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**EFFECTIVENESS OF MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION
MECHANISM IN FOSTERING MARRIAGE STABILITY AMONG
COUPLES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study investigated the efficacy of marital conflict resolution mechanisms in promoting marriage stability among couples in Lagos State, Nigeria. With the rising rates of marital discord globally and the unique socio-cultural context of Lagos State, understanding the effectiveness of conflict resolution strategies becomes crucial for enhancing the longevity of marital unions. The population of the study comprised all couples in Lagos state Nigeria, while the sample consisted of couples in Oriade Development Area of Lagos state. A descriptive research design was used and stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting population sample. Self-Constructed questionnaire was used as instrument to collect information from the participants. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics which include computation of the mean, standard deviation and percentage frequencies of the data set. Chi-square test was used to determine whether marital stability varied by level of education and type of marriage. The result of findings was that marital conflicts experienced by married individuals were solvable by application of conflict resolution mechanisms. The study recommended the establishment of marital conflicts resolution centres in all Local Government area in the state.

Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Marriage and Marital stability

Introduction

Marriage, as a fundamental social institution, plays a pivotal role in shaping the fabric of societies globally. The stability of marriages is crucial not only for the well-being of individual couples but also for the broader social and economic landscape. Nigeria, with its diverse cultural landscape, faces unique challenges in maintaining marital stability, and Lagos State stands as a microcosm of this complexity. Marital conflicts are an inevitable aspect of any relationship, yet the manner in which couples navigate and resolve these conflicts significantly influences the overall stability of the marriage. Marital conflicts in Nigeria are often influenced by a combination of cultural, religious, and socio-economic factors. Nigeria has experienced significant social transformations, impacting traditional family structures and dynamics (Oyewole, 2021). Lagos State, being a melting pot of cultures and traditions, presents a unique context where couples navigate these changes while seeking stability in their marriages.

Marriage stability is not only a personal triumph for individual couples but also contributes to broader societal cohesion and development. Numerous studies emphasize the positive effects of stable marriages on mental health, child development, and economic well-being (Huntington, Stanley, Doss, & Rhoades, 2022). It is imperative to understanding the factors that contribute to marital stability is, therefore, essential for promoting individual and societal welfare.

Marriage, as a social institution, is a complex and dynamic entity influenced by various factors, including cultural, social, economic, and individual dynamics. In the context of Lagos State, Nigeria, understanding the effectiveness of marital conflict resolution mechanisms is essential to address the unique challenges that couples face within this diverse and rapidly evolving society. Lagos State, as the economic and cultural hub of Nigeria, is characterized by a rich tapestry of traditions and values. Cultural factors, including extended family networks, religious beliefs, and societal expectations, play a significant role in shaping marital relationships (Bau, & Fernández, 2023). These cultural dynamics can both facilitate and hinder effective conflict resolution within marriages.

Nigeria, undergoing rapid urbanization and economic changes, experiences shifts in traditional family structures and roles. Economic stressors, unemployment, and financial instability can contribute to marital conflicts (Lee, Yoo, Son, Sung, & Chang, 2023). Exploring the interplay between socio-economic factors and conflict resolution mechanisms is crucial for understanding marital stability. It was indicated that couples employ various conflict resolution strategies, ranging from communication skills to seeking external support. The prevalence and effectiveness of these mechanisms is vital for tailoring interventions that align with the needs of couples in Lagos State (Donohue, 2023).

Low, Overall, Cross, & Henderson, (2019) explained marital conflict resolution mechanism as the different ways in which spouses can resolve their conflicts. These mechanisms are avoidant, validating, and volatile. The three identified mechanism regulate and help couples maintain a more stable and

satisfying relationship. Gottman&Gottman (2015) distinguished the three regulated mechanism by the degree to which partners attempt to influence each other through persuasion and dialogue and the timing of the influence attempts. Avoidant couples prefer to minimize conflict as much as possible by agreeing to disagree. Validating couples address conflict by emphasizing the importance of making sure each person is understood and their views are appreciated, or validated. Volatile couples are more passionate and energetic and are not afraid of lively debates and disagreements.

Avoidant Conflict Resolution Mechanism: The avoidant conflict resolution mechanism involves a tendency to withdraw from conflicts or avoid addressing issues directly. Individuals using this mechanism may minimize the importance of disagreements, refrain from expressing their feelings openly, or create emotional distance during conflicts to maintain a semblance of peace (Paquette, Rapaport, St-Louis, & Vallerand, 2020).

