



INTRA-FAMILY CONFLICTS IN RWANDA:

A CONSTANT CHALLENGE TO SUSTAINABLE PEACE IN RWANDA

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Foreword

IRDP is an independent think tank established in 2001 and contributed to the consolidation of lasting peace in post-genocide Rwanda. Today, as Rwanda is moving for a middle country income and has greatly realized many achievements in lasting security and peace, IRDP is today extending its mission by contributing to the sustainable peace and development looking at new conflicts dynamics in Rwanda considering also regional and international threats to peace. The debate around the Rwanda's reconstruction process is shifting from stability to sustainability. How can Rwanda's achievements, in all sectors including peace and development can be sustainable? This question brought us to the fundamentals of human nature and values of the family as nuclear unit of the society. It seems that ideological conflicts in the post genocide context are extending or transformed to the intra-family conflicts. This means that human and family values are continuously threaten by new anti-values led by modernism and high speed of criminalities and conflicts of interests.

Today's families experience problems leading to violence and crimes. From those crises, families are experiencing unfaithfulness, violence, child molestation, divorce and separation. These problems experienced in families affect the intra-family members, and long term negative impact on social cohesion among family allies, child, parents and neighbors.

It is against this background and different recommendations during our recent meetings with communities, IRDP committed to conduct a research on interfamily conflicts, to analyze the nature, causes and consequences of interfamily conflicts. Results are drawn from a very participatory research action, community dialogues and youth school of debates.

From a very qualitative approach informed by our community dialogues clubs organized in the two last years, the present study identifies three types of conflicts in Rwanda's households: *conflicts between husband and wife, conflicts between*

parents and children as well as conflicts between siblings. Among other causes, we mentioned that some fundamental human values are collapsing when violence are expending in families at the extent that lives are lost due to conflicts of interests. Genocide legacy in terms of identity based stereotypes, misunderstanding of gender policies, family succession and heritage, poor communication and poverty, suspicion, mistrust, level of education are among other factors leading to intra-family conflicts. IRDP has organized a national forum with around two hundreds of participants from civil servants organizations, policy makers, local and international NGOS, academia and youth in order to discuss the issues. Recommendations have been validated and shared to different stakeholders. After that a number of talks have been organized with different media. The question kept the attention of the National Dialogue Summit 2017, “Umushikirano” and the intra-family conflict has been retained as one of the issues to be addressed. We thank Mgr Servilien Nzakamwita, the IRDP board member who raised it and took shape since then in media and different policy dialogues.

IRDP is committed to make further deep researches and engage communities in dialogue to mainstream and address those explosive intra-family conflicts.

We thank our partners DFID who contributed in funding the GRRP project through which we have been able to conduct this research. We thank Aegis Trust for a continuous kind collaboration.

IRDP in its mission of advocacy, alert the Rwandan community, policy makers, NGOs to get interested to these new phenomena of destructive conflicts. IRDP is committed that there is a need for deep reflection on a neutral and trusted space for communities to engage in intra-family resolutions.

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ACRONYMS

ARCT :	Association Rwandaise des Counselors en Traumatisme
CSOs:	Civil Society Organisations
DHS:	Demographic and Health Survey
<i>FBOs:</i>	Faith Based Organization
GBV:	Gender Based Violence
GMO:	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IRDP:	Institute of Research and Dialogue for Peace
MAJ:	Maison d'Accès al Justice
MIGEPROFE:	Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion
MINIJUST:	Ministry of Justice
MININTER:	Ministry of Internal Security
NISR:	National Institute of Statistics
NURC:	National Unity and Reconciliation Commission
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
RWAMREC:	Rwanda Men Resource Center
RNP:	Rwanda National Police
UN:	United Nations
USAID:	United States Agency for International Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The present study was conducted in 2016 in 10 districts of Rwanda. It sought to identify the nature, causes and impact of household conflicts in Rwanda and suggest some practical strategies to promote peaceful co-existence in the country.

The study used qualitative methods whereby group discussions and individual interviews were conducted. Desk reviews of relevant policy documents were also done and previous studies consulted for in-depth knowledge on the topic under study. The participants were selected from cohorts of civil servants, government institutions, and religious institutions as well as ordinary people. They included members of IRDP dialogue clubs at sector and district levels, local leaders, police officers, opinion leaders, government official, teachers, NCW representatives as well as other stakeholders from relevant institutions.

The present study identifies three types of conflicts in Rwanda's households: conflicts between husband and wife, conflicts between parents and children as well as conflicts between siblings.

The narratives from the participants reveal that conflicts between couples are mainly caused by lack of communication between husband and wife leading to poor interaction and collaboration mechanisms in households. This scenario has resulted into a situation where couples develop a sense of mistrust and suspicion between each other and this has torn many families apart.

On the other hand, the narratives show that poverty is another important factor that creates tension, friction, nagging, quarrels and eventually fights between couples. In this study, poverty is also identified as a major factor pushing couples to practice adultery.

The findings additionally reveal that many couples tend to misinterpret gender-related laws whereby women demonstrate to their husbands that they are 'more empowered' by gender laws. This makes many husbands feel undermined. The study

also reveals that many couples do not make joint decisions while managing their household assets and this creates tension and conflicts between them.

Regarding the conflicts between parents and children, the narratives reveal that they are caused by unequal distribution of inheritance property and gifts (*umunani*) to their children.

Concerning the conflicts between children, the narratives further reveal that preferential treatment by parents towards some of their children can create hatred between them. It was also found that that in polygamous families, children born outside wedlock and those from legal marriages are treated differently and this becomes a source of household conflicts between siblings.

Last but not least, the narratives reveal that household conflicts lead to physical and emotional violence between couples and children. The conflicts affect the economic welfare of the households because of constant quarrels that limit their efforts to develop the family. The conflicts also affect children negatively to the extent that some of them become sex workers and others go to the street while others drop out of school to become thieves. Other consequences of household conflicts in extreme cases were found to be divorce murder and/or suicide.

The study finally suggests some solutions to overcome these problems and proposes some recommendations.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background and rationale

A family is the foundation of any society. It is an entity that gives real meaning to life and existence. As such, it constitutes the cornerstone of any social system. A family is not a casual or spontaneous organization of people but a divinely ordained institution. The foundation of a family is based on marriage, which is a right to every human being (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008). The above definition brings out two closely related but separate concepts—family and marriage. The concept of family envisages a more complex system of relationships than marriage because it usually brings together not only the couple but also their children and other relatives and friends. In addition, a family acts as a social unit of society, which is usually very close "to the original" model of the entire society in which it operates.

This is why governments and non-governmental organizations in different parts of the world attribute great importance to strengthening the family as a basic social unit. In recent decades, this consolidation has been considered to be even more necessary and urgent in view of the increasingly divergent and often conflicting values and practices that characterize life within families (Chow, 1996). The family as a social unit contributes to the welfare of humanity and the developmental process worldwide. It is in this regard that the United Nations observes a 'family day' which is celebrated on 15th May of every year. This year's theme is "Families Matter for the Achievement of Development Goals."

In conformity with the state and society, religions also attach great importance to the family and matters relating to and surrounding it. Religions do not only care about the nuclear family that consists of just parents and children, but they are also

concerned with the concept of extended family that covers children, parents, grandparents as well as in-laws. The divine importance of the family comes from its selected function in preserving the human race by procreation. Also, the family is responsible for protecting morals and values of individuals and, indeed, society at large (Chow, 1996).

Rwanda recognizes the importance and role of families in safeguarding cultural values. The concept of family generally goes beyond the definition which conceives it as a group of people united by marriage, blood or adoption, characterized by a common residence. In Rwanda, like almost everywhere in Africa, family relationships extend beyond people having a common residence; one must also include extended family members living outside the household and who sometimes live far apart (UNICEF, 2015).

Family development in Rwanda is rooted in the country's main orientations. Article 27 of the country's Constitution requires the State of Rwanda to set up appropriate legislation and institutions for the protection of the family, especially towards the child and mother. In this regard, Rwanda established a National Policy for Family Protection with the comprehensive objective of outlining a framework for implementing and monitoring programs to ensure the protection and support of the family in order to enable it to play efficiently its vital role in the country development (RNPFPP, 2007). This policy, inter alia, specifically aims at ensuring peace, democracy and security within the family by promoting the culture of peace and an atmosphere of harmony among family members.

In this study the types of intra-family conflicts in Rwanda to be analyzed include the following: conflicts between partners, conflicts between parents and children as well as conflicts between children of the same family.

Problem statement and research questions

In a paper on the concept of security, Baldwin (1997); Robbins et al. (2011) specify that the methodology used in analyzing social phenomena at nation-state level can also be applicable to other levels such as the family. The importance of studying conflict lies in how people expect to bring about positive change in social relationships. In general, conflicts can either be resolved or managed. Whereas management of conflicts only eases tension temporarily, conflict resolution, on the other hand, resolves contentious issues of conflict on a more or less permanent basis (Marx, 1971).

The present study is built on various problems that face Rwandan families. Family conflicts have become a major problem to security and are threatening the welfare of Rwandan families. In the last two decades following the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, the Rwandan society witnessed quarrels of family members who reached the extent of killing one another, this despite ongoing peace-building efforts that were in place at that time in Rwanda.

Family conflicts are reported to be the major cause of many offences and suicide cases occurring in Rwanda. In a report on types of conflicts in Rwanda, the National Commission for Unity and Reconciliation, it was revealed that family conflicts not only affect those who are abused, but they also have a substantial effect on family members, friends, co-workers, other witnesses as well as the community at large (NURC, 2008).

NURC also reported that children, who grow up witnessing family conflicts, are among those seriously affected by this crime. Frequent exposure to violence in the home not only predisposes children to numerous social and physical problems, but also teaches them that violence is a normal way of life—and this increases their risk of becoming society's next generation of victims and abusers.

The effects of family-related conflicts extend from psychological to physical threats and violence. In a training on land legal systems in Rwanda organized by the USAID-Land Project, the participants affirmed that consent seeking [on selling land] is the main source of conflicts between spouses and this has led to spouses killing their partners, cases of which have especially been reported in frequent basis in the country's Eastern Province (USAID, 2014). They also noted that children face gender imbalance when it comes to inheritance resulting into family conflicts among relatives. Further, they state that the gender principle is respected between female and male children while sharing property left by their parents after death, but when it comes to parents offering ascending partitions (gifts) to their children known as *umunani* in Kinyarwanda, male children are favored to the detriment of their female counterparts.

The post-genocide legal framework related to gender balance highlights different factors that influence these conflicts. Given the little knowledge of gender principles in general, the concept of gender balance is misinterpreted especially by women in rural areas who are generally illiterate or uneducated. The concept is interpreted to mean that today women's time has come to take the lead and rule over men who have been dominating them for long (MIGEPOROF, 2012), with a view of revenging for what men did before.

On the other hand, men have refused to accept entirely the changes brought by new laws entailing the principle of gender equal rights and sometimes tend to question how this principle was instituted (USAID and HAGURUKA, 2014).

Culturally, Rwandan women were not much involved in economic affairs but they are rather had a passive attitude in their traditional roles as housewives and mothers. In the post-genocide Rwanda, a number of legal, policy and institutional frameworks have been set up and implemented to ensure women's economic empowerment, thus contributing to household and national development. In return, women have become a driving force of the socio-economic development of the country

from the 1994 genocide (MIGEPROF, 2005). Nonetheless, economic violence is also one of the factors that endanger family good relationship. This type of violence includes the lack of assistance to the family by the spouse, abandoning the family, complicity in confinement, deprivation of fundamental rights and discrimination (NURC, 2008).

Information technology facilitates communication but, if badly used, it can hamper family cohesion and influence conflicts among relatives. In newly formed families, technological devices especially social networks—*whatsapp, facebook, etc.*— are used to communicate.

these networks cheat on one has caused many The introduction all over the world



In some instances, are also used to another, a fact that wrangles in families. of new technologies has had a direct

effect on changes in communication methods. While e-mail correspondences, texting and connection via social media have improved professional correspondence, they have at the same time tended to damage family's social ties and emotional bonding (Barlow, 2009).

Before the arrival of colonialists, the Rwandan society was a balanced society in which each and everybody had their place where a sense of family and solidarity was real. Today, it is regrettable to notice that all these values have tended to be rejected almost systematically (MIGEPROF, 2005). Social disconnection and loss of cultural values such as roles and responsibilities in the family, neglect of elders' advice by young generations and community obligations over children are also believed to be among the issues that hamper family promotion in Rwanda.

In the National Group Meeting conducted by IRDP in 2013, the participants expressed their concern regarding intra-family conflicts. IRDP management and researchers were requested to conduct a research on this issue.

Below are research questions to guide this study:

- ❖ What is the nature of intra-family conflicts in Rwanda?
- ❖ What are the causes of intra-family conflicts?
- ❖ What are the consequences of family conflicts on peace development?
- ❖ What are the solutions to promote social-economic cohesion within Rwandan families?

Objectives of the study

The overall objective of this study, therefore, is to analyze the consequences of conflicts in families on the Rwandan society and sustainable peace in Rwanda.

Specifically, the study seeks to:

- ❖ Identify the nature of conflicts in Rwandan families
- ❖ Identify causes of conflicts in Rwandan families
- ❖ Establish the consequences of these conflicts on Rwandan families.
- ❖ Recommend solutions to promote social-economic cohesion within Rwandan families.

Research methodology

This research uses rigorous scientific methods (desk reviews, group discussions, interviews, etc.) as detailed in the following sections.

1.1.1 Approaches and Methods

This study relied on qualitative methods with the aim of gathering diverse quality information; this was done by making *desk reviews* (documentary research which informed the study with in-depth knowledge on previous studies on similar topics, relevant policy documents and other related reports. In addition, *group discussions* and *individual interviews* were conducted.

