

FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES OF MARITAL CONFLICTS AMONG SPOUSES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the factors and consequences of marital conflict among spouses in Rivers State. The study covered all married spouses who were identified with marital conflicts in Rivers State. This study adopted a descriptive survey Design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the respondents from three L.G.As. The population was unknown. A sample size of 120 spouses was used for the study. Six research questions and six hypotheses were used. A self-structured questionnaire was used to collect data for the study. The face validity of the instrument was determined by experts in the field. Cronbach's alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which stood at 0.85 index value. Data collected were analyzed through frequency count and means scores, while the hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA at 0.05 level of significance. Findings from the study revealed that: there were different factors responsible for marital conflict which include; childlessness, infidelity, failed roles and expectations and lack of financial stability. The consequences include: psychological trauma. It was concluded that there are incidences of marital conflict in the study area. Based on the findings, the researcher recommended that spouses should endeavour to resolve their differences critically without the third party.

Key Words: Factors, Consequences, Marital conflicts

Introduction

Marriage is an entire duration of life union between a male and female. It is the oldest institution that has ever existed. The researcher, from experience observes the alarming rate of separation and divorce among spouses in Rivers State. Looking at the surrounding issues of marriages in Rivers state, it is worthy to note that, if proper counselling (therapy) is not provided, the upcoming youth will find it hard to settle in their marital homes due to the peculiarity of their environment, culture, ideologies, and beliefs.

Ibeh, Obidoa and Okere (2013) points out that marital conflict as a strain in marriage, interaction among couples who are living together. The increasing rate of marriage and family conflict such as the incidence of divorce in the society today justifies the fact that there are conflicts in marital homes (Olaitan, 2003). Animashaun (2014) posits that marital conflict is a phenomenon that destabilizes the couple, disrupt their joy and mostly felt by women yet, least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is also a profound social problem, sapping women's energy, compromising their physical health and eroding their self-esteem.

Conflicts arise as an attempt to match the behaviour and expectations of one with the behaviour and expectations of the other. Marriage and the family system are threatened because disharmony sets in when husband and wife disagree on certain goals to achieve resulting to conflicts and confusion between them unless they come to terms on the goal to pursue. Conflicts and disagreements are inevitable in every close relationship including marital relationship. In every marriage, degree of conflict is actually necessary to keep the marriage dynamic, rather than static (Ashford, LeCroy & Lortie, 2006).

Marital separation now comes in various forms, accompanied with their own myriad set of problems as individual families have their own particular conflict situation(s); after all, no two marriages are the same as not all marriages fail for the same one reason, nor is there usually one main reason for the breaking down of a peculiar marriage. Some marriages are peaceful and relatively problem-free. However, crises overwhelm many others as findings have revealed that marital conflicts did exist, (Tolorunleke, 2014). There is a myriad of marital problems. They may arise from the premarital stage, to the day of the wedding and subsequent events that follow as the marriage proceeds (Akinade, 2015).

It is common place to understand that spouses at most times come to terms with their actions and behaviours with an understanding towards making purposeful or steady efforts with a view to ensuring an ambience of peaceful co-existence, no matter the cost. This merely does not suggest the absence of problems/conflicts as regards individual family, as the strength of a marriage lies in its ability to always find reasons for continuity through marital attachment and adjustment. The knowledge of marital life and modification of characters before marriage become an added advantage in narrowing down high expectations held by spouses which characterizes conflict in homes. At this point, the marriage counsellor becomes a part of the process since it is from this backdrop that the counsellor is expected to maintain a far-reaching function in marriage counselling, by making sure that the spouses clarify and harmonize their various marital expectations (Uwatt, 2004).

As a matter of fact, marriage has been clearly seen as a centre of all human endeavors in recognition of its influence on almost all of human activities. On this note, instabilities and disharmonious experiences in marital life will not only affect the principal agents of marriage

(the couple) as it also affects other parts it serves. Undiyaundeye and Reaman (2002) stressed that conflict has a way of adding undesirable outcome on the spouses. The lingering result of marital conflict usually end up in separation and finally the total collapse 'divorce' which may be interpreted as liberation but has been viewed by counsellors as a traumatic psychologically difficult condition; as the marriage worsens, sincere, constant and instant moves should be made to remedy it, considering its undesirable consequences on the entire family and the society at large as the products of that relationship begins a new phase of life which excludes one of the parents from their lifelong training, making them lose a substantial part of the bond which is present in a complete family system. In summary, this study has provided suitable recommendations in a bid to avoid conflict or if not possible reduce marital conflicts among spouses in Rivers State with an overview of arising implications of marital conflicts in regards to the profession of counselling.