Validating Conflict Resolution Mechanism:Validating conflict resolution emphasizes open communication, active listening, and acknowledging the feelings and perspectives of both partners. Couples employing this mechanism seek to understand each other's viewpoints, validate emotions, and find common ground. This approach fosters mutual respect and a collaborative problem-solving mindset (Khalifian, Murphy, Barry, & Herman, 2019).

Volatile Conflict Resolution Mechanism: Volatile conflict resolution is characterized by intense and expressive exchanges during disagreements. Couples employing this mechanism may engage in passionate arguments, express emotions openly, and experience heightened energy during conflicts. While volatile conflict resolution can be intense, it is not necessarily detrimental if managed constructively (Li, Cao, Lan, Ju, Zheng, Chen, & Fang, 2019). These conflict resolution mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, and couples may exhibit a combination of these styles depending on the situation and individual preferences. Understanding these mechanisms helps the counsellors and therapists tailor interventions to specific couples' needs, fostering healthier conflict resolution and promoting marital stability.

Marital conflict resolution mechanisms encompass various strategies and approaches that couples employ to address and resolve conflicts within their relationships. These mechanisms are interconnected, and couples may use a combination of them based on the specific context of their conflicts. It is important to note that the effectiveness of these strategies and approaches can vary depending on cultural, individual, and situational factors:

Communication Skills: Effective communication involves active listening, expressing thoughts clearly, and fostering open dialogue. Couples who communicate openly often experience higher marital satisfaction (Johnson & Greenberg, 2013;

Low, Overall, Cross, & Henderson, 2019)

Negotiation and Compromise: Couples engage in negotiation and compromise to find middle ground and meet each other's needs. This collaborative approach is linked to increased relationship satisfaction (Paquette, Rapaport, St-Louis, & Vallerand, 2020).

Problem-Solving Skills: Developing problem-solving skills allows couples to work together to find solutions to issues. Effective problem-solving is associated with marital stability and satisfaction (Markman, Stanley, & Blumberg, 2010; Mirzanezhad, 2020).

Emotional Regulation: Managing emotions during conflicts is crucial. Emotional regulation involves staying calm, avoiding escalation, and addressing issues constructively, contributing to marital stability (Deylami, Hassan, Alareqe, & Zainudin, 2021).

Seeking Professional Help: In some cases, couples may opt for counselling or therapy to address deep-seated issues. Seeking professional help has been shown to improve communication and overall marital satisfaction (Karney, & Bradbury, 2020).

Apology and Forgiveness: Apologizing and forgiving are crucial components of conflict resolution. Couples who master these skills often experience lower levels of resentment and higher relationship satisfaction (Borinca, Falomir-Pichastor, Andrighetto, & Halabi, 2021).

Cultural nuances in conflict resolution cannot be overlooked. Marital interventions need to be culturally sensitive to resonate with the diverse population of Lagos State. Emphasizing communication patterns, respect for elders, and communal decision-making may be essential components of effective conflict resolution within the cultural context (Eko, & Putranto, 2021).

Education and counselling services have been recognized as valuable tools in enhancing marital stability, the impact of such services on conflict resolution and overall marital satisfaction is crucial for designing targeted interventions (Karney, & Bradbury, 2020). Religion holds significant importance in the lives of many Nigerians and can influence marital values and conflict resolution approaches. Exploring the role of religious beliefs and practices in shaping marital stability can provide valuable insights for interventions in Lagos State (Lakatos, & Martos, 2019). Support systems, including family and social networks, can influence how couples approach and resolve conflicts, the dynamics of external support and its impact on marital stability is pertinent in the Lagos State context (Umberson, & Montez, 2010). Prior research on marital conflict resolution has offered valuable insights into diverse strategies employed by couples globally (Johnson & Greenberg, 2013).

However, there is a scarcity of studies specifically focusing on the Nigerian context, particularly within the dynamic environment of Lagos State.

Statement of the Problem

Marital stability is a vital component of societal well-being, and effective conflict resolution mechanisms play a crucial role in maintaining the longevity of marital unions. In the diverse and dynamic context of Lagos State, Nigeria, where cultural, economic, and social factors intersect, there exists a pressing need to comprehend the specific challenges faced by couples in resolving conflicts within their marriages. Despite the recognition of the importance of conflict resolution, there remains a gap in understanding which mechanisms are most effective in fostering marriage stability in this distinct socio-cultural environment.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the prevalent marital conflicts experienced by couples in Lagos State and examining the approaches currently employed for conflict resolution. The overarching goal is to delineate the effectiveness of various conflict resolution mechanisms and identify any cultural or contextual nuances influencing their impact on marital stability. By delving into these aspects, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can inform targeted interventions and support systems tailored to the unique dynamics of marriages in Lagos State, ultimately contributing to the enhancement of marital stability in the metropolis.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study was to establish the relationship between marital conflict resolution styles as a mechanism and marital stability in Lagos State Nigeria:

1. To investigate the marital conflict resolution mechanisms employed by married couples in Lagos State
2. To explore the differences between the level of education and type of marriage in relation to marital stability

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the marital conflict resolution mechanisms used by the married couples in Lagos state Nigeria?
2. What are the difference between level of education and type of marriage in marital stability?

Methodology

A descriptive research survey was used. The population of the study comprised all couples in Lagos state Nigeria, while the target population consisted of couples in Oriade Local Government Area of Lagos state. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting population sample of 96 married couples.

A self-constructed questionnaire named marital conflict resolution mechanisms questionnaire (MCRMQ) was used as instrument to collect information from the participants. The MCRMQ had a four-point response scale of strongly agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and strongly disagreed (DS). The instrument was validated by experts in Test and Measurement. The validity was at 0.05 significant level. Data was collected from respondents through face-to-face approach.

The data was analysed using descriptive statistics which include computation of the mean, standard deviation and percentage frequencies of the data set. Chi-square test was run to determine whether marital stability varied by respondents' demographics such level of education and type of marriage.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the marital conflict resolution mechanisms used by the married couples in Lagos state Nigeria?

Table 1: The use of validating conflict resolution mechanism

SN	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I feel heard and understood by my partner when we discuss conflicts	3.13	0.550
2	My partner acknowledges and validates my feelings during disagreements	2.99	0.663
3	We actively try to see each other's perspective during conflicts	2.93	0.822
4	We use positive language and affirmations when discussing sensitive issues	2.76	0.789
5	Our conflicts often end with both of us feeling validated and understood.	2.53	0.901
	Total mean score	2.87	0.745

In Table 1, the total mean score on the use of validating conflict resolution mechanism was mean is 2.87, standard deviation is 0.745 on a 4-point scale, which suggests that validating conflict resolution mechanism was applied by respondents to resolve their marital conflicts.

Table 2: The Use of Avoidant Conflict Resolution mechanism

SN	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	I tend to withdraw or avoid discussions when conflicts arise in our relationship	3.09	0.593
2	During disagreements, I prefer to keep my thoughts and feelings to myself rather than expressing them openly	3.04	0.756
3	I find it challenging to confront or address issues directly with my partner	2.89	0.723

SN	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	I often postpone or delay discussions about conflicts to avoid tension.	2.75	0.695
5	I believe that avoiding conflicts is a way to maintain peace and stability in our relationship	2.57	0.854
6	I tend to distance myself emotionally from my partner when conflicts arise, avoiding deep emotional engagement during disagreements	2.37	0.814
	Total mean score	2.79	0.739

In Table 2, the total mean score on the use of avoidant conflict resolution mechanism to resolve marital conflict as measured on a 4-point scale was high mean is 2.79, standard deviation is 0.739 implied that majority of the respondents used avoidant conflict resolution styles.

Table 3: The Use of Volatile Conflict Resolution mechanism

SN	Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Emotions tend to escalate quickly during conflicts in our relationship	2.92	0.876
2	We often engage in intense arguments when discussing sensitive issues	2.84	0.634
3	Both partners express their anger and frustration openly during conflicts	2.84	0.784
4	Conflict discussions in our relationship can become loud and intense	2.84	0.954
5	We find it challenging to remain calm and composed during disagreements	2.53	0.887
	Total mean score	2.79	0.827

In Table 3, The Total mean score on a 4-point scale was high Mean is 2.79, standard deviation is 0.827 which implied that respondents generally applied volatile conflict resolution mechanism.

Research Question 2: What are the difference between level of education and type of marriage in marital stability?