For triangulation purposes, a forum of experts and stakeholders who are familiar with the topic under study were consulted throughout the research process. Based on identified indicators and related sources of data, an interview guide was designed. The intent of this guide was twofold: it helped in guiding the group discussants in order to avoid an off-topic discussion. The guide was also used during interviews with key resource persons who were contacted to provide their perceptions and experiences on family-related conflicts.

1.1.2 Participants

The research was conducted countrywide in 11 districts where each province was represented by two districts, at least. It took place from October 2015 to September 2016. Districts were selected basing on already existing dialogue clubs and schools debating clubs. The total population from which the participants were selected was approximately 4,104; out of these, different cohorts of participants were selected. In this connection, the dialogue forum at cell level included 789 participants. As for school debates, they were organized in 36 secondary schools and in 3 tertiary institutions and universities. The number of participants from schools was 2,340.

Meetings were privileged for forum dialogues which were conducted using an interview guide recommended by IRDP researchers. Each of the dialogue forums was tasked to make a summary of major points arising from the discussions. Two additional dialogue forums were organized at sector and district levels in order to compare with ideas from existing permanent dialogue forums. Recommendations were added accordingly. 484 respondents participated at sector level while 482 participated at district level. In addition, 14 key informants were interviewed. These were people with experience in handling family conflicts. Keys informants were selected according to the criteria of residing in border districts. Most of these participants were victims of family conflicts and their experience was deemed useful in enriching the data generated.

1.1.3 Characteristics of participants

Permanent dialogue clubs already in existence at cell level were selected according to the variables of sex, age, religion and inclusiveness. As for sex, both male and female participants had to be represented in each forum. Regarding age, three categories—youth, adults and the elderly—were included. As far as religion is concerned, all religious denominations practiced in the cell had to be represented in the forum too. For participant inclusiveness, there was an attempt to include people of different backgrounds, namely those born outside Rwanda before and after the 1984 Genocide against the Tutsis. On the basis of the participative approach espoused by IRDP, all respondents who expressed interest in participating in the study were allowed to take part.

The selection of students was done in both S4 and S6 although university students at various levels were also included in the study. The other criteria under consideration were sex and the level of education of the participants. For example, female and male students who performed well in class were included in the study.

At sector and district forums, the respondents were selected from people who demonstrated proof of being involved in conflict resolution such as local leaders, security personnel, opinions leaders, *Abunzi*, MAJ, FBOs, and CSOs. The rationale behind was to include the experience of such respondents who had firsthand information about the conflicts under study and compare it with the data generated at the grassroots.

1.1.4 Qualitative approach

This study used a qualitative approach based on group discussions. This section describes the processes that were used during data collection as well as target participants in the group discussions. The techniques of data analysis are also discussed in this section.

1.1.5 Group discussions

This technique was useful in the validation, triangulation and confronting ideas between the theoretical framework, literature review and the results obtained on the ground. It enabled the researchers to learn or confirm not just facts but the meaning behind those facts. The group discussions were separately conducted as follows:

- A forum was organized at sector level; it included members of IRDP dialogue club; Local leaders who were composed of the village chief, cell and sector executive secretaries, Police officers, CSOs and FBOs working at sector level, conciliators and other opinions leaders at sector level in 11 sectors
- The districts that participated in the study were: Bugesera; Rwamagana; Nyagatare; Rulindo; Rubavu; Karongi; Huye; Muhanga; Kicukiro; Gasabo; Ngororero.
- Another forum at district level was organized; it included Mayors, Vice-Mayors in charge of social affairs, Director in charge of good governance, Officer in charge of MAJ, officer in charge of culture and sports, Director in charge of education, Police Officer in charge of community policing, army representative, five executive secretaries at sector level, representative of civil society in the district, School head teachers in which the forum was organized, National Council women representative, national council, youth representative, IRDP forum dialogue representative, opinion leaders from 10 districts as follows: Bugesera, Rwamagana, Huye, Muhanga, Rubavu, Rulindo, Gasabo, Nyagatare, Ngororero and Kicukiro.

The discussion was organized on the topic of ‘intra-family conflicts’ under the framework of existing IRDP dialogue forum summarized in the table below. Each IRDP dialogue forum presented the results from the discussion about the topic and the participants provided their input and recommendations.

Table 1: Participants in the dialogue forum at sector level

N°	Sector	District	Date of meeting	Total number of people who participated in the discussion at sector level by sex		
				Total	Female	Male
1.	KIGABIRO	RWAMAGAGNA	21/03/2016	30	5	25
2.	BUSASAMA NA	RUBAVU	23/03/2016	39	10	29
3.	NYAMATA	BUGESERA	24/03/2016	53	25	28
4.	NYANGE	NGORORERO	28/03/2016	42	15	27
5.	NYAMABUY E	MUHANGA	29/03/2016	46	21	25
6.	KINYINYA	GASABO	29/03/2016	42	26	16
7.	KISARO	RULINDO	30/03/2016	45	17	28
8.	SIMBI	HUYE	30/03/2016	34	12	22
9.	KANOMBE	KICUKIRO	30/03/2016	62	11	51
10.	RUBENGER A	KARONGI	31/03/2016	47	19	28
11.	MATIMBA	NYAGATARE	01/04/2016	44	19	25
	Total			484	180	304

Source: Compiled from the dialogue forum report at sector level

In the table above, the distribution of the selected districts was done according to provinces; it is interesting to note that there was representation in all the provinces of the country. Eastern province was represented by three districts, namely Bugesera, Rwamagana and Nyagatare; Southern Province was represented by Muhanga and Huye. As for Western Province, it was represented by Rubavu, Karongi and Ngororero. Northern Province was represented by Rulindo district while Kigali City was represented by Gasabo district. The selection of the above districts was done purposively.

The results obtained from the discussion at sector level was recorded and then presented at district level for more input and recommendations. The table below presents the distribution of participants to the dialogue forum at district level.

Table 2: Participants in the dialogue forum at district level

N°	District	Date	Number of participants		
			Total	Female	Male
1.	RWAMAGAGNA	16//06/2016	40	8	22
2.	RUBAVU	28/07/2016	39	10	29
3.	BUGESERA	23/06/2016	55	22	33
4.	MUHANGA	21/06/2016	55	25	30
5.	GASABO	14/07/2016	47	21	26
6.	RULINDO	14/06/2016	50	22	28
7.	HUYE	12/07/2016	83	19	64
8.	KICUKIRO	18/08/2016	32	15	17
9.	NGORORERO	02/09/2016	46	20	26
10.	NYAGATARE	29/07/2016	35	11	24
11.	TOTAL		482	173	309

Source: Compiled from the dialogue forum report at sector level

1.1.6 Interviews with key informants

In order to gain deep understanding of intra-family conflicts and in order to generate critical data that emerged from the discussion forum, the researchers identified a number of resource persons. These constituted the study's respondents, also referred to as 'privileged witness' who were selected on the basis of their experience, daily experience and contact with the topic under study, namely intra-family conflicts and related issues. There was no pre-fixed number of interviews to be conducted. This was based on a number of scientific norms and procedures—the

principles of *exhaustivity* and *representability* as well as the frequency of conflicts in families which showed that, in the generated data, all aspects of the study were covered and that no more new elements were introduced.

In-depth interviews (IDI) were conducted with:

- The Deputy chairman of intermediate court of Nyarugenge district
- The Chairperson of the primary court of Gasabo district
- The Executive Secretary of RWAMREC
- The Legal Officer of HAGURUKA
- Local Leaders (Executive Secretaries at sector level)

The key informants were selected according to the criteria of institutions dealing with family conflicts on daily basis as well as victim of family conflicts: The key informants such as victims of family conflicts were organized in four districts presented in the table below:

Table 3: Number of Key informants’ (victims) of family conflicts

Districts	Number of key informants	Sex	
		Male	Female
Bugesera	3	1	2
Nyagatare	4	2	2
Rulindo	4	2	2
Rubavu	3	2	1
Total	14	7	7

Source: Compiled from the report on dialogue forum at sector level

An expert survey of 16 participants was also organized on 17th June 2016 at national level and comprised different institutions that are charged with intervening in the prevention of family conflicts such as:

- Representative of the Catholic Church:

The Catholic Church is a faith-based organization which teaches love, tolerance and other moral values. The believers of this denomination report conflicts that occur in their family to the priest who provides them with advice in order to prevent violence from occurring in their families.

- Muslim faith representative

Islam is another faith-based institution in Rwanda which teaches love, tolerance and other moral values. The believers of this faith report conflicts that occur in their families to the Imam who provides them with advice in order to prevent violence from occurring in their families. In the Islamic faith, these leaders—also called *Imams*—are placed in each district and play the role of advising Muslim families that are confronted with conflicts before going to local leaders or courts.

- Parliamentary representative

The Parliament is a government institution charged with formulating laws. Among these laws, there are some which are related to family matters; therefore, the conflicts that arise from family wrangles can be solved using family law and penal law.

- MIGEPROF representative

The Ministry of Gender and Family Protection (MIGEPROF) is a government ministry which has the role and responsibility of promoting the family. In other words, the family promotion presupposes that families should be free of conflicts. On the other hand, the ministry has a mandate of formulating family policies.

- MINIJUST representative

The Ministry of Justice (MINIJUST) is a key and lead ministry in the justice sector whose role it is to ensure that the rule of law, human rights and justice for all prevail in the country. It is also charged with promoting support mechanisms to community programs to enhance education of the population about laws and human rights as well as promoting access to justice. On the other hand, in Rwanda some conflicts end up in violence which is sometimes resolved by other judicial systems such as *abunzi* local courts, the Police as well as local council and the legal magistrate courts.

- GMO representative

The mandate of the Gender Monitoring Office (GMO) includes: monitoring the fight against gender-based injustice and violence as well as submitting complaints of injustice and gender-based violence to the Judicial Police, the Prosecution department and the Judiciary; the institution also ensures that there is settlement of such disputes. Given that gender-based violence is a consequence of family conflicts, GMO deals with family conflicts on daily basis.

- Army representative

The army is a security organ which ensures that there is no violence in the country as well as in families on daily basis. On the other hand, this institution operates a gender desk office. The vision of this gender desk is to promote human security through fostering a society where military men and women share roles and responsibilities in achieving equality and respect. Furthermore, one of its activities is to train trainers on prevention of and response to gender-violence victims (GBV) in ensuring timely and appropriate response to GBV and offering legal, medical and psychosocial assistance to GBV victims.

- Police representative

Rwanda National Police is a security institution that is in charge of security of the people and their goods in the country. The department of criminal investigation (CID), among other things, is charged with investigating gender-based violence on daily basis and child protection as well as homicides and major crimes which sometimes occur in families

- Civil Society organizations

(Profemmes Twesehamwe, Rwamrec, Haguruka and ARCT Ruhuka)

The above civil societies are mandated to play a role in advocacy related to human rights initiatives as well as women's right. In this regard, some of them are involved in facilitating victims of family conflicts in judicial organs.

- The academia

(University of Rwanda, College of Education)

The academia, especially the College of Education (COE) was consulted because of its existing department of Gender Studies and its long time experience in studies related to conflicts raised by the concept of gender.

- The Media (Tele 10)

The media was invited to participate in this study because of their experience and involvement in several discussions about the topic on conflicts in families. Tele 10 was also invited especially owing to its active interest and involvement in television discussions held on weekly basis.

- Famille Esperance and Communauté de l'Emmanuel representative

The above two Catholic faith communities were also selected to participate in the study. They are a group of believers who organize sessions on family conflicts on monthly basis. The first was created by a Catholic religious who was teaching

engaged couples and prepared them for marriage. After some years, many of the couples she had prepared for marriage experienced a big percentage of divorce. In the spirit of initiating change, she changed her techniques of teaching and started to gather married couples in order to discuss family conflicts to avoid divorce.

1.1.7 Data collection and analysis

Data collection tools

Part of the data generated for this research relied on existing information collected by competent institutions and researchers. The research literature related to family protection and promotion, theory and practice, in Rwanda and elsewhere, captured our attention. After desk reviews, field research was organized to establish the root causes of intra-family conflicts. At this stage, consultations with various key informants such as focal points in various relevant institutions and other stakeholders were conducted.

Techniques of analysis

Given the exploratory aims of the present study, its analysis was based on the inductive and deductive models, which aim to give meaning to raw data and make sense of them (Blais and Martineau 2006, Merriam, 2002) The descriptive and inductive orientations of this analytical approach seek to construct meaning attached by individuals to phenomena.

1.1.8 Ethical Considerations

The search for knowledge in this study does not contradict ethical principles, including the obligation to avoid hurting or embarrassing respondents as well as respecting their privacy. The researchers deemed it imperative to raise the issue of ethical relevance of this study with reference to values and actions that were

undertaken. For instance, the researchers observed a set of measures that are in conformity with ethical standards during the whole process of the study. These included:

- Seeking and obtaining recommendation letters justifying the relevance of the study they were involved in; the letters introduced them to potential informants;
- Seeking and obtaining formal consent from each informant before interviewing them or engaging in discussions;
- Informing the respondents that they had a right to refuse to participate in the study;
- Guaranteeing confidentiality regarding any information given and promising them to use it exclusively for purposes of this study and not for anything else. Such measures were intended to solicit cooperation and to build trust between the researchers and information givers;
- Ensuring that anonymity was guaranteed.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the theoretical framework that informs and guides this study. The framework focuses notably on theories of conflict and theories on family conflict. The discussions depart from a conceptual clarification by different scholars on various theoretical underpinnings and perspectives regarding key terms such as family, conflict, and (intra) family conflict. It is through and/or on the basis of this conceptual stand that theories on (intra) family conflict—notably the nature, causes and effects as well as strategies for constructive resolution, management or transformation—are discussed.