Statement of the Problem

In Rivers State, problems such as drunkenness, mismanagement of money, poor communication among spouses, domestic violence, infertility etc.; among others have caused serious breakdown of marital relationship. Spouses have lost their love, patience, and respect for one another and what it takes to build up a strong and lasting marital commitment to each other; as the state at which these problems breakdown God's ordinance calls for quick attention. On a wider perspective, these factors create instabilities and disharmony in marriages, thus subjecting spouses to serious emotional trauma. It's ironic that most spouses are unaware of these situations. They feel these problems are insignificant and not worth tackling, as they tend to live with it or in fact remain indifferent to it.

Most marriages experience stressful emotional conflicts when there are situations within the family that give rise to a lot of pressure leading to disagreement and eventually resulting into deep hatred, grief and fear. In Rivers State, some marriages have been faced with numerous conflicts which have been occasioned by the economic recession and various social ills. There is a shortfall of financial capacity to meet family needs, due to either unemployment, retrenchment, inflation, extended family responsibilities, poverty and pressure from acquaintances. These myriads of problems constitute enormous forms of pressure on the family. It is worthy of note to emphasize the link between the family and the society as the future generation rests squarely on the family unit as the need for the societal (Rivers State) transformation and reconstruction through marital and family unity and stability becomes pertinent for an area of study by the researcher. The problem of this study is the collapse of many marriages in recent time and the high rate of crime among the youth who are mostly from these collapsed marriages.

The following questions were answered to guide the research:

1. What are the factors responsible for marital conflict among spouses in Rivers State?
2. What are the consequences of marital conflict among spouses in Rivers State?
3. What are the different factors of marital conflict between male and female spouses in Rivers State?
4. How do the consequences of marital conflicts differ between male and female spouses in Rivers State?

The third and fourth research questions were translated to null hypotheses thus: there is no significant difference in the factors of marital conflict among educated and uneducated spouses in Rivers State, there is no significant difference in the consequences of marital conflict between educated and uneducated spouses in Rivers State.

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey. This design is ideal for a study of this kind which attempts to capture everyday behaviour (Stangor, 2004). The purpose of descriptive research was to describe systematically the facts and characteristics of a given population or area of interest factually and accurately (Akinsola, 2002).

The descriptive survey technique, involves describing large population characterized by the selection in which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analysing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. The total population of this study comprised of couples who are experiencing marital conflicts in Rivers State, but due to lack of proper documentation of marriages the actual data was not available at the time of this study. This is because most individuals marry through traditional methods and do not register their marriage thereafter. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 120 respondents which comprised of male and female spouses who are experiencing marital conflicts in Ikwerre, Khana and Phalga LGAs of Rivers State.

A self-structured questionnaire titled: Factors and Consequences of Martial Conflicts among Spouses in Rivers State (FCOMC) serve as the instrument for the study. The instrument was validated by two experts in the University of Abuja to ensure face and content validity. To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted in an interval of two (2) weeks using 30 spouses, randomly selected from Emohua LGA which was not part of the study area. The items on the questionnaire were scored and compared, using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and the reliability index of 0.73 was obtained and which is considered reliable for the study. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire titled: Factors and Consequences of Martial Conflicts among Spouses (FCOMC) in Rivers State. The statistical tools that were used in analysing the collected data include mean score and t-test. To answer the research questions, any item mean that was greater or equal to 2.50 was considered as 'agree', while item mean below 2.50 was considered as 'disagree'. This is because, 2.50 is the midpoint of the 4-point Likert scale.

Results

Research Question One: What are the factors responsible for marital conflict among educated and uneducated spouses in Rivers State?

Table 1: Factors of Marital Conflict among spouses in Rivers State.
N=120

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	High expectation from my spouse causes conflict	2.78	Agree
2	My spouse's drunkenness makes me angry.	2.32	Agree
3	Extreme nagging from my spouse makes me sad	2.64	Agree
4	Communication breakdown in my marriage results in conflict.	3.08	Agree
5	Infidelity results in conflict in my marriage.	2.78	Agree
6	In-Laws and third party's interference aggravates conflict in my marriage.	2.76	Agree
7	My spouse has good habits.	3.03	Agree
8	My spouse and I quarrel a lot.	2.74	Agree
9	My spouse can also cook.	3.18	Agree
10	My spouse talks much for my displeasure	2.78	Agree
11	Cultural differences have generated crises in my home.	2.71	Agree
12	My spouse threatens me with weapon.	1.88	Disagree
13	I am forced to have sex when I am not ready.	1.83	Disagree
14	My spouse is violent when angry.	1.93	Disagree
15	My spouse keeps late nights and this keeps me up late.	2.05	Disagree
Sectional Mean		2.56	

Table 1 shows the factors of marital conflict among spouses in Rivers State. The mean score for factors of marital conflict is 2.56, which indicates that the respondents agreed that the above factors are responsible for marital conflict amongst spouses in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: What are the consequences of marital conflict among educated and uneducated spouses in Rivers State?

Table 2: Consequences of Marital Conflict among spouses in Rivers State

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
16	My lack of confidence is as a result of marital conflict.	2.36	Disagree
17	My children suffer trauma as a result of conflict in my marriage.	2.39	Disagree
18	Marital conflict has put me into deep stress and anxiety.	2.68	Disagree
19	My nature of job frustrates my spouse.	2.50	Disagree
20	My spouse always beats me so hard that I must seek medical help.	1.81	Disagree
21	I withdraw from people due to shame as a result of conflict in my marriage.	1.91	Disagree
22	Mismanagement of money by my spouse results in the inability to pay children's bills or school fees?	2.32	Disagree
23	My friends avoid me due to crises in my home.	1.92	Disagree
24	Maltreatment from my spouse has made me to lose weight.	1.93	Disagree
25	Pressure from my mother-in-law for my inability to conceive has caused me severe ill-health.	2.00	Disagree
26	Verbal abuse from my spouse has affected my health	1.97	Disagree
Sectional Mean		2.16	

Table 2 shows the consequences of marital conflict of spouses in Rivers State. The mean score for consequences of marital conflict among spouses is 2.16 indicating disagreement since the mean is below 2.50 (midpoint on a 4-point Likert scale). This implies that the respondents disagreed on the consequences of marital conflict among spouses in Rivers State.

HO₁: There is no significant difference in the factors of marital conflict between male and female spouses in Rivers State

Table 3: t-test of difference between the factors of marital conflict between male and female spouses in Rivers State

Gender	Number	Mean	S. D	t-value	Sig(2tailed)	Decision
Male	73	2.503	.4584	-1.129	.262	Accepted
Female	47	2.261	.6154			

The analysis on Table 3 was carried out to determine the difference in factors of marital conflict between male and female couples. A significant value of .262 (greater than the 0.05 level of significance) shows that there is no significant difference. The hypothesis is therefore

accepted. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference in the mean of male and female spouses in factors of marital conflict in Rivers State.

HO₂: There is no significant difference in the consequences of marital conflict between male and female spouses in Rivers State

Table 4: t-test on difference between the difference in the consequences of marital conflict between male and female spouses in Rivers State

Gender	Number	Mean	S. D	t-value	Sig(2tailed)	Decision
Male	73	2.06	.649	-1.926	.047	Rejected
Female	47	2.32	.790			

The analysis on Table 4 was carried out to determine the difference in consequences of marital conflict between male and female couples. A significant value of .047 (less than the 0.05 level of significance) shows that there is significant difference between male and female spouses. The hypothesis that says that there is no significant difference in the consequences of marital conflict between male and female spouses in Rivers State is therefore rejected.

Discussion of Findings

Findings showed that parental upbringing, childlessness, lack of financial stability, religious differences etc. are the factors responsible for marital disharmony among couples in the study area. The factors mentioned above can cause marital disharmony, however, it may not be sufficed if proper information is provided for the spouses in form of marital counselling.

The findings revealed that there is marital conflict and consequences of marital conflict in the study area and these conflicts are caused by parental upbringing, childlessness, lack of financial stability, religious differences etc. and the consequences of marital conflicts are stress, anxiety, insomnia, suicidal thoughts as well as hatred/fear of the opposite sex. This is line with the study of Uwatt (2004) who reported that there are different types of conflicts prevalent among spouses; physical, social, economic and psychological conflicts. Also, the consequences of marital conflict are found to include extra-marital relationships, stress and inability to control children, drug abuse, separations and divorces.

There is no significant difference in factors of marital conflicts due to gender in Rivers State; however, there's variation in consequences of marital conflicts alongside gender. With a significant value of .047 (less than the 0.05 level of significance) it was concluded that there is statistical significance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Marital conflicts exist and have consequences in the study area irrespective of gender, level of education and years of marital experience. The factors and consequences of marital conflicts do not have any significant differences alongside gender and level of education. The factors and consequences of marital conflicts differ significantly among couples with different years of marital experience.

From the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors should sensitize couples on the Factors and consequences of marital conflicts, irrespective of their level of education or gender.

2. School guidance counsellors should design seminars on marriage to enlighten and educate the youth on possible causes and prevention of marriage violence regularly.
3. There is no formula for marriage, thus every marriage is a unique marriage. Therefore, spouses should be sensitive to the fact that factors and consequences of marital conflicts is not gender based.
4. It is recommended therefore that spouses should ensure that the unique marital relationship is placed above any prejudice, irritations and should never allow sentiments to tear it apart.
5. Because the consequences of marital conflicts affect both genders, couples are advised to always find a way to reach compromise because the outcome of marital conflicts is not a respecter of gender.

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