Table 4: Chi-square statistics for significance Difference in determine level of education and marital stability

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.123	3	0.007
Likelihood Ratio	10.685	3	0.014
Linear-by-Linear Association	10.468	1	0.001
N of Valid Cases	76		

Table 4 depicted the value of chi square 12.123, infinity degree of freedom 3 and p-value 0.007. Since the p-value is lesser than the level of significance 0.05. That is level of education as valuable tools in enhancing marital stability

Table 5: Chi-square statistics for significance Difference in determine type of marriage and marital stability

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.612	4	0.004
Likelihood Ratio	14.991	4	0.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.528	1	0.216
N of Valid Cases	76		

Table 5 depicted the value of chi square 15.612, infinity degree of freedom 4 and p-value 0.004. Since the p-value is lesser than the level of significance 0.05. That is type of marriage had an effect on marital stability.

Discussion of Findings

Research question one was answered and corroborated with Johnson & Greenberg, (2013); Low, Overall, Cross, & Henderson, (2019) that a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship. Regulated conflict resolution mechanism have been proposed to be the most effective styles that lead to marital stability and satisfying relationship. The finding also support the work of Paquette, Rapaport, St-Louis, & Vallerand, (2020) that avoidant couples prefer to minimize conflict as much as possible, that validating conflict resolution mechanism to resolve their marital conflicts and The least practiced volatile conflict resolution styles in the marriage was attempting to get all concerns/issues immediately out into the open. It was agreed that developing problem-solving skills allows couples to work together to find solutions to issues. Effective problem-solving is associated with marital stability and satisfaction.

Research question two supported and agreed with work of Karney, & Bradbury, (2020) that level of education and counselling services have been recognized as valuable tools in enhancing marital stability, the impact of such services on conflict resolution and overall marital satisfaction is crucial for designing targeted interventions. Lakatos, & Martos, (2019) affirmed that the type of marriage had an influence on marital stability. Religion holds significant importance in the lives of many Nigerians and can influence marital values and conflict resolution approaches. This agreed with study of Umberson, & Montez, (2010) that Support systems, including family and social networks, can influence how couples approach and resolve conflicts.

Conclusion

Most types of marital conflicts experienced by married couples were solvable. Such conflicts included dealing with important life changes such as the

birth of a child, a job loss, illness or death of a loved one; handling of major issues about the children including whether or not to have a child; handling major issues and events concerning in-laws and relatives; occurrence of disturbing events such as violence, drugs or an affair and trouble handling financial issues. Perpetual conflicts mainly presented in form of spill over of non-marital stress such as job tension into the marriage and the occurrence of unpleasant fights in the marriage.

Married Couples in used all the three regulated conflict resolution styles as a mechanism to resolve conflict in their marriages. Among validating conflict resolution mechanism which were highly used, sharing of ideas topped the list, along with trying not to hurt the partner's feelings and sacrificing own wishes for the wishes of the partner. In terms of avoidant conflict resolution mechanism, doing what is necessary to avoid useless tensions was the most manifest, followed by trying to soothe the partner to preserve the relationship and trying to avoid creating unpleasantness. Of the volatile conflict resolution mechanism, firmness in pursuing own goals was the most manifest, followed trying to find a compromise solution and letting the partner have some of their position in a give and take way. Conflict resolution styles as the mechanism were necessary but not sufficient conditions for marital stability. The three conflict resolution styles potentially had a positive influence on marital stability as depicted by the higher ratio of married couples in stable marriages to those in unstable relationships. However, in terms of statistical significance, the individual contribution of each conflict resolution styles to marital stability was small. The only exception was the attempt by married couples to get all concerns and issues immediately out into the open, which fall under the volatile conflict resolution style. Instead, level of education and type of marriage had a stronger influence on marital stability.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Premarital counselling should give to intending couples that some conflicts, if not most conflict, are perpetual and therefore require coping with, rather than resolving. Thus, early identification and classification of the same in the marital life of couple would go a long way in maintaining a stable marriage.
- The adoption of marital conflict resolution mechanism should be complemented by the seven factors that build strong marriages which could be referred to “The Sound Relationship House”. These are: creating shared meaning, making life dreams come true, dialogue for perpetual problems, maintaining a positive mental attitude, turning towards the spouse through building emotional bank accounts, sharing fondness and admiration and knowing one another.
- Establishment of marital conflicts resolution centers in all Local Government area in the Lagos state in particular and general in Nigeria.

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