2.2. Theories on conflict

There are as different definitions of conflict as there are different schools of thoughts about conflict. Although conflict has been studied extensively, there is a lack of consensus among scholars, which has given rise to differing definitions with combinations of conflict attributes. There exist three basic different schools of thought on the nature of conflicts—the *traditional*, *behavioral*, and *interactionist* approaches. The traditionalists believe that all conflicts are destructive/bad, and that consequently they (conflicts) should be eliminated. The behavioralists seek to rationalize the existence of conflict and perceive conflict as inevitable in organizations or relationships. Thus, behavioralists ‘accept’ it. The interactionists view conflict as absolutely necessary and consequently accept and encourage conflict.

The seemingly general view of conflict, which is indeed the stand of this study takes a behavioral approach and considers conflict as normal, part of life and inevitable in all human relations (Adams, 1965; Coser, 1956; Dahrendorf, 1959; Scanzoni, 1972; Simmel, 1955; Sprey, 1969). The point is that if conflict is suppressed, it can result in stagnation and failure to adapt to changed circumstances and/or erode the bond of group solidarity because of an accumulation of hostility. The study thus considers that conflict *per se* is neither bad nor good, neither wrong nor right; what makes it good or bad is how it is managed or transformed, either constructively or destructively. Therefore, as Galtung posits, when conflict fails to be managed positively, it can escalate and change into violent conflict (Galtung, 1967). Here, conflict is simply understood as a divergence of values or the pursuit of real or perceived incompatible goals. Conflict involves attitudes, behaviour and contradictions; “it is when contradictions are met with negative attitudes and behaviour that conflict is born” (Galtung, 2000:16). Conflict is “a process in which there are opposing interests between individuals or groups, the two sides recognize opposition, each side believes that the other will act to interfere with the interests and one or both sides take actions that produce such interference” (Baron and Byrne, 2004). In light of this definition, it is normal to disagree with each other from time to time. Such conflict is part of day-to-day life. However, once they are not resolved peacefully, conflicts can be stressful and damaging to relationships.

2.3. Theories on (intra) family conflict

In the existing literature, there is lack of a single comprehensive theory of family conflict. This study’s theorization of family conflict is thus often enriched by applying many aspects of general social or sociological theories of conflict to the analysis of intra-family conflict. The study distinguishes between destructive conflict and constructive conflict on intra-family relations. But let us first discuss briefly the concept of family towards the conceptual stand or scope of this study.

2.3.1. Defining the concept of family

Definitions on what a family is abound, but consensus does not. Although there are many references in law and public policy to the family, there is no clear legal definition of the term.

Viewed simply, the definitions can be categorized in two ways¹:

(1) Structural definitions that specify who is in the family and who is out of it according to certain characteristics of family members, and (2) functional definitions that specify the functions which family members ought to perform. The definition of a family in the structure-functional perspective emphasizes the family as a social institution that performs certain essential functions for society, which depend on the society and how it is organized. Likewise, family structure, or the form of the family, varies according to the society in which it is embedded. In preindustrial or traditional societies, the family structure was an extended one, involving whole kinship group (parents, children, grand-parents, and other relatives). In industrial or modern societies, the typical family structure is more often the nuclear family (husband, wife and children).

This study considers aspects of both the structural and functional perspectives of the family and understands a family as a social unit that includes a household and one or more people living in the same household who are related to the household by birth, marriage or adoption. It is a social unit where one or more children are being cared for and/or brought up. In this study, this definition is however restricted to the traditional “nuclear family” of parents and their children, and where the parents are presumed to be acting in the best interests of their children. The study does not thus focus on the extended-kind model of family made up of a community of parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives, which should be recognized as a primary family, even if the blood ties are not as strong as a nuclear family.

¹ Find the entire discussion at: https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/s_wifis01c02.pdf

2.3.2. Understanding (intra) family conflict(s)

The core aspect here is what is actually meant by ‘family conflict’, given that the prefix ‘intra’ simply refers to ‘*within*’ the family. Intra-family conflict refers to the conflict within the family. What is then meant by the term ‘family conflict’? Chafetz (1981:158) is one of the scholars who offers a relatively broad definition of family conflict by holding that family conflict is “any overt behavior, including verbal statements, by a person towards one or more family members which expresses a negative reaction to the distribution of any scarce and valued resources within the family is considered an instance of family conflict.” Although this definition seems to be very broad in as much as it encompasses a variety of behavioral manifestations of the phenomenon, it appears simultaneously quite narrow in focusing only on disagreements over distribution of scarce and valued resources, ignoring “conflicts” which arise from sadism, displaced aggression, and so on. This narrowing of the concept is necessary if theories of social conflict are to be examined as to their relevance to understanding the nature of family conflicts. Furthermore, such psychological variables are explicitly omitted from this analysis for reasons already stated.

Kramer holds that family conflict refers to interpersonal tension or struggle among two or more persons (within the family) whose opinions, values, needs or expectations are opposing or incompatible” (Kramer et al., 2006:794).

In general, the understanding of family conflict has both *psychological* and *behavioral* attributes and can be defined in both terms. One example of a psychologically-based definition of conflict is the perceived goal incompatibility (Fincham, Bradbury, & Grych, 1990).

In this definition, conflict is the perception by at least one person that another person is blocking the first person from achieving a personal, relational or instrumental goal. That is, to be interpersonal, conflict means that the other person

or persons in the relationship do not even have to be aware that the original person perceives an incompatibility of goals or goal blockage. In this definition, therefore, conflict is not necessarily expressed in terms of interpersonal behavior.

Scholars employing behavioral-oriented definitions include Cahn (1992), who identify three types of conflict as specific disagreements—problem-solving discussions, and unhappy/dissolving relationships, respectively. Donohue and Kolt (1992:4) defines conflict “as a situation in which interdependent people *express* (manifest or latent) differences in satisfying their individual needs and interests, and they experience interference from each other in accomplishing these goals” emphasis added). Lastly Straus (1990) stresses Conflict Tactics Scale measures in behavioral manifestations of conflict such as problem solving, yelling, and pushing. (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2005:161)

This study thus takes a look at the conflict dimension of intra-family relationships and distinguishes between destructive conflict and constructive conflict on intra-family relations. The point is that the reader should recognize that conflict within the family—whether marital, parent-child, or sibling-sibling—is a fact of family life that may have constructive as well as destructive effects on their relationships (Stewart, 2001:582). Therefore, (intra)family conflict itself is not problematic. Instead, the way this conflict is managed or transformed is what determines its either positive or negative outcomes. The above discussions already indicate the nature of family conflicts, which is well emphasized in the subsection below.

2.3.3 Nature of (intra) family conflict(s)

Family conflicts are as varied as the people involved in them. In a nuclear family, which is the stand of this study, conflict can arise between spouses (marital conflicts), between parents and children, or between siblings. For example, the turmoil can result from a workaholic husband whose wife feels lonely and resentful

towards him (and the job that takes him away from her), or children who are a source of continual family conflict and aggravation due to the parent's lack of consistent parental skills, or blended families in which an unaccepted step-parent or interfering in-laws are sources of family conflict. In other homes, couples and families are torn apart by verbal, emotional or physical abuse. Researchers of family violence have for long recognized violence between siblings as a common form of intra-family violence (Gelles & Straus, 1988). Sibling violence may include psychological/emotional acts (e.g., teasing, ridiculing, insulting, threatening, terrorizing), physical acts (e.g., slapping, hitting, biting, kicking, tickling, smothering, choking).

Therefore, (intra)family conflict refers to any conflict that occurs within a family between husband and wife, between parents and children, between siblings, or within extended families (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.). It comprises disagreements over distribution of scarce and valued resources; tension or struggle over opposed or incompatible opinions. In addition, family conflict has both psychological and behavioral attributes and may be either destructive or constructive depending on how it is managed or transformed.

The reminder of this study is that family conflict is restricted to the nuclear family instead of the extended family. In this regard, the cause(s) of the family conflict, as well as the duration, frequency and intensity of such conflict(s) also constitute its nature that informs and shapes the approaches for resolution, management and/or transformation in this regard.

2.3.4. Causes of family conflicts

The causes of (intra) family conflicts are multiple and related theories are provided. In this regard, conflict theory, deprivation theory and other sociological theories of conflict can serve as informative theories to family conflicts.

Psychological factors

These are factors that are inherent within the individual (husband, wife and child). This group of causes includes personality characteristics, such as aggressiveness, lack of self-control, low frustration tolerance and of course mental illness, such as paranoia (Strauss, 2005:471). In this regard, the *Micro-Theory of Conflict* posits that “The root causes of conflict lie in human nature and human behavior”. In explaining spousal conflict, the micro-theory of conflict may apply to explain interpersonal relationship between spouses. When, for example, spouses quarrel among one other, as a result, they develop incompatible behavior which emanates from socio-economic grounds. According to Lorenz, humans are by nature instinct aggressive. He argues that humans, like all other animals, are endowed with fixed patterns of behavior oriented towards self-preservation (Lorenz, 1996).

It is in this perspective that the *Frustration-Aggression Theory* becomes also relevant. This Theory states that an excessive level of frustration is accumulated when an organism’s pursuit of a goal is blocked. This explains that human beings, as goal-oriented organisms, naturally become aggravated when they are prevented from achieving what they desire. Indeed, a natural buildup of blocked energy which seeks to be released and aggressive action is directed to the source of frustration. An external stimulus induces frustration, which in turn precipitates aggression that triggers spousal conflict (Ronald, 1993).

In the context of intimate partner violence, a social problem may be frustrated at home. This level of frustration may further be exaggerated when basic needs are mixed. Failure to meet social requirements and lack of proper way to explain these frustrations to intimate partners may lead to conflict, especially if a situation is not available. Aggressive human behavior reflects survival enhancing instinct; this implies that once spouses come together, they carry with them some fixed patterns of behavior which may not be changed easily.

This would make it possible for a spouse to easily and quickly adjust to the demands of the other, thus resulting into conflicts. Some scholars, however, argue that aggression in humans is driven by external factors and by biological needs for survival rather than by mere inter-species aggression (Harcourt, 1991). This explains that spousal conflict originates or is influenced by external factors such as the working environment, social media and groupings, as indeed discussed in the next subsection.

Vangelisti (2004) also stresses that family conflict can be caused by lack of communication, understanding, and clarity of communication. This further explains that once a person is influenced by such external factors, they are then likely to be aggressive, and this may cause conflict at home.

Social and cultural context

Social learning theory suggests that continuous reciprocal interaction between the individual and the environment (i.e., children and parents, children and the media...) provides the basis by which the consequences of behavior are learned, and this, the behavior is performed (Bandura, 1972 in Witt, 1987:294). The *social context* includes the factors to be found in *the way the society is* organized. For example, whether families are organized as separate, “nuclear” households of couples living alone or children or an individual parent with children affects the rate of violence because such nuclear households lack the presence of other adults who can help adjudicate conflicts or intervene to prevent violence.

The environment and socialization is thus key here (social media, peer, etc.). In fact, one of the main assumptions on family violence is that violence behavior is a learned response (Gelles and Strauss, 1979).

Cultural factors are found within the rules of behavior characteristic of a society, which will therefore be called “*cultural factors*”. This includes such things as the idealization of masculine/feminine toughness and a widely shared (even though not widely recognized) rule that gives family members the right to hit other family members if there is a serious transgression and provided that no physical damage occurs. In relation to husbands and wives, this rule takes the form of an implicit clause in marriage that makes the marriage license a hitting license (Strauss, 2005:471).

It is worth noting that the psychological, social and cultural factors are interrelated and cannot be understood in isolation. As the narratives in this study indicate, the historical background of the Rwandan society and social gender norms influences some family conflicts to arise between spouses.

Distribution of scarce resources and power im/balance

Four theories constitute the leading framework that explains how management of resources and power dynamics in the family relate to the relationships of family members. These are: *relative deprivation theory*, *exchange theory*, *conflict theory* and *the feminist theory*. The *relative deprivation theory* portrays that some factors such as emotional deprivation, physical need deprivation such as housing; clothing, food, and gift could be the cause of conflict between spouses.

In the event that needs of a spouse are not adequately met, this can easily result into conflict. These needs may include sex, money, reward, gifts and religious issues. Lack of satisfaction of basic needs due to poverty, low income, associated with negative behavior and attitude of one of the spouses may create a big contradiction and lead to conflict (Runciman, 1996).

According to the *exchange theory*, the resources that individuals bring to a family affect formation, continuation, nature, and power dynamics of a family/relationship. The *conflict theory* stresses that social and economic relations are not equally beneficial to the parties; conflict and exploitation characterize relations of inequality. The *feminist theory* posits that gender is central to the analysis of the family; male dominance in the family is oppressive to women (Ryan McVay, undated, p.23)

There are two issues concerning the distribution of scarce and valued resources within the family, either one of which can give rise to conflict. On the one hand, there is the issue of who gets how much of the various resources. Anyone who feels deprived of their “fair share” may react with hostility towards others in the group, the result being conflict. The other issue concerns who determines who gets how much; this issue is known as “family power” in family literature. Members who perceive themselves as relatively powerless may react with hostility towards those perceived as having power.

As long as the powerless receive what, in their perception, is a “fair share” of the scarce and valued resources of the family, conflict is unlikely. Sooner or later, however, the powerless are likely to define the distribution of some scarce and valued resource as “unfair” and, under such circumstances, may blame the more powerful, namely those receiving a greater share, or both (if they are different people), with conflict as a likely result (Chafetz, 1981:160-161).

In terms of the family, it would appear that individuals who possess more power-related resources—physical power, financial resources, knowledge or expertise, and so on win more frequently in specific conflicts dealing with resource distribution. Thus, husbands win most of such conflicts with their wives (Bell et al., n.d.; Blood and Wolfe, 1960) and parents win most of such conflicts with their dependent children. It is likely too that older siblings win more frequently in resource distribution conflicts with younger siblings (Chafetz, 1981:169)

The exchange theory is useful in understanding this phenomenon and has been widely employed for this purpose (see Chafetz, 1980; Scanzoni, 1979; Gillespie, 1971). Simply stated, those with superior valued resources are able to grant or withhold them in return for compliance (Blau, 1964). “The greater the relative share of power resources possessed by a family member, the more likely that person is to win conflicts with other family members concerning the distribution of scarce and valued resources” (Chafetz, 1981:170). “The more the rules governing the distribution of scarce and valued resources regularly disadvantage the same family member(s) in their receipt of such resources, the more intense conflict is likely to become” (Chafetz, 1981:164).

Family economic problems

Family economic problems can both constitute cause and consequence of family conflicts. In contemporary societies, the family remains principally accountable for at least three important functions: (1) to raise children responsibly, (2) to provide family with economic support; that is, and (3) to give emotional security to the family. Research in this area clearly shows that within the perspective of family functioning, high levels of family conflict, stress resulting from the separation and/or resulting poverty can all negatively affect maternal mental health. Poor mental health affects the ability of parents, whether married, separated or divorced, to parent effectively, which in turn impacts on their children’s well-being.

For example, financial hardship and the stress that it induces can both contribute to family breakdown and is often a consequence of it. Financial hardship increases the likelihood of other variables associated with negative outcomes, such as poor housing, health problems, poor nutrition and fewer material resources for nurturing children (Ryan McVay, undated, p.2). Another example points to poverty. According to the resource-based theory of domestic violence, the more resources (social, personal and economic) a person can command, the more power he or she can potentially call on.

An individual who is rich in terms of such resources has less need to use force in an open manner. In contrast, a person with little education, low job prestige and income, or poor interpersonal skills may use violence to compensate for real or perceived lack of resources and to maintain dominance. More resources (social, personal and economic) a person can command, the more power he or she can potentially call on. The individual who is rich in terms of these resources has less need to use force in an open manner.

In contrast, a person with little education, low job prestige and income, or poor interpersonal skills may use violence to compensate for a real or perceived lack of resources and to maintain dominance (Doak, 2009). Studies on failed masculinity also suggest that when a man is unable to fulfil his traditional roles of family breadwinner in a dominant masculinity construction, he feels threatened and can use violence to attest his manhood (Cambell, 2013; Connell 2011;Porter, 2013). Gender humiliation thus becomes a key factor in prolonging family conflict and violent actions to reassert masculinity (Lambon, 2010).

2.3.5. Consequences of family conflicts

As social conflict suggests, the effects of conflict on families depend on how conflicts are expressed (Cummings and Cummings, 1988), with some forms having negative effects and others having benign, or even positive effects (Cummings and Davies 2002). Conflict can be considered harmful if the security of one or all conflicting parties (spouse/child) is threatened; from this perspective, multiple destructive behaviors have been identified, including physical and verbal aggression, withdrawal/avoidance, nonverbal and verbal anger, and the use of insults. Conversely, constructive conflict behaviors, which support or foster parties' sense of security, have also been described: calm discussion, support, (some forms of) humor, problem solving, and physical and verbal affection (Cummings and Schatz, 2012:17). This study focuses mostly on the negative effects of conflicts poorly managed.

Family disruption

Acrimonious family contexts, marked by high levels of parent–child or spousal conflicts can be both a cause and consequence of parental divorce (Schlomer et al., 2010:288). In parentally disrupted families, not only do we find a breakdown in communication and interaction between spouses, but also a number of processes operate to reduce the ability and/or willingness of parents to invest time, energy, and resources in their children. Divorce frequently results in greatly diminished contact between children and noncustodial parents (usually the fathers) (e.g., Fox & Kelly, 1995; Furstenberg, Nord, & Peterson, 1983).

At the same time, divorced custodial parents (usually mothers) as well as never-married mothers tend to provide lower quality parental investment compared with married parents (i.e., they spend less time with their children, provide less emotional support, have fewer rules, dispense harsher discipline, engage in less parental monitoring and supervision and have more conflict with their children (Schlomer et al., 2010:289).

Family Violence

Although family conflict does not necessarily lead to family violence, the two are clearly related in that family violence is usually preceded by non-violent family conflict. That is, in families that do experience violence, conflict is often a precursor to violence, and if the family were not to experience initial conflict, there would be no family violence. Much like war is a continuation of politics by different means, in these families physical violence is a continuation of interpersonal conflict by different means.

Family violence refers to the extent to which one or more parties involved in a conflict attempts to injure or harm the other party or parties in the conflict. This includes physical and structural violence. Not all family violence, however, is necessarily preceded by conflict. Some forms of violence, such as consistent

psychological, physical, or sexual abuse are a function of the predatory personality of a family member and/or the abusive nature of a family relationship and constitute more of a cause than a consequence of conflict. Because this form of violence is qualitatively different from violence that occurs in the context of family conflict, it is not developed further in the present discussion (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2005:175).

In fact, when we think of violence or abuse in the family, images of bleeding and broken children or husbands who beat up their wives for no particular reason are immediately brought to mind. Yet, this type of overt behavior is only part of the range of abusive behaviors that may occur in the family. Most of the time, violence never reaches public consciousness since it is “normal violence”—that is, it follows the implicit rules of a society’s culture (Gelles and Strauss, 1979 in Witt, 1987:294). Cultural norms, which define the family as a private grouping, tend to encourage family violence indirectly (Witt, 1987:294).

Different forms of violence in the family thus point to physical violence, psychological and emotional violence, as well as economic violence. Family violence researchers have long recognized emotional, physical, sexual, and economic abuse as distinct types that often co-occur in the lives of victims (Kagaba, 2015). Physical violence refers to any behaviour that involves the intentional use of force against the body of another person that risks physical injury, harm, and/or pain. Physical abuse includes pushing, hitting, slapping, choking, using an object to hit, twist a body part, burn, force the ingestion of an unwanted substance, and use of a weapon (Sylvester, 2013).

Emotional or psychological abuse is a behaviour that is intended to intimidate or humiliate someone. It may include threats of abandonment or abuse, confinement to the home, stalking, threats to take children to custody, destruction of objects, verbal aggression and constant degradation or humiliation as revealed by some of the respondents in this study.

Economic violence and/or deprivation occur when the abuser has complete control over the victim's money and other economic resources. Usually, this involves putting the victim on a strict "allowance" withholding money at will and forcing the victim to beg for money until the abuser releases it. It is common for the victim to receive less money as the acts of abuse continue. This also includes (but is not limited to) preventing the victim from finishing education or obtaining employment, or intentionally squandering or misusing communal resources.

Effects on children

Historically, children have been relegated to the role of a passive victim as opposed to the role of an active participant in, or even instigator of family conflict. Generally speaking, the extent to which families engage in conflict communication can be defined as destructive, hostile, or even violent; family conflict is associated with negative outcomes for children. In contrast, the extent to which families engage in constructive conflict that can be defined as rational and focused on problem solving. Family conflict is associated with positive outcomes for children in general, and for adolescents in particular. Pre-adolescent children are especially affected by family conflict, both positively and negatively.

Young children who are exposed to intense, destructive parental conflict experience fear, sadness, and anger (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985) and feel unsafe and are not secure in the home and outside the family (Gordis, Margolin, & John, 2001). In addition to negative psychological outcomes, children of families that frequently engage in destructive conflict also experience problems in their peer relationships. For example, Jenkins (2000) reported that intense parental conflict is associated with children's greater aggression and anger in relationships with teachers and peers. Noller (1995) reported a correlation between intense parental and sibling conflict.

The processes by which parental conflict causes negative outcomes for children are not exactly known. One possible explanation is that most of the psychological effects and some of the social effects stem from the fact that important security needs that children have in their relationships with their parents are unmet when parents engage in frequent conflicts. The negative psychological consequences that children exhibit are a result of these unmet needs.

The social effects, by contrast, are a result of poor parental modeling of communication skills that leads children to behave poorly in their relationships outside the family. In other words, children acquire poor conflict and other communication skills in their families and, as a consequence, have poorer relationships with others compared to children in families whose parents have effective conflict communication strategies (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2005:173).

The *Emotional Security Theory* (EST) serves as a framework for understanding family conflict implications for children and families and they also provide an overarching theoretical foundation from which to build prevention or intervention approaches. EST holds that the children's sense of protection, safety, and security about their parents' relationship and about the family as a whole are related to their well-being and adjustment over time. Negative family conflicts have the potential to undermine child and family well-being and adjustment. Higher rates of depression, anxiety, and alcohol-use are found among adults in relationships characterized by destructive conflict behaviors (Cummings and Davies 2002).

Each of these outcomes in turn, potentially compounds the effects of parental conflict for children and contributes to an increase in destructive inter-parental conflict behaviors (Cummings and Davies 2002; Whisman, 2001). For instance, homes characterized by inter-parental aggression are also strongly associated with child maltreatment (Hughes 1988). Parental drinking is linked with destructive marital conflict and entails negative implications for child and family functioning and adjustment (Cummings and Schatz, 2012:15).

The *Parent-Offspring Conflict Theory* (POCT) also offers an important framework for analyzing the causes of variation among parents. As Schlomer et al., (2010:288) stress, much research implicates the quality of parent–child relationships as an important determinant of an array of child and adolescent outcomes such as academic achievement, pregnancy risk, substance use, and various other indicators of child functioning. One well-replicated finding within this literature is that adolescents growing up in acrimonious family contexts, marked by high levels of parent–child conflict, have more behavioral adjustment problems (internalizing and externalizing), more difficulties at school, and generally feel more distressed than their peers from more harmonious families (Schlomer et al., 2010:288).

As a result of conflicts, many children experience a decline in economic and community resources following divorce in parentally disrupted families (Amato, 2000; McLanahan & Teitler, 1999). This may include economic hardship, movement into poorer neighborhoods, enrollment of children in inferior schools, decreases in the quality and availability of after-school programs and so forth.

The major avenue through which marital conflict negatively affects a child is the threat to the child’s sense of emotional security (Stewart, 2001:582). According to the emotional security theory, marital conflict impacts on children’s development by threatening their goal of felt security in the family (Cummings et al., 2006; Davies & Cummings, 1994 in in Kouros, Merrilees and Cummings, 2008:685).

For example, children may become emotionally distressed and they behaviorally regulate their exposure to marital conflict by hiding in their rooms. Alternatively, children may misbehave or react in an attempt to distract their parents or to stop conflict. In the short term, these responses may be effective in regulating the children’s exposure to conflict and allowing them to regain a sense of emotional security.

These responses, however, may develop into patterns of behavior that are maladaptive in other settings, such as at school or during peer play. Therefore, over time, regulatory responses motivated by emotional insecurity may contribute to the development of both internalizing and externalizing behavior problems among children (Kouros, Merrilees and Cummings, 2008:685). Cummings et al. (2006) found that marital discord, characterized by verbal aggression, overt hostile marital conflict, and negative perceptions of the quality of marital relationship was associated with greater child emotional insecurity in two independent samples of children.

For adolescents, greater emotional insecurity was related to concurrent levels of internalizing problems, and for young school-aged children emotional insecurity was related to both internalizing and externalizing problems one year later. Emotional security has been found to be a stronger mediator compared to other hypothesized mediators of the effect of marital conflict on children (e.g., spill-over of marital conflict to parent-child relationship, social learning theory; Davies, Harold, et al., 2002 in Kouros, Merrilees and Cummings, 2008:685).

Effects on spouses—Intimate partner violence

There is evidence that poorly managed (intra) family conflicts, in the example of inequalities in bargaining power, increase the risk of intimate partner violence in general and particularly against women. Intimate partners exhibit gender symmetry among women and men who are its victims. While such activists draw our attention to the often-ignored problem of men as victims of domestic violence, their efforts are also often motivated by the desire to undermine or dismantle those laudable initiatives to administer to women victims. In their view, compassion is a zero-sum game, and when we show any compassion for women who are victims of domestic violence special intimate partner, we may never address the male victims (Kimmel, 2001,2002).

The *patriarchal theory* tries to explain the causes of domestic violence (Intimate Partner Violence). It highlights that power and control are important factors in understanding intimate partner violence especially in a patriarchal society where the man is taken as the head of the house and makes all important decisions on behalf of the household; the woman, on the other hand, takes a subordinate role in the relationship/home. The man is all powerful in that he controls what the woman does, who she sees etc. resulting into her being isolated from her social network. This is socially accepted in a patriarchal society, justified by custom and tradition and condoned by law. For example, in Rwanda, under the customary tradition, women were disadvantaged in many areas of social-economic development.

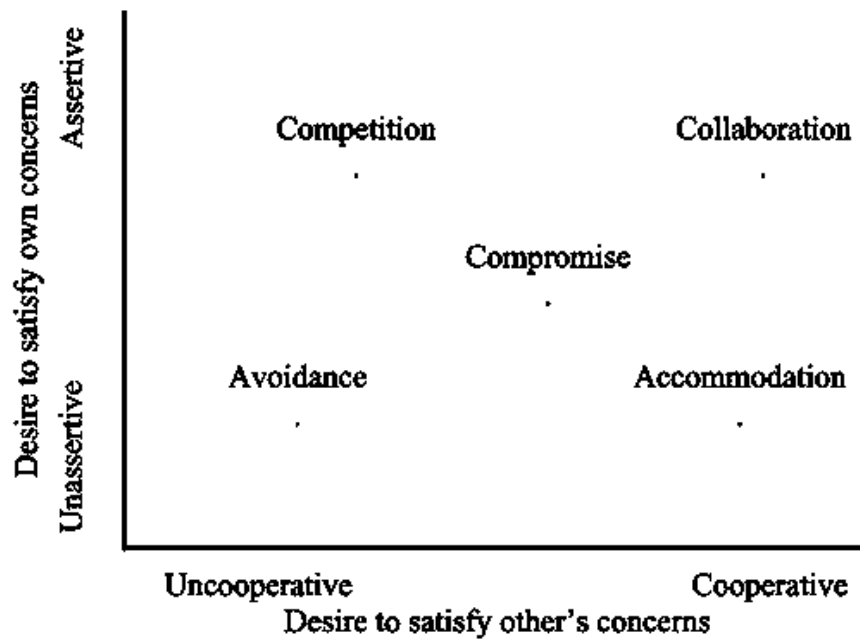
One of the most significant discriminations lay in the area of access to and control over land (RGMO, 2013: 10). Family relationships were gendered and constructed with men and women as dominant and subordinate respectively (RGMO, 2010: 4). These power imbalances meant that women were particularly vulnerable to several forms of violence (Winter and Leighton, 2001) especially in the restricted family private sphere (Uwineza and Pearson, 2009).

2.3.6. Approaches towards handling family conflicts

One major research stream in the organizational conflict literature is interpersonal conflict handling strategies and their impact on individuals and organizational outcomes. This approach is based on the rationale that while conflicts are inevitable, it is important to handle them properly.

Most researchers distinguish conflict management strategies with a two-dimensional model of behavior—comprising self and others—that produce five strategies (see figure below) as summarized by Sorenson, Morse and Savage (1999). Among these models, two models proposed by Kilmann and Thomas (1977) and Rahim (2002) seem to be the most widely used in organizational conflict literature.

The first identifies the dual dimensions of *assertiveness*, which refers to the individual's desire to satisfy his or her own concern. The second is *cooperation*, which refers to the individual's desire to satisfy another's need, as the basis for differing responses of either competition (high assertiveness and low cooperation), collaboration (high assertiveness and cooperation), compromise (moderate assertiveness and cooperation), accommodation (low assertiveness and high cooperation), or avoidance (low assertiveness and cooperation).



Source: Kenneth Thomas (1976).

The *competing* style of conflict handling is an aggressive and assertive one. This type of conflict style tends to occur without concern for others' opinions. The style has its place in certain situations where decisiveness is necessary notably when swift action needs to take place or when decisions receive an unpopular reception. Others may find the style off-putting, and when an individual uses this style too often, the result may be lack of cooperation or feedback from others. This usually happens when one party feels dominant over the other and wishes to monopolize control and out-compete the other. One party does not wish to pay any attention to the other and only defends his/her position.

This method uses force to dominate and suppress the other party. It entails egocentric and selfish interests where a win/lose situation is noticed.

The *avoiding* style tends to avoid conflicts altogether, as the name implies (avoid or postpone conflict by ignoring it, changing the subject). The style delays the conflict, and the party does not attempt to satisfy his own point of view or that of others. Those who use the avoiding style tend to leave situations and conflicts unresolved. Avoidance happens when a person shuns away responsibility.

He/she recognizes the problem, but does not make any effort to solve it. This attitude is always based on the understanding that conflict is always negative, thinking that trying to extricate from it may land a person into more trouble. It looks as if one has swept the problem under the carpet, postponing it due to fear.

With regard to the *accommodating* style, the party puts aside her own needs and concerns in favor of others. This style is beneficial in situations where it is important to develop good feelings among a group or when it is necessary to maintain peace.

Those who use the accommodating style do not resist change. This is about surrendering one's own needs and wishes to accommodate the other party. This simply means sacrifice and giving-in so that conflicting parties can remain in a harmonious relationship. Accommodation solves conflict through one side giving in to the other. Accommodation proves important when harmony needs to triumph in a given situation. Accommodation entails certain skills set, including obedience and selflessness.

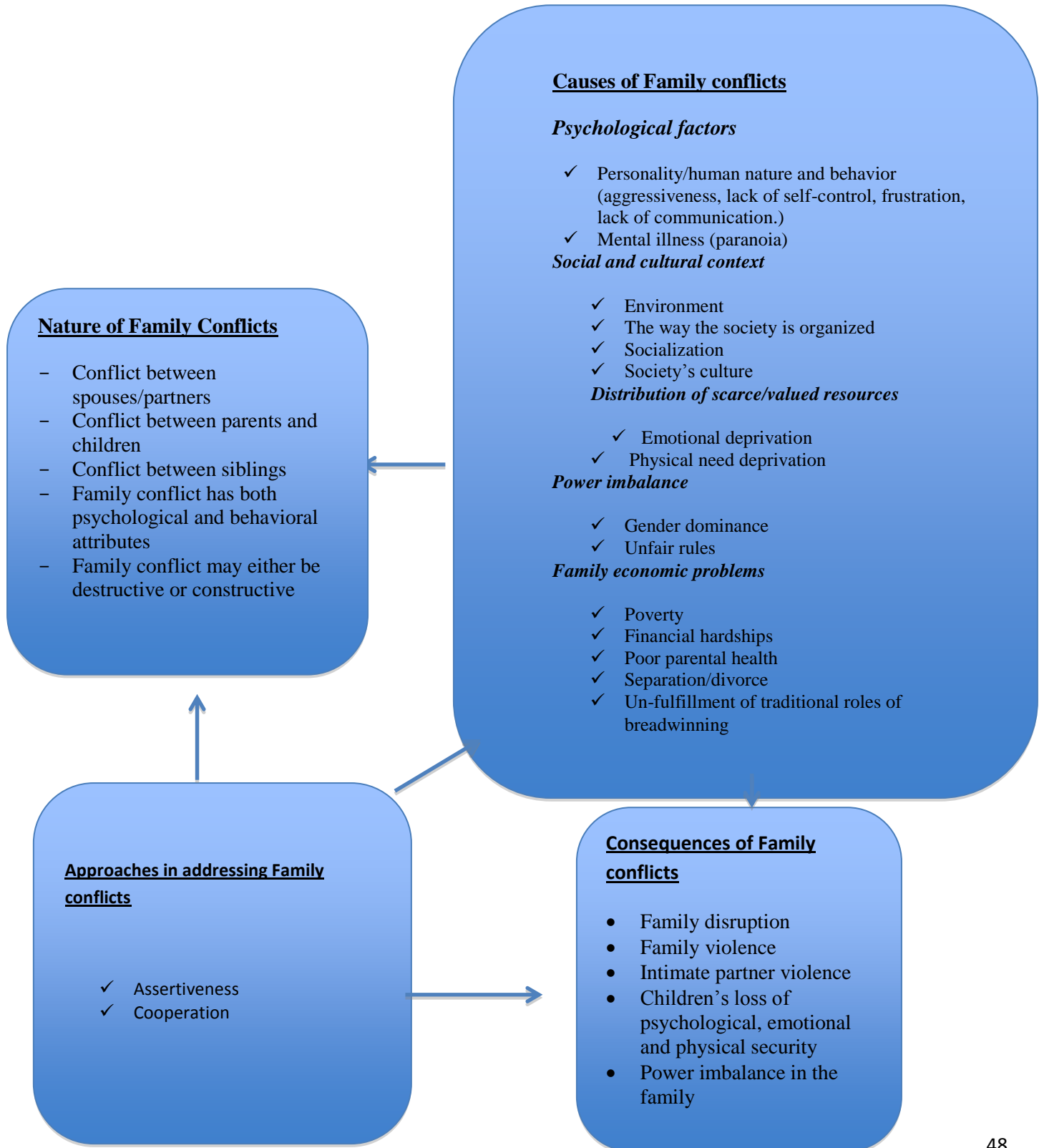
The *compromising* style aims to reach agreement and, most often, this means compromise. The style brings the problem into the open and often involves the presence of the third party. This kind of attitude requires that each party loses or gives up something if it is to gain anything.

It means mini-lose/mini-win situation of negotiation where each party accepts to lose something in order to gain something as well. This attitude happens when competing risks may damage relationships of conflicting parties or when both parties have the same or equal bargaining power and where no party is stronger to win the other. In other words, no party has the stamina to dominate or in any way suppress the other.

The *Collaboration* style addresses a conflict's source. The style handles problems through brainstorming solutions beneficial to everyone. Listening serves as an essential element for collaboration. Collaboration refers to working together to find a mutually beneficial solution. Collaboration as the only win-win solution to conflict can also be time-intensive and inappropriate when there is no adequate trust, respect or communication among participants for collaboration to occur. This method involves mutual discussion and dialogue in order to arrive at a final decision. This requires active listening and co-operation of the other party in the conflict in the quest for a solution. It also requires participation and mutual understanding of both parties. This style can be used when both parties are deeply convinced of their common needs or have relatively the same bargaining power.

The collaborating style functions with high assertiveness and high cooperation. In collaboration, the parties confront each other to reach a solution that fully satisfies the concern of either party. Confrontation provides the first step in seeking constructive resolutions. It involves sharing relevant facts and feelings, openly admitting differences, and clarifying issues at hand as well as the needs of the opposing parties and their current feelings. Therefore, there are many strategies used in conflict situations. In view of the above five styles, it is worth emphasizing that none of these is wrong to use, but there are right and wrong times to use each of them.

2.4. Analytical framework



This analytical framework draws on the previously discussed theories; it serves to discuss empirical findings regarding intra-family conflicts in Rwanda. Whether empirical facts agree or not with the suggested theories, and/or, whether new theoretical conclusions can be drawn from facts under study constitutes the core discussion of the usefulness of this framework.

2.5. Conclusion

Selected aspects of several social theories, especially theories of social conflict have been examined for propositions that may enhance our understanding of family/household conflicts. The theories discussed in this chapter overlap and are mutually reinforcing and complementing. Family conflict is an important aspect of family communication closely associated with relational satisfaction and the psychological well-being and social functioning of all family members, and in particular, that of children. Generally speaking, conflict behaviors associated with positive outcomes are those that are direct and cooperative and focus on problem solving, whereas indirect and competitive strategies associated with asserting power and authority are associated with negative outcomes.

The most negative outcomes, however, are associated with violent conflict behavior, regardless of whether violence is a result of the intensity of the conflict or whether it is deliberately used as a means of gaining compliance during the conflict, as in corporal punishment. Although the causal processes linking violence to negative outcomes are not fully understood, it seems that the best advice that can be given to families is to make any form of violence, including corporal punishment, unacceptable in family relationships. Given the potentially harmful effects of negative family relationships, it is important to understand the contexts and events within families that regulate parent–child conflict as this may have implications for designing interventions aimed at mitigating these effects.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings of the present study. It gives the details of narratives by the respondents who participated in the investigation on intra-household conflicts in the contemporary Rwandan society. The narratives generate three main themes that are useful in understanding and analyzing the causes of intra-household conflicts in Rwandan families, their consequences on people's lives as well as the strategies to be made by various stakeholders to reduce the said conflicts. An attempt is also made to make an analysis of how the respondents perceive these conflicts. The intra-household conflicts under study are categorized under three sub-headings: conflicts between couples, conflicts between parents and children and conflicts between siblings.

Conflicts between Couples

The narratives under this section underscore a number of issues that take place in Rwandan households: lack of communication, mistrust, jealousy, poverty, social media, social structures, polygamy and unequal power-relations between couples as well as misinterpretation gender laws. These issues resonate with what Vangelisti (2004) and Harcaurt (1991) highlight in various studies that family conflict can be caused by communication problems between couples, notably resulting from the use of social media and their working environment. Harcaurt further explains that spousal conflict originates or is influenced by external factors which prompt spouses to be aggressive, and this may cause conflict at home. In the following narratives, the participants under study reveal some of the causes of these conflicts among Rwandan spouses.

A participant in the dialogue forum reported that jealousy is one of the causes of household conflict. He reported the matter this way:

There is a man who was always jealous of his wife. The couple had a dispute about family planning as the husband wanted more children. The wife accepted but on condition that the husband refrained from being jealous. In the course of their argument, they fought and the wife fled to the neighbors. In revenge, the husband destroyed the neighbor's banana plantation. Local leaders forced the husband to compensate his neighbor's entire plantation [NGORORERO DISTRICT].

Another key informant aged 46 narrated her ordeal of how mistrust between couples can be a source of conflicts:

My husband was a soldier who was always absent at home due to the nature of his work. He once made me pregnant. When he returned, his child was born. One day he started a dispute with me. The cause of the dispute was that he suspected me of having an affair with other men during his absence. His complaint was that my child looked like his uncle who was living close to our home. Jealousy and mistrust was the root cause of several disputes that led to our separation [BUGESERA DISTRICT KEY INFORMANT].

A conflict between couples was voiced by another participant. It is caused by lack of commitment to spouse marital roles and responsibilities. Two similar cases on false promises were reported by different informants as follows:

A young man who was motorbike rider fell in love with a nurse aged 60. The nurse promised him a lot of things in his life dream. After some time, the nurse did not fulfill her promises and he decided to commit suicide by drowning in River Nyabarongo [RWAMAGANA DISTRICT FORUM].

There is a lady who promised his prospective husband to buy for him two sewing machines after wedding but she failed to bring the machines. Immediately conflict rose they started fighting, finally they ended up with divorce [MUHANGA DISTRICT FORUM].

The above set of narratives compares eloquently with a study conducted by GMO (2013) on causes of domestic violence in Rwanda. The study brings out similar causes of family conflicts such as deprivation of household resources, poor communication, unfaithfulness, polygamy, male attitudes of disrespect towards women and adultery. The GMO study reveals that these causes are common to both sexes. For example, in its study, female respondents identified adultery as a major cause of domestic violence at a rate of 97%. This was followed by male attitudes of disrespect towards women ranked at 96.9%. As for unfaithfulness and poor communication it was rated at 96.6% respectively.

According to another survey conducted by the National Public Prosecutor Agency (2011), it was found that conflicts exist related to ownership on household property, unfaithfulness, polygamy, lack of dialogue, excessive consumption of alcohol and poverty. The above findings are also confirmed by the Demographic and Health Survey (2015) which found that jealousy is and unfaithfulness among partners are major causes of household conflicts.

Another set of respondents highlighted some other causes leading to household tension, squabbles and quarrels. They specifically cited disappointment due to excessive expectations by spouses, lack of dialogue and negotiation between couples, lack of openness, rumors and gossip, nagging and lying among couples.

The participants voiced these concerns in the following ways:

There is a case of a lady who was the 10th child in her family; she had always watched his father beating her mother. From this experience, she decided never to get married because she thought that all men were like her father. When she was in secondary school, she got pregnant from her teacher and dropped out of school. Due to the advice she got from her peers who had had unwanted pregnancies, she changed her mind and accepted to be married. Previously, her hope was to get married to a born-again Christian husband who never drank alcohol. However, the husband she got did not meet any of her expectations; he used to beat her on top of being a drug addict who smoked “urumogi” (marijuana) and he, in turn, influenced her to smoke marijuana with him also [RULINDO’S DISTRICT FORUM].

Lack of communication was also mentioned by another respondent as a cause of conflicts between married partners. This was voiced by one participant as follows:

Many couples have a habit of not discussing their problem; sometimes, many problems are beyond the understanding of one partner. Instead of discussing such problems together, spouses keep quiet about the problem until it leads to separation [...] this sometimes leads to infidelity and other related consequences. We might also include in this category the refusal to negotiate a position: I find that conjugal conflicts often appear when none of the partners acknowledges responsibility that they are wrong. For example if one of the partners offends the other and refuses to admit it or apologize or if the other refuses to forgive him/her, it can be a cause of conflicts [MUHANGA DISTRICT FORUM].

In other testimonies, it was stated that, many couples tend to tell lies about their previous actions/relationships before getting married and this causes many household problems:

Sometimes it results from the fact that they don't tell each other the truth at the time of engagement lying about their economic status or their character, and when at last, it is discovered that the other lied to him/her ... it leads to conflict. For example if a partner had a child from a previous union and reveals it after the marriage, If one partner hides a child that he has delivered before marriage, then after having two children together the parent of the child who was born out of wedlock can bring the child to the real father, This increases the family expenditure in households for things like schools fees, food, and medical charges, etc. the other partner starts complaining [RUBAVU DISTRICT FORUM].

There is a lady who started a marriage process but declined to disclose to his husband that she had had a boyfriend previously. On their wedding day, her former boyfriend attended the ceremony and at the time of giving out gifts; the former boyfriend brought a gift package which contained different photos of their best moments with a note on which it was written; "I wish you a nice marriage but don't forget that the baby you carry in your womb will be a proof of our strong lovely memory". In the evening when they started opening gift packages, the newly married husband saw the photos of his wife with his former boyfriend and was astonished and a few minutes later he also read the chit with the above mentioned words. Afterwards, he decided to divorce her before they could even start their new life as a couple [RWAMAGANA SECTOR FORUM].

There are cases of ladies who, in the process of intending to get married, decide to run several prospective suitors while at the same time keeping such relationships under cover. This lack of openness and resolve can be a source of future household conflicts by intending couples as testified by this respondent:

There are girls who fall in love with several suitors a strategy of optimizing her chances of getting married by one of them in the future but in some cases the lady could still be studying at the university. Most of the intending suitors can impose conditions that their wedding can only take place after the end their studies and therefore the fiancé have to pay school fees for her beloved. There are situations where the lady can lie to more than three men and all of them pay fees for her studies and when she graduates, that no one is qualified to marry her [MUHANGA DISTRICT FORUM].

A participant supported the view that gossip and rumors can also lead to family conflicts:

I was a matron of a friend of mine who was about to wed; two weeks after marriage she told me that she cannot give birth because she doesn't have a uterus. I advised her to tell her husband but she said that if she disclosed it to him he will shoot her, he was a soldier. After a period of two to three years they went to a health clinic separately; but the lady knew she had a problem. Later I decided to disclose the secret to the husband and conflicts started immediately and they ended up divorcing [MUHANGA DISTRICT FORUM].

To sum up, the revelations from this set of narratives is that they do not involve outsiders and are therefore internal to the couples' households and could easily affect children in one way or another. They point to unfaithfulness and mistrust between couples in Rwanda as major factors that could lead to household instability.

These findings are corroborated by a research conducted by GMO (2013) on the root causes of family conflicts which found that lies, dishonesty and lack of openness in communication between couples are responsible for domestic violence in households.

Moreover, the respondents frequently voiced other causes like sexual dissatisfaction, extra-marital affairs, refusal to have sexual intercourse with partner, comparison of partners and adultery as major concerns that lead to household insecurity and mistrust between couples. This was voiced by several respondents in different ways:

Before getting married, many girls have ideal expectations about and perceptions towards sexual relations. But once they get married, they become disappointed because their expectations don't get fulfilled. Likewise, even husbands get disappointed. Thus, when a wife is not sexually satisfied by her husband, she becomes affected but doesn't talk about it. Likewise, the wife can be the cause of this problem. Then, they begin to resort to their friends for guidance and counseling, or both may contrarily keep quiet. Many wives can have sexual intercourse with several men if they don't get sexual satisfaction from their husbands [NGORORERO DISTRICT FORUM, NYANGE SECTOR].

There is one family in which the husband was Catholic and the wife Protestant; when the husband used to come back during the night after drinking a glass of beer, the wife would refuse to have sex with her and she used to spend a night in another room. If the husband proposed to have sex during the day, the wife never accepted saying that their children were watching them. Finally conflicts arose from this misunderstanding and they started fighting. The consequence was for the husband to go for extra-marital sex which depleted family resources.

There is also a problem of couples who do not satisfy each other in sexual intercourse, either the husband does not satisfy the wife or the wife does not satisfy the husband and this ends up in conflicts [HUYE DISTRICT FORUM].

A respondent associated the problem of adultery with having several boyfriends before marriage as a root cause of household conflicts:

I think concerning having had many boyfriends before marriage, leads to compare one partner with another,... it has become an epidemic, people no longer respect their values. ... For instance many spouses in their 30s, when they are still single, they tend to have many boyfriends or girlfriends before they choose their spouse. ... they don't care about how other people consider them[...].

According to one other respondent, adultery and extramarital sex, sometimes associated with night prayers, cause intra-family conflicts. The informant said:

Some men and women spend all day in prayers; they also pray overnight with the objective of receiving miracles from God. Some of these miracles include 'having sex with their neighbors' wives (bamwe berekwa abagore babandi). This is not written anywhere in the bible at all. This is the origin of destruction of Rwandan society and a bad example to our young generations [RUBAVU DISTRICT, BUSASAMANA SECTOR].

Another key informant reiterated the refusal to have sexual intercourse as a cause of conflict among couples. He narrated a story with a sad ending:

There is a story of a woman who had the habit of refusing to have sex with his husband especially when he was drunk. One day, the man went back home drunk and after taking supper, he demanded for sex. The wife refused and went to spend the night in another room with his two-year old son. The man knocked on the door of his wife who refused to open. Their house was constructed with sun dried bricks; the man tried to jump over the wall and pushed one brick that hit his son who immediately died on the spot [RULINDO DISTRICT FORUM].

There is a respondent who associated adultery with poverty, both of which destabilize Rwandan households. He had this to say:

Sometimes adultery is caused by poverty, for example when a husband gets a job in Kigali and her wife remains in the village alone without sufficient means of survival. This wife will commit adultery in order to earn a living or satisfy her needs and his husband will also go for extra marital sexual intercourses because of spending a longtime out of his home [DIALOGUE CLUB, RUBAVU, BUSASAMANA SECTOR]

A key informant narrated a story of a man aged 55 to highlight the relationship between adultery and family conflicts:

A man who was a school bursar in a secondary school used to have sex with an under-age student and made her pregnant. When he learnt that the girl was pregnant, he went to negotiate with the parents of the student and proposed a big sum of money to silence the parents. He decided to sell his house in Kigali. One day, he proposed her wife to go 'out' with him and he revealed to her what had happened and proposed that the solution was to sell the house. His spouse refused and incited children against his father. When the man was left with no option, he committed suicide by drinking rat poison. [NYAGATARE KEY INFORMANT].

The above set of narratives clearly shows that in Rwanda's contemporary household, communication, dialogue and negotiation are key factors for household stability. This is probably related to cultural norms whereby Rwandan women normally do not disclose their feelings or challenge their husbands as they depend on them to earn a living.

On the other hand, there were some respondents who emphasized unequal power-relations in household decision making processes, especially on household assets as a major source of domestic wrangles. They also emphasized that families with many children find it difficult to provide basic needs like education, health care and food. They voiced their concerns as follows:

There was a lady who was a teacher and she realized that time had come for her to get married. She then decided to take a bank loan of 1,500,000 Francs. She used her mother's plot as collateral. In that area there is a common word used to refer to girls and women who offer money to men in return for marriage commonly known as "kugura umugabo". The man who fell in love with that teacher took that money and he did not take her in marriage. After some time, she managed to 'buy' another man but on her wedding day her mother was not happy she was thinking about her plot which was at risk of being sold by the bank [MUHANGA DISTRICT FORUM].

In a discussion dialogue group, some respondents reported that large families and/or poverty are a source of interfamily conflicts because they contribute to impoverishing such families:

Having many children creates also conflicts. The same fact of having many children of which they are not able to educate and nourish incites the husband to go away elsewhere, they quarrel and do not have good relations [, NYAMATA SECTOR FORUM].

The first cause of conjugal conflicts today is related income and assets because young men know that couples are interested in money. When a young man/woman is poor, she can easily decide to marry someone with property even if there is no love between them. In most Civil marriages at sector level, couples sign to share assets after marriage [NYAMATA SECTOR].

As testified by some participants, it was reported that the desire to acquire property by prospective spouses was identified by several informants as a source of conflicts. This is also echoed by Runciman (1996) who stresses that emotional deprivation, physical need deprivation such as housing, clothing, food, and gifts could be a cause of conflicts between spouses. In the event that spousal needs are not adequately met, this can easily result into conflict.

The argument held by the above author is that inability to satisfy basic needs due to poverty, low income accruing from negative behavior and attitude adopted by one of the spouses may create a big contradiction and lead to conflict. For example Ryan McVay, (undated, p.2) explains that induced financial hardship and stress can both contribute to family breakdown and is often a consequence of it.

Financial hardship increases the likelihood of other variables associated with negative outcomes, such as poor housing, health problems, poor nutrition and fewer material resources for nurturing children. In this connection, two Rwandan participants in the study made the following explanation:

There are benefits expected from matrimonial regimes based on property. If one partner proposes to choose a matrimonial regime where there is no sharing of assets, any partners will consider their love to be incomplete. Many ladies leave their parents' homes without any property but sign for a matrimonial regime of sharing assets; they thus simply pretend to mix assets with their husbands so that in case of divorce they can take all the assets of the husband. This arrangement is accelerated by the Rwanda culture as well as religion which assume that once people are married it is for life [NYANGE SECTOR DIALOGUE CLUB].

The Intervention Dialogue Club invited one family in which there was a conflict. One of the spouses was member of the club (wife) and the other was not a member. The husband was suffering from diabetes and proposed to his wife to sell their land for treatment. After selling the land, the husband lied that he went to look for a job (gupagasa) and misused the money by drinking beer and spending it on other useless things. When the money was over, he came back to demand more money from his spouse who refused to sell another piece of land and conflict started. The wife came to inform the leaders of the club of dialogue about their conflict. These leaders invited the couple and advised them on how to manage their assets on mutual agreement [NYANGE SECTOR FORUM].

Another participant made some clarifications regarding the decision to make household purchases and how this fuels conflicts in families. She narrated:

When people harvest their coffee, the purpose of selling the coffee is to pay domestic expenses. However, the husband may sometimes sell a small quantity of coffee in order to buy beer. Therefore since the family does not budget for beer expenses, the husband may decide alone to sell coffee and have money and goes to drink. When the wife asks why the coffee has been sold without being consulted, conflicts start [HUYE DISTRICT, SIMBI SECTOR].

According to one key informant, assets have become a source of family conflicts and they tend to be valued more than even life, to the extent that some couples are now avoiding to contract legal marriages if the husband is poor and instead, they choose to co-exist illegally:

The discussion on the matrimonial regime before marriage is good but it should not be the focus of the family; the issue should be the common understanding between the future husband and wife. The marriage project should be based on the value of human beings. If there is no mutual understanding and collaboration, conflicts may arise and some spouses can kill each other due to the assets of the family. People should give value to the human being that they want live with, then after they can think about assets. Informal marriages are very dangerous for the wife and children born under such marriages because they are not protected by the law [RWAMREC].

The narratives above seem to indicate that there is lack of joint-decision making between couples. Some of the reasons given are unequal power-relations in favor of men as well as economic disparities regarding possession of assets. This could also relate to the fact that culturally, Rwandan men in their households consider themselves as arbiters on all important decisions, especially household assets (land).

This can also be explained by the patriarchy theory which states that in societies where power and control are important factors in understanding intimate partner violence, a man is taken as the head of the household, supposed to make all important decisions on behalf of the household while a woman, on the other hand, plays a subordinate role in this relationship/home (Strauss, 2005).

It was reported that some husbands in Rwandan urban areas abandon their families completely or, alternatively can decide to return to their homes very late at night as a result of their spouses refusing to perform their basic responsibilities in the household due to misinterpretation of the concept of gender equality. This conflict was echoed by one participant who said:

Due to misinterpretation of gender equity, some women misbehave and no longer perform their domestic responsibilities. For civil servants or couples who work in offices or do commercial business, they all leave home in the morning and return in the evening. When they are back, some women do not bother to check what is going on in the kitchen. They depend on house maids who do all the cooking; the wife simply supervises them and gives them orders. When the husband returns home, he usually finds her wife in the sitting room watching the TV. When he asks his wife about food, she expects the house maid to do all this and if she doesn't, she is automatically fired. This forces the husband to eat outside his home and develops a habit returning home late. Such a husband no longer asks for food to avoid conflicts with her wife [KARONGI DISTRICT DIALOGUE FORUM].

The narrative above also resonates with the feminist theory according to which gender is central to the analysis of family matters. In patriarchal societies, male dominance in the family is generally oppressive to women.

This leads members who perceive themselves as relatively powerless to react with hostility towards those perceived as having power. In such conflictual circumstances, equal balance of power relations between men and women can be achieved if the decision-making process involves negotiation and re-negotiation of gender relationships between husband and wife (Kabeer, 1997).

On a different note, the respondents also reported misinterpretation of gender equality and disrespect between couples as another source of conflict in households. This was also observed in different surveys in Rwanda. For example, the Rwanda Gender Monitoring Office study (GMO, 2013) found that in spite of all the efforts in gender mainstreaming practices, misinterpretation of the notion of gender has made it synonymous with exclusively women's businesses, and this has created silent resistance among a significant number of traditionalist men and women (see also National gender Policy, 2011:33). Other studies show that people on the ground have tended to misinterpret gender by developing conflicting and contradictory meanings of the notion of gender (GMO, 2013). A participant from Karongi Peace Dialogue explained this misinterpretation as follows:

Due to the misinterpretation of gender equity, some women misbehave and no longer perform their domestic responsibilities. For civil servants or couples who work in offices or practice commerce, they all leave home in the morning and return in the evening. When they are back, some women do not bother to check what is going on in the kitchen. They depend on house maids who do all the cooking; the wife simply supervises them and gives them orders. When the husband returns home, he usually finds her wife in the sitting room watching the TV. When he asks his wife about food, she expects the house maid to do all this and if she doesn't, she is automatically fired. This forces the husband to eat outside his home and develops a habit returning home late. Such a husband no longer asks for food to avoid conflicts with her wife [KARONGI DISTRICT DIALOGUE FORUM].

The above narratives were corroborated by a Pastor who explained that although men and women are equal before the law, this equality (gender equality) has been grossly misunderstood by many Rwandans. He said:

Equality does not disregard the fact that the husband is the head of household and the spouse is the heart of the household but nowadays people tend to misinterpret this. The wife as the heart of the household has her responsibilities that cannot be replaced by the head of household. Everyone should play his/her roles without overlapping his partner's roles[...] the way people preach does not contradict the law of equality because the bible says that men and women are equal before God. However, a family is an institution created by God who decided that husbands are heads of families. Leadership and implementation of decisions must be done by the husband [BUGESERA DISTRICT FORUM].

A group of experts confirmed the importance of observing and implementing gender roles and responsibilities in order to avoid conflicts:

In this modern era, wives have become a source of conflicts. We cannot go backwards or retrogress in terms of development, but even if a lady is a leader and holds a high position in society even as high as the Office of the President, it does not imply that she will no longer fulfill her roles as the heart of the family [PRO-FEMMES TWESE-HAMWE].

In short, the above narratives emphasize that the promotion of gender equality has created some new concerns to couples because it interferes with existing gender laws. On the other hand, some participants raised some concerns that gender equality is grossly misunderstood whereby married women consider gender equality laws as giving them more power than men. Apparently, these two conflicting interests create tension and wrangles in households. As for men, they see gender equality laws as undermining their traditional prerogatives.

A review of Rwanda's Civil Code No. 42/1988 of 27th October 1988 supports the view that unequal gender relations between men and women in Rwanda is still guarded and promoted by the law. Article 206 of this Organic Law, for instance, it states that "*Umugabo niwe mutware w'urugo rugizwe nawe n'umugore n'abanababo.*" (Translation: a man is the head of the household composed of the couple and their children). Regardless of gender laws aimed at promoting equal power relations, this legal provision seems to support the patriarchal nature of the Rwandan society and, specifically the unequal power relations between spouses.

The narratives also seem to support Rwanda's civil code where a key informant quoted the Book of Ephesians in the Bible 5:22–28 in which "wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, and he is the Savior of the body. Therefore just as the Church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything." Therefore, in Rwanda gender equality laws seem to be operating in a non-conducive environment where the mindset and attitudes of some couple are still guided by traditional gender practices.

For instance, a survey done across Rwanda on people's perceptions of gender and gender equality, 77% of the Rwandans who participated in the study reported to have heard about gender equality principles through meetings and mass media. However, in that study, only one person out of nine knew its content while the rest were reported to be attaching contradictory meanings to the concept of gender equality (GMO, 2013; GMO, 2013; RWAMRC, 2013, DHS, 2010; USAID, 2012). As a result, the narratives indicate that this misinterpretation of gender creates tension and instability in households

Additionally, in the following set of narratives, the respondents identified social media and social structure as two sources of household conflicts between Rwandan couples.

Some scholars, however, argue that aggression among humans is driven by external factors and by biological needs for survival rather than by mere inter-species aggression (Harcourt, 1991). This explains that spousal conflict can originate from or can be influenced by external factors such as the working environment, social media and groupings, as indeed discussed in the next subsection. In this connection, some respondents had this to say:

You can find a married employed woman, when she comes back home from work, instead of going to the kitchen to prepare the evening meal for the family or instead of making other arrangements of sorting out her husband's and children's garments for the following day, she simply opens her phone and starts searching on whatsapp or facebook. When the husband asks her to give him food, she tells him to ask house maids [NATIONAL GROUP MEETING].

Marriage today is based on contacts found on whatsapp or facebook or on school acquaintances and this does not work. Marriage is not based on solid traditional values of studying your future partner's character using old and mature relatives or friends as go-betweens [NATIONAL GROUP MEETING].

Some other respondents emphasized differences in social structure as a major cause of conflict in modern Rwandan families. They presented two opposed models of marriage in Rwanda, one espoused by the youth where, out of gender equality, wives think that all housework must be done by maids. On the other hand, the second model conceives marriage to be built on solid cultural norms and values:

The youth today base their marriage on sentiments. They don't consult old people before choosing their partners. They simply get married on the basis of the partner's wealth but not on someone's behavior and character. This always ends up with a wrong choice of spouse. Old people should talk about such problems to their children when they are still young [NATIONAL GROUP MEETING].

The respect which wives used to give to their husbands long ago is no longer found in modern homes because modern wives can satisfy their needs using their salaries. Long ago, wives depended on their husbands or parents for everything but now a woman can rent her own house and support herself with her job [NATIONAL GROUP MEETING].

This above set of narratives depicts a social marriage conflict between two generations, namely between the youth and traditionalists. Such marriages in Rwanda seem not to be long-lasting as they end up in divorce. It is also noticeable from the narratives that in modern Rwandan households, some wives who earn salary tend to regard themselves as independent and free; they belong to the generation of the youth who seem to disregard their family responsibilities which were traditionally cherished by society.

Instead, they wish that housemaids should do all their house work while they relax with social media. In this context, there is therefore need for family forums where the use of social media should be discussed. This also shows that gender equality seems to be grossly misunderstood by spouses who think that equal rights between men and women mean that couples can disregard all their family responsibilities and assign them to housemaids.

This has tended to create family conflicts because many Rwandan husbands interpret this as a sign of disrespect and insubordination by their wives. In addition, it seems that more explanations on the concept of gender equality should be made to couples so that it may not continue to be a source of friction.

Conflicts between parents and children

Regarding the causes of intra-family conflicts between parents and their children in Rwanda, several respondents reported interesting accounts on the issue. Their accounts revealed the existence of the practice of incest, inheritance-related conflicts, irresponsibility of parents, unwanted and premature pregnancies for girls.

In the narrative below, a head-teacher reported a case of incest where a parent sexually abused her daughters:

In Huye district, there is a case of a 43-year old man had conflicts with his wife and the latter decided to abandon his husband and fled to Bugesera. The man remained with her three daughters aged 14, 16 and 17. Later the man started to have sex with her daughters and these children became traumatized and could not cope with school. One day, a teacher who wanted to know the reason behind the trauma of his students asked one of them what had gone wrong. One of the students disclosed the sexual-abuse scandal committed by his father; thereafter the teacher went to report the case to the Police. The Police took the man to court and he was sentenced with life imprisonment with a fine of 400, 000 Francs [HUYE DISTRICT DIALOGUE FORUM].

There were other respondents who reported parent-children conflicts caused by unfair distribution of inherited property. The narratives reveal that children who are dissatisfied with their parents' inheritance arrangements can sometimes kill them:

You find that a parent can decide to give a big portion of land to one child may be because he's the one who always takes care of him or her very much. This creates a conflict among other children who don't accept the parent's decision. With little property and in the Rwandan context of land scarcity, children often struggle to inherit property before and/or after the death of the parent. When the parent dies, all the children want to inherit the parent's land and this creates a big conflict among the family [NYAMATA FORUM SECTOR].

Another respondent reported a more or less similar case:

There is an example of a boy who was in jail because of being involved in the genocide against the Tutsi; when he was released, he went to ask his parents for assets (land). The parents responded to him to be patient because they were still alive and that he would remain with all assets when they would die. The boy was not patient and he killed his parents. He was initiated in the genocide killing exercise when he was young and this habit of killing boomeranged against his parents. [NYAMATA FORUM SECTOR].

Another cause of conflict among children and parents includes unwanted, premature pregnancies, drunkenness and use of drugs as causes of family conflicts between children and their parents. The respondent herself was a victim of premature pregnancy in Primary six:

I was made pregnant when I was a student. Since I was under age, the father of my child had to serve a prison sentence. I went to prison authorities to beg them to pardon the man who had impregnated me because I was unable to take care of my son who was only 3 months old. This did not please my father. The prison authorities promised that he would be released in the next few days. When the man was released, my father immediately chased me out of his home. I went to live with this man in illegal marriage. After one year, we had two children. The man became a drunkard and started using drugs. After a year of cohabitation, he told me that all the two children did not belong to him. we now live in conflict fighting all the time [NYAGATARE DISTRICT KEY INFORMANT]

In another testimony, nagging and quarrelsome behavior of parents creates conflicts with their children. A respondent testified:

There is an example of a couple that used to fight often in the presence of their children; when the children grew up, they asked their parents if they also had parents somewhere they told them to go there since they were tired with their conflicts. They chased them from their home. After a long period outside their home, one of the parents accidentally met her spouse outside of their former home and apologized and asked for reconciliation. [BUGESERA DISTRICT].

In view of the above testimonies, it is apparent that parents who conflict with their daughters who happen to get pregnant do it for many reasons. Having a child during teenage years limits the girl's opportunities for better education, job, income and a better future. Pregnancy during teenage years can lead to greater health risks and/or complications for girls during delivery and can even lead to death. On the other hand, children born to very young mothers are at greater risk of contracting illnesses and probably dying.

The above findings are confirmed by a DHS report (2015), which reveals that the proportion of young girls aged between 15 and 19 who have already had one, or more children as well as those currently in their first pregnancy exist in Rwanda. On the other hand, daughters who get unwanted pregnancies always conflict with their parents. They become a liability to the family in so far as family income is channeled to treating and caring for the pregnant girl instead of taking care of other family responsibilities like paying school fees, food and health care for other children.

Conflicts between siblings

The third and last type of conflict identified in this study is the conflict between siblings. Siblings are defined as children within the same family. The disputes over inheritance, gifts (*umunani*), unequal distribution of inherited property and preference of some children by parents dominate in this category, especially upon death of parents.

A participant from the dialogue forum reported the following case of inheritance:

There was a rich man with 5 children who had 140 cows. He then took 120 cows and gave them to one of the five children as "umunani" and divided the remaining cows to the rest of his children. When the father died, all family members gathered in order to tell the one who had inherited 120 cows to share with his brothers. The later did not accept saying that he acquired those cows in a legitimate way. When his brothers realized that the courts of law could not help them to share equally that inheritance, they killed their brother at night (NYAGATARE DISTRICT FORUM)

Another participant highlighted a rare but possible scenario as shown below:

If one of the parents died and yet they have certain number of children, if the remaining parents want to have a second marriage, he or she will give birth to other children who do not share both parents. These kinds of children are most of time in conflicts [RUBAVU DISTRICT FORUM].

Another respondent voiced land disputes as another cause of conflicts between children from the same family:

Disputes over inheritance (izungura) and ascending partition, or gifts of land to children (umunani), disputes involving informal and polygamous unions and disputes over inheritance and gifts of land seem to be the most common quarrels between siblings upon the death of their parents. (RUBAVU DISTRICT FORUM)

In conclusion, therefore, in accordance with the above narratives, the most common cause of disputes between siblings identified is where parents give unequal proportions of inherited property [land and gifts (*umunani*)] to one child on the grounds that the latter took care of him/her a lot, especially in times of sickness. This scenario is reported to be a major source of conflict among children who do not accept that decision. For example in Rwanda where there are small land holdings and given the context of land scarcity, families often struggle over inheritance after the death of their parents as a means of earning a living and by extension, survival.

Consequences of intra-household conflicts

The narratives revealed some major consequences resulting from intra-household conflicts. These include physical and emotional, violence, silence, divorce, economic deprivation (poverty), murder and suicide. The data revealed that these consequences have an impact of compelling some children to the street. Alternatively, some children may develop strange and unusual behavior, perform poorly at school or even drop out.

A key informant showed how conflicts between couples can lead to physical and emotional violence:

A lady of 55 years was a victim of family conflicts and experienced physical violence during her period of marriage with her husband, 35 years. The last time she was beaten, his husband had rented his land and he did not give any amount of money to her. When she asked him to give her some money in order to purchase food, the husband started a dispute with her and ended up beating her. She did not go to any authority to report the husband because he always showed her a hummer that he would use it to kill her. My husband beats me almost 10 times per month [NYAGATARE DISTRICT KEY INFORMANT].

Another respondent from the same district shared her personal experience on the effects of physical violence:

My husband is a drunkard and travels to Uganda to drink alcohol and marijuana. When I was sleeping, he came back at night around 01h00 a.m. and poured water in the bed in which I was sleeping. Then he stood up started to beat me. During that fight, I hit him and he was injured [NYAGATARE KEY INFORMANT].

Overall, these testimonies above highlight how violence results from intra-household conflicts in Rwanda. They show that household conflicts do not only affect one spouse, they instead impact negatively on the entire household.

One respondent said that divorce leads to economic deprivation:

If father and mother are divorced, and one of them leaves the family, in such a case, the family will become a single-parent family. Therefore [...] divorce usually affects the economic situation in the family very much, because after the divorce only one parent earns money for the children, and the other parent only brings limited financial support. (NGORORERO DISTRICT FORUM)

Divorce is highlighted in the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS, 2015) as a critical issue whereby the percentage of divorce rated at 34.5 % for females and 32.9% for males. The same report indicates that about 842 women (6.2%) were divorced. On the other hand 79 males (1.4%) were divorced prior to the survey. The results show a big number of females in Rwanda are divorced compared to males. In backing up the DHS report survey, Kacyiru basic court statistics show that in 2015, 191 divorce cases were filed while in the first quarter of 2016, 69 divorces cases were reported. The court statistics further reveal that several cases of divorce are mainly caused by emotional and physical violence, adultery and barren wives.

Several other participants reported that family conflicts have a negative effect on children. While some can become street children, others can become sex workers, drug and alcohol addicts. One of them said:

Most street children say that when their parents are involved in conflicts, they fail to take care of them. They are likely to become robbers because of lack of occupation. [...] Girls who live on the street are also likely to be exposed to sexual violence and therefore when they grow up, they are likely to become sex workers (HUYE DISTRICT FORUM).

Apparently, from the above narratives, household conflicts seem to affect children in many aspects of their development. The latter may lose their chances of continuing with school programs, hence making the future uncertain.

As destitute, this impacts negatively on the security situation of their settings. Some scholar's also highlight that young children who are exposed to intense, destructive parental conflict experience fear, sadness, and anger (Cummings, Iannotti, & Zahn-Waxler, 1985) and feel unsafe and are not secure in the home and outside their family set-up (Gordis, Margolin, & John, 2001).

It was also reported by several participants that silence is an effect of household conflicts. It is also seen as a strategy of overcoming conflicts within homes. As an effect, it affects couples negatively because if one of the couples decides to keep quiet without communicating or discussing the problem with the partner, the conflict exacerbates and in most cases leads to murder and/or suicide. For example, the recent statistics from Rwanda National Police (RNP) indicate that in 2013, the number of females murdered by their husbands was 39.

As a strategy of overcoming conflict, silence is used as a bargaining chip by women in Rwandan traditional practices as elaborated by one of the participants:

In general, most women victims keep silent in order to safeguard family union [...] or to protect their children: “ingo niko zubakwa” (that’s how families are traditionally built). This is why many violence cases pass unreported. I think that leaders should use homegrown solutions to discuss our family problems to avoid gender conflicts (KARONGI DISTRICT FORUM).

The above narrative shows that Rwanda's cultural and traditional institutions should not be left out while dealing with family conflicts. The respondent gives an example of indigenous homegrown solutions which can be used to handle some of the current complex social problems in households. These include conflict resolutions forums where experienced married couples can meet to dialogue with young people to discuss various matters of varied social and common interest. Two examples of such forums in Rwanda are: 'parents' evening forums' (*umugoroba w'ababyeyi*) and 'family friends forums' (*inshuti z'umuryango*)

Solutions to promote socioeconomic cohesion within Rwandan households

This study identified several solutions that can help to promote socioeconomic cohesion in Rwandan families. These range from strengthening existing institutional mechanisms such as *abunzi* (local mediators) and *umugoroba w'ababyeyi* (parents evenings), introducing an education curriculum where sex, civic education as well as family matters are taught to children at an early age, sensitization of people on understanding gender equality and revising laws pertaining to marriage and divorce to reflect the realities on the ground.

On the point of gender equality, a Catholic Bishop in the expert survey had this to say:

Countries which are our models in development no longer consider families to be important. In developed countries, spouses have short term contract of marriages. When partners disagree on some issue, they divorce immediately. On the other hand, even lesbians and gays for them can form a family in those countries. Marriages in western countries no longer last because of misinterpreting gender equality principles. Rwandan society should be carefully with Western behavior which does not match with our culture [CIVIL SOCIETY REPRESENTATIVE, BUGESERA].

There was a respondent who used the Bible as a point of reference to promote gender equality practices:

There is a problem of misinterpretation of the bible, for example a pastor was preaching on how wives should submit to the husband and he said if a husband decides to move with the whole family from one district to another, the wife has to accept without discussion. This is a wrong because the husband has a right of discussing with her partner and to decide together before departure.(RWAMREC KEY INFORMANT)

Another participant was concerned with the educational curriculum as a key to solving family-related problems. He stressed:

There is need for [...] initiating a curriculum on family conflicts and related standard norms of living for married couples. Students in S5 and S6 who are about to join university or in active service but mature enough to get married should be trained about this topic.[RULINDO DISTRICT FORUM]

Other participants were of the view that the existing law on marriage and divorce should be revised:

The law on divorce should be revised because there is a time some people want to divorce due to misunderstanding but they find barriers from the law. For example if one of them is not able to give birth, the law is silent on this issue regarding divorce [RWAMAGANA DISTRICT FORUM].

The above suggestion on divorce was confirmed by another respondent:

There are some clauses that are not stipulated in the law which should be taken into consideration in order to allow separation of couples that live in conflicts in order to reduce homicide that occurs among married couples. There are causes that were not taken into consideration identified by the time of enacting the law on divorce [MUHANGA DISTRICT FORUM].

As for another respondent, he outlined special cases where divorce process should be accelerated:

There is a case of a man who promised his wife to celebrate religious marriage within one month. The wife waited for six months until she got disappointed. By that time, she fell in love with another boy but could not have her marriage legalized before divorcing with the previous husband. In such a case, the law should make a provision on speeding up this kind of divorce [RUBAVU DISTRICT FORUM....].

The government was called upon by one respondent to upgrade and legalize *de facto* marriages of a lengthy duration. He had this to say:

*The government should revise the law of legal marriage by saying that if a husband has been with a wife for a period of one year and above such *de facto* marriage should be automatically upgraded to a legal marriage. There are a lot of consequences for children that are not stable in such illegal families; if such a family is destroyed, the country will be also destroyed. There was one civil registration officer who was illegally married with seven children. This civil servant was saying that he cannot organize a legal marriage with her wife because he doesn't want her to have right to the family assets. On the other hand religious marriage and customary marriage should be also legally recognized [RWAMREC KEY INFORMANT...].*

The other respondent was concerned with protecting the rights of children born outside legal marriages since these are also *bona fide* citizens of their country:

There is an example of a partner in a legal marriage (husband) who gave birth to a child with another person. The husband was recognizing that child was his own but living outside his home. When this man died, the child tried to claim for property from her step mother who categorically refused. Here, the law is inadequate for children in such situations. The law should support their rights. (HAGURUKA KEY INFORMANT).

Lastly, one respondent advocated for strengthening guidance and counseling of children by their parents on matters of reproductive health. He said:

Parents should spend some time with their children especially the youth and counsel them. We should allocate time to teach the children about cultural values, reproductive health and how they can prepare themselves when they are ready to start their own families. The Umugoroba w'ababyeyi faces a challenge of being attended by mainly women and with few men. It is recommended to head of village to strengthen the policy by inviting all citizens once in a month to discuss family-related matters in order to reduce the magnitude of conflicts that is devastating Rwandan community [RUBAVU DISTRICT DISCUSSION FORUM].

The above participants' narratives focus on the strategies to promote socioeconomic cohesion in Rwanda's households. They identify some conflicting and/or inflexible legal provisions on gender laws which may lead to some confusion in interpreting and implementing gender-related laws. The narratives suggest that an attempt should be made to revisit some of the provisions of gender-related laws and those that recognize the rights of all children, regardless of the marital status of their parents. As a result, the narratives suggest that these strategies can go a long way in stabilizing Rwandan households. Other participants suggested that some aspects of gender related matters like reproductive health, sexual education should be integrated in the curriculum. –

Conclusion

This study aimed at identifying the nature, causes and impact of household conflicts in Rwanda and suggesting some practical strategies to promote peaceful co-existence in the country. In achieving the above objectives, the study used a qualitative method which resorted to group discussion and individual interviews. The study was conducted in 2016 in 10 districts. The participants were selected from civil servants, government institutions, and religious institutions as well as ordinary people.

The findings of the study revealed that, in the Rwandan family set-up, there are three types of household conflicts, namely conflicts between couples, conflicts between parents and children and conflicts between children.

The narratives from the participants revealed that, among the causes for conflicts between couples, the dominant concerns were lack of communication which leads to poor interaction between wife and husband. As a consequence, this leads to jealousy, mistrust and suspicion.

On the other hand, the narratives showed that poverty is another important factor that creates tension, friction, quarrels and eventually fights between couples. At the same time, the findings revealed that poverty is a key factor that leads couples to indulge in adulterous practices. Besides, the findings revealed that misinterpretation and understanding of gender-related laws by couples creates a sense of disrespect whereby husbands feel undermined by their wives and others feel that their masculinity is at stake. The narratives further indicate that the preceding scenario leads to poor collaborative mechanisms between couples in making joint decisions and managing household assets.

As for the conflicts between parents and children, the narratives revealed the existence of unequal distribution of inheritance property and gifts (*umunani*) between children as a major cause of tension between the two parties.

Lastly, the narratives also established that conflicts between children were mainly caused by parental preferential treatment towards some children at the expense of others. The study showed that this behavior creates hatred between siblings. Additionally, it was found that in polygamous families, children born of different fathers are generally not considered to inherit property as it is done for children from a legal marriage.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were formulated and proposed:

1. Rwanda's indigenous institutions such as 'Parents' evening meetings' (*umugoroba w'ababyeyi*) and 'family friends forums' (*inshuti z'umuryango*) should be strengthened and empowered to mitigate and/or prevent household conflicts.
2. Local leaders, IRDP dialogue clubs, NWCs, religious leaders and local mediators should mobilize couples to attend 'parents' meetings' in order to discuss gender matters, cultural values and other related family problems.
3. MIGEPROF should empower the above forums to operate at community level across the country in order to:
 - (a) Strengthen and promote synergy between MIGEPROF and family-related institutions such as:
 - i. parents' evening forums
 - ii. family friends' forums
 - iii. IRDP dialogue club
 - iv. National Women Council
 - v. National Youth Council
 - vi. National institutions of civic education
 - vii. Faith-based organizations
 - (b) Strengthen institutions that collaborate with MIGEPROF by:
 - (i) promoting awareness on household conflicts in urban and rural areas
 - (ii) equipping them with tools and facilities to enhance their modalities of work
 - (iv) establishing clear instructions that can be updated any time.

(iv) proposing special recommendations to faith-based organizations for their contribution in counseling.

(c) MINEDUC should train and sensitize people on peace education in schools.

4. MINALOC should set household conflict mitigation as one of the targets of performance contracts (*imihigo*) at local level. This would help to:
 - (i) harmonize action plans between partners
 - (ii) design an action plans based on research of conflicts, assessment of problems, evaluation of action plans before taking other orientations.
 - (iii) harmonize performance contracts between partners that are involved in conflicts resolutions.
5. A special unit at Sector level across the country should be set up to sensitize intending brides and bridegrooms to become responsible parents and to empower them with conflict management skills, especially how to use and cope with the current social media (whatsapp, facebook).
6. In collaboration with related government institutions, MINEDUC should develop a curriculum on peace education. This curriculum should aim at sensitizing citizens on promoting peace and preventing or mitigating conflict. The curriculum should propose a methodology of implementing this goal by local leaders, community mediators, FBO, NWC and CSO.
7. MIGEPROF and MINIJUST should revisit some legal provisions pertaining to gender equality in order to avoid contradictions between Rwandan traditional gender practices and the new legislation promoting gender equality.
8. The Ministry of Local Governance in collaboration with MIGEPROF should ensure that children born out of wedlock, children in illegal marriages as well as adopted children should be officially registered and given equal rights like those born in legal marriages, especially on property inheritance.

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