship. Without trust a family cannot progress in any area of life. Spouses must demonstrate trust to each other in the way they relate with each other in public or in private. Trust is a personal attribute which every individual should possess for the welfare of their marriage. Twenty five (67%) respondents said that spouses should possess honesty. Honesty requires that each spouse is truthful to the other even in absence.

Open communication was valued by 21 (57%) respondents. Through communication couples disagree constructively. They make appropriate decisions as they plan for their future life together. Integrity was important to 18 respondents (48%) as strength to a couple's marital relationship. Integrity can be demonstrated by being consistent in behavior in public or in private. All the four virtues and attributes were crucial in strengthening this type of marriage.

4.2.4 Preparation for long distance marriage

To accomplish any project there must be a preparation phase. This is a time to take stock of the outcomes of the venture in terms of the strengths, weaknesses, cost, timeframe among others. The decision to travel abroad away from loved ones calls for proper planning and a balancing act that would result to the survival of a marriage. Figure 4.2 below shows how respondents prepared for long distance marriages. This question received multiple responses.

Figure 4.2: Preparation for long distance marriages



An observation of figure 4.2 above shows that, 26 (70%) respondents preferred that couples attend counseling before they ventured into long distance marriage. This meant that for

the success of this marriage, there were issues that needed to be addressed in counseling before departure. This is true given that separation is an emotional issue and if mishandled, emotions could be damaged. A point worth noting is that counseling has not been fully utilized in Kenya in dealing with emotional issues. However the findings showed that the respondents were aware of the importance of psychological support to the family during times of crisis.

Those who preferred to consult people who had been in long distance marriages were 22 (59%). Walking a beaten path is easier than forming one's path. The couples who consulted with others who have had the same experience received more support. These consultations with couples who have had experience in these marriages provide the couple with an opportunity to reflect on their own situations. Respondents who said that they would consult with a religious leader 11 (30%) showed their spiritual side and dependency on a higher being. Spiritual guidance provides strength in time of crises. This also shows that faith was an integral part of these respondents. Two (5%) respondents said they would discuss with friends and relatives. The responses in figure 4.2, demonstrated a willingness by respondents to share their predicament with other individuals in similar situations. The responses to this question showed that the respondents were aware of the available social support networks.

4.2.5 Advice to Couples in Long Distance Marriages

Table 4.13 below shows the advice that respondents gave to their peers in long distance marriages. This question received multiple responses.

Table 4.13: Advice to couples in long distance marriages

Response	No	Percentage
Communication	22	59%
Prayer	16	43%
Honesty	10	27%
Trust	18	49%
Seek for reunion	12	32%
Faithful/Integrity	6	16%
Stop Involving in-laws	4	11%
Keep marital vows	3	8%

The observation made from table 4.13 above, is that 22 (59%) respondents picked communication as very important to the family. Open, honest, deep, rich face-to-face, frequent communication was essential to a healthy marriage. Some respondents described the gradient of communication as a process where communication was good immediately after departure of spouse but as time progressed, it became rare and thereafter deteriorated to a point no communication at all. From the communication responses mentioned above, it was clear that communication is vital to any relationship. Communication, both verbal and written is the channel to a human heart. An individual must express self in order to be understood, denotes a kikuyu proverb (“*kiri ngoro gitihotanaga*”). In communication, spouses express their joys, fears, expectations, plans, dreams and receive support in areas of weakness from others. Spouses should always open communication lines in order to connect emotionally despite being far from each other. Trust between the couples was rated second with 18 (49%) of respondents citing it as very important. Trust is a key ingredient in a strong marriage, without which a marriage is weakened. There were 12 (32%) respondents who advised couples to seek reunion. These respondents felt that the separation was unbearable as illustrated by the following statements;

”If one is not prepared to be left behind, do not get married”.

”Learn to cope with absence positively”

”If there is no way of joining the other, then they should sacrifice and come together as God intended”.

” To try as much as possible to reunite as a family above finances, career etc.”

”If you can, avoid long distance marriage by all means”

To the 12 respondents who advised on reunion, a complete family is important hence a priority to them compared to the finances and career development.

Sixteen (43%) respondents prioritized prayer as a piece of advice to the couples. To these respondents, spirituality was an integral part of their lives. Prayer to God was an important resource to couples since they received strength to continue in the marriage. From these responses it shows that families in the County are quite spiritual .They acknowledged God in

their lives and depended on a higher being, more so in times of crisis. Some of the statements they used to demonstrate their spiritual inclination included:

“Prayer works miracles, as you can afford to smile at the storm and dare to take that step forward”.

“Pray a lot, it helps and pray always.”

The statements made above shows that when these families were in difficulties, they took solace in prayer.

The following attributes -honesty (27%), faithfulness (16%) warning not to involve in-laws in the family affairs (11%) and admonition to keep marriage vows (8%) acquired a slot in the advice list. The pieces of advice and recommendations made by respondents to their peers would hence serve as a resource to the families already in these situations and those intending to venture in it.

From the findings in this chapter, it suffices to say that there are underlying issues affecting families in long distance marriages in the county that require to be addressed.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the study findings. It also presents the, conclusions, recommendations and areas for further studies. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the data that was presented by use of percentages, pie charts, bar graphs and tables. The three objectives that guided the study were; an assessment of the state of long distance marriages in the County, effects of this type of marriage on the family and the appropriate strategies that would support family members in long distance marriage in Kiambu County.

5.1 Summary of findings

The research findings are as presented in chapter four and the following summaries are made in the light of the objectives of the study.

5.2 Factors that contributed to the existence of long distance marriages in the county.

Motivation for outward mobility must be triggered and contributed by a specific need(s) or factors. The factor that contributed immensely to the outward mobility in this study was employment (68%). Scarcity of better paying- jobs in the country, high inflation rate, high cost of living and an increasing desire for better living standards motivated spouses to travel abroad. Academic pursuit (29%) was another factor that made spouses to travel abroad. Some foreign countries offer courses that are not offered in Kenya necessitating the travel abroad. The opportunity of combining education with employment makes foreign travel attractive to these spouses because these individuals can have programs running concurrently. Related to employment was career advancement (27%).Some spouses traveled abroad to gain experience in certain fields not available in the country. Most of these fields are in the medical sector and take many years to acquire the necessary skills, expertise and competences required.

5.3 Effects of long distance marriage on the family in Kiambu County

Generally speaking long distance marriages affect the family in all areas of operations. This study sought to find out the effects of the absence of a spouse or parent from the family. The

aspects of the family most affected by spouse absence were; couple's relationship, parenting, finances and communication.

5.3.1 Couple's relationship

The part of the couple's relationship that was greatly affected by spouse's absence was the sexual relationship with (81%) of respondents saying they were sexually unfulfilled. Sexual encounter between couples is a building block to a strong marriage. Sexual satisfaction is critical to the health of a marriage and serves the family as an avenue for procreation.

Sixty seven percent (67%) of the respondents said that long distance marriages weaken couple's relationship while (51%) of respondents said that this type of marriage separated families. The separation estranged the spouses from each other. The couples relationship was further affected by the absence of a spouse, with loneliness cited by (95%) of respondents as the major effect. At same time, the study revealed that (72%) of respondents said that they were emotionally distant from their absent spouse. Physical contact and emotional satisfaction are intertwined in enhancing a well-functioning marriage. Another area of the couple's concerns was morality. About 45% of the respondents stated that infidelity was a concern in their marriage. From the perspective of these respondents their spouses were unfaithful to them which strained the marriage. Frequent conflicts as stated by (50%) of respondents strained the couple's relationship. Conflicts arose during telephone communication when issues were discussed superficially leading to suspicions and disagreements. Spouses also experienced suspicion from friends and relatives as indicated by (78%) of respondents, slightly below half of respondents (45%) said that their marriage was threatened by divorce while other spouses lacked finances as said by (27%) of respondents. Another major area affected by a spouse's absence was communication with (68%) of respondents in concurrence. Some respondents said that difficulties in obtaining travel documents to join a spouse contributed to long periods of separation hence deteriorating the couple's relationship further.

An important point to note is the age of respondents and its relationship to ages of the respondents. The study showed that the majority of the respondents got married at an age below 30 years but at the time of the study the majority of the respondents were between 40-50 years. This is a period when some women are in pre-menopausal or menopausal age which means that conception is difficult. At this time of the family cycle there are those left with children and have to deal with teenagers or young adults still need the attention of their parents. Some young adults

also become single parents or get married during the period the absence of one parent. For other families the issue to deal with is teenage motherhood. This issue creates conflicts between the grandparents who blame each other of poor parenting. As people grow old, they require company from their spouses who may not be available leading some to take up a partner to provide companionship and avoid suicidal deaths caused by loneliness, court cases citing neglect as highlighted in this study. Every family negotiates the developmental milestones differently due to their uniqueness but generally all families negotiate common life cycle with some variations arising from personality differences.

5.3.2 Parenting/Children

Parenting is a fulltime job and should be undertaken by both parents. The study showed that absence of a parent had serious effects on children. This was clear from the study with (83%) of the respondents saying that children were emotionally removed from their absent parent. Role models are important in modifying children's behavior. This was evident from the (56%) of respondents who said that absence of a parent denied children models. A single parent imparts a portion of skills to children leading to emotionally imbalanced children.

Depression in children as mentioned by (35%) of respondents was another major challenge to the parent left behind with children. Emotionally ill children exist as evidenced by the presence of four types of children in a family; -hero who turns into a workaholic under the burden of bruised emotions, a scape-goat who is a hostile child, lost child who is withdrawn and the mascot who is fragile and requires protection and assurances of love from both parents.

Twenty two (22%) of respondents said that their children lacked basic provisions while (5%) of respondents said that their children became truants.

Therefore for the sake of well balanced children both parents must bring children up.

5.3.3 Family finances

About half (51%) of respondents attributed the negative effects of family finances to the absence of a spouse due to the following situations; The fact that a spouse abroad had to cater for his/her needs in addition to those of the family in Kenya meant that resources were not adequate to sustain two homes given the high cost of living and low paying jobs abroad. Other spouses lived extravagant lives or started new families that strained the finances. Some spouses abroad advanced their education which meant that some funds were spent in education. Progress for

projects that were started before departure of spouse stalled or slowed down. Some respondents cited mismanagement of finances by the spouse abroad or starting of new families abroad as a cause for less finances sent to the family back home. Other respondents cited pressure from in-laws to provide them with more finances. Finances were consumed in buying telephone calling cards or use of airtime on internet. However all about absence of a spouse was not negative. To some families to have a family abroad brings a sense of pride and a source of the much needed resources. Kenyans in the Diaspora are reported to remit huge sums of money back home which is used to improve families' standards as well as injecting foreign funds to the country's economy. Professionals who travel abroad include doctors, nurses, teachers and other academicians. Having family members abroad provide an opportunity to the family in county to visit those foreign countries.

5.3.4 Communication

The study revealed that a couple's communication was adversely affected by spouse's absence as (68%) of the respondents concurred. Wholesome communication encompasses verbal and non-verbal responses. The absence of adequate communication leads to, loneliness and frustration among the family members. This was cited by a respondent who said that "children need more than telephone communication-they need to feel and be touched by their parents". The cost of calling back home, poor network connections, different time zones, decline in the interest for the spouse back home and crashing work schedules worsened communication with families back home. Lack of access to internet or inadequate skills in the use of technology made communication difficult. Some methods of communication are too slow such as use of snail mail which may get lost on the way. When breakdown in communication occurs, the bumpy road for the marriage starts. All channels of communication- audio through telephones, Skype, social media and other written messages such as letters, emails must be utilized in order to sustain a continuous connection with family.

Employees in essential sectors such as health and security do not receive telephone calls while on duty. Lack of understanding of the special circumstances by the spouse created suspicion between the couple.

5.4 Strategies to strengthen long distance marriages

Preparation made before commencement of the journey is crucial in determining the strength of a marriage. Strategies fronted by respondents to help them cope with an absent

spouse included; attending counseling (70%). Absence of a spouse is an emotional issue that requires psychological support. Counseling enables individuals to clarify issues such as their past experiences, expectations, fears and future. Families in long distance marriages would benefit from counseling which provides an avenue for members to vent pent up emotions as well as deal with individual personality issues.

Consulting people who have been in long distance marriages is a strong strategy in providing social support networks. Individuals who had experienced long distance marriages knew the fragile aspects of a marriage that needed to be handled with care. Peers were therefore a major resource to couples already in this type of marriage or those planning to enter.

Spirituality was a key strength to spouses in long distance marriages in coping with this new phase in their life. Some respondents (30%) opted to consult with religious leaders for support during this time of need, while (5%) preferred to share with friends and relatives. Different people draw their strength from different sources hence the varied choices. However the varied sources of support showed that social support networks were necessary in alleviating pain and suffering in these families.

Families in long distance marriages were faced with various obstacles which they had to overcome or withstand. To overcome the challenges family members had to possess the following virtues cited by respondents; Eighty one percent of respondents believed that trust between the couple would lead to strong families, while honesty (67%), open communication (57%) and integrity were strong ingredients to functional families.

When respondents were asked to advice families in this type of marriage, communication was on top of the list with (59%) of respondents mentioning it. Prayer (43%) and seeking of reunion (32%) were cited as an important to families. Upholding of marital vows was important advice to families in long distance marriages.

It is worth noting that some concepts such as honesty, integrity communication were repeated which points to their importance in the family. These mentioned aspects of strengthening the family should therefore be implemented appropriately.

5.5 Conclusions

The following conclusions were made based on the study findings. Families in long distance marriages encountered many challenges. These challenges that arose from an absent spouse had a negative impact on the family. Both genders were involved in long distance marriage, a situation that created a unique form of single hood and single parenthood among

married individuals between 20 and 50 years. However more females were left in the county compared to males. It was clear that the respondents in the study were opposed to long distance marriages given the overwhelming responses to against this type of marriage. It was observed that three factors; employment, education and career advancement contributed to the outward mobility by spouses. Absence of a spouse impacted on the family negatively by; weakening a couple's relationship and separating families. One respondent viewed the absence of a spouse positively since it presented the family member with an opportunity to improve the family's living standards.

Family members in long distance marriages face a lot of challenges. Key among them were; loneliness, parenting, suspicions from friends and relatives, loose family ties, lost period to have children, frequent conflicts, divorce and lack of finances.

A couple's relationship was negatively affected by the absence of a spouse in the following areas; unfulfilled sexual needs, emotional estrangement, integrity and frequent conflicts.

Another group of family members affected by absence of a parent were the children. Children got emotionally removed from their absent parent, lacked models, and got depressed, lacked basic provisions while a few became truants.

Family finances were not spared the strain as a result of absence of a spouse. The fact that spouses abroad had to cater for two families in addition to new financial demands strained the family finances further.

Communication is a key ingredient to a healthy family. The absence of a spouse negatively affected the family's communication .High cost of telephone calls, poor network connections, different time zones and varied work schedules all led to poor communication.

Couples keen on having strong long distance marriages should be honest, trust each other, maintain open communication lines at all times and have integrity. Couples should know that a strong marriage requires a lot of work from the two. Preparation for a period of time with an absent spouse is a must to couples in long distance marriages. Three appropriate means of preparation for life alone are; attending counseling, consulting with people who have been in these types of marriages as well as consulting with religious leaders. These preparatory methods provided families with social support networks.

Finally families received pieces of advice from their peers that; they should always communicate, trust each other, be honest in relationships, pray to God for strength, remain faithful to their marital vows and have integrity. Spouses were warned against involving in-laws

in their nuclear family matters. The ultimate piece of advice that the families received was to reunite and live as a whole unit physically and emotionally.

5.6 Recommendations

Drawing from the conclusions discussed in this chapter, the following recommendations were made; family members should maintain healthy communication, trust each other, and be honest, adhere to their marital vows. Family members should prepare for the experiences in long distance marriages by attending counseling, consulting with peers in this type of marriage and consult with religious leaders. This would provide the much needed social support networks. Families should strive to reunite and live as a whole family.

5.7 Recommendations for further studies

A study should be conducted on long distance marriages from the absent spouse's perspective. This is because this study was one sided and sought the perspective of the spouse in Kenya only.

A study on long distance marriages focusing on regions of Kenya should be conducted to establish the region with the highest exodus. This can be disaggregated by gender, age, occupation and the countries frequently visited to inform regional specific interventions.

A study on the impact of long distance marriages among couples within the country needs to be undertaken.

Another study that needs to be undertaken is one focusing on singles that are in long distance relationships.

Physical distance has a major effect on the family but there are other families where couples live under one roof but are emotionally distant. This is a study that needs to be conducted to improve the quality of these unions.

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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

THE IMPACT OF LONG DISTANCE MARRIAGES ON THE FAMILY

A STUDY OF FAMILIES WITH SPOUSES ABROAD IN KIAMBU COUNTY

The data collected in this study will be for academic purposes only in fulfillment of Masters Degree in Counseling and will be confidential. This questionnaire aims at gathering information on the impact of long distance marriage on families in Kiambu County. The respondents in the study are married individuals whose spouses are outside Kenya.

Section A: Respondent's profile

Instructions: Please answer all the questions as honestly as possible and tick the box that matches your response to each question.

1. Gender (a) Male (b) Female

2. What was your age in years when you got married?

(a) 20-30 (b) 30-40 (c) 40-50 (d) 50 + years

3. What is your age in years now?

(a) 20-30yrs (c) 30-40 yrs (d) 40-50 yrs (d) 50+ yrs

Section B- Impact of long distance marriage on families.

4. Do you think long distance marriages are common in Kiambu County? (a) Yes (b) No

5. If your answer in 5 above is yes, in four points, please explain in the space below.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

6. Given a choice would you choose to be in a long distance marriage? (a) Yes (b) No

7. If your answer in question 7 above is yes, please give four reasons in the space below.

- a. _____
- b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

8. What are the reasons that made your spouse to go abroad?

- (a) Career advancement
- (b) Education
- (c) Employment
- (d) For treatment
- (e) As an asylum seeker

9. What is your view on long distance marriage? (a) It separate families (b) weakens couple's relationship (c) It enables a couple to take opportunities in life.

10. What are some of the challenges faced by families with spouses abroad? Tick as many answers as possible provided below.

- (a) Loneliness
- (b) Frequent conflicts
- (c) Lack of finances
- (d) Suspicion from friends and relatives
- (e) Loose family ties
- (f) Lost period to have children
- (g) Parenting
- (h) Divorce
- (i) Others, specify

11. In your view what are the effects of long distance marriage on the couple's relationship?

- (a) Unfulfilled conjugal relationship
- (b) Emotional distance
- (c) Frequent conflicts
- (d) Infidelity

12. What do you think is the effect of long distance marriage on children?

- (a) Truancy
- (b) Depression
- (c) Emotional distance with the absent parent
- (d) Lacks models

(e) Lacks basic provisions.

13 How does long distance affect a couple's finances?

(a) Positively

(b) Negatively

14. If the answer is a or b in question 14, explain below in four points.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

15. In your view does long distance affect a couple's communication? (a) Yes (b) No

16. If yes in question 16, please explain in four points.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

17. What should couples in long distance marriages possess in order to strengthen relationships for couples in long distance marriages? From the list below, tick those that apply to you.

(a) Should have open communication

(b) Trust each other

(c) Be honest

(d) Integrity

18. How should couples prepare for a long distance marriage?

(a) Attend counseling

(b) Consult religious leader

(c) Discuss the separation with friends and in-laws

(d) Consult with people who have been in long distance marriages

19. What advice would you give to couples in long distance marriages? Please list four points.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____