

**A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF THE CAUSES AND MANAGEMENT OF
MARITAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA**

Samuel Opeyemi IROYE, PhD

Department of Peace Studies and Conflict Resolution
Faculty of Social Sciences
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja
lifelinesamuel@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

As haughty and blissful as the Marriage institution might seem to have been presented, it has also in some cases been seen to be a tool of societal disorder and instrument of untimely death of some of its parties due to arising operational conflicts. Marital conflict has become a thing of concern in this contemporary society because of its attending negative implications. Though Conflict has been presented as a concept which should not always be perceived as a negative phenomenon, the attitude and responses of conflicting parties often determine or such will be presented most especially within a marriage relationship. Marital conflict is not just a difference of opinion. Rather, it is a series of events that have been poorly handled so as to deeply damage the marriage relationship. This work examines the practical causes of marital conflicts and its overriding effects on the society general. It further postulates possible practical contemporary solutions which may help in dealing with such marital conflicts in any given situation. The study employs both the survey and analytical method of research using qualitative and quantitative systems of data analysis. This work recommends that organization of regular seminars and workshops may be necessary in helping couples to acquire skills on issues that have to do with conflict resolution and thereby ensuring marital harmony even in the presence of imminent challenges. The research asserts that the overriding negative effects of marital conflict even if not totally eliminated can be reduced to the barest minimum where parties are ready to maintain a positive attitude in their marriage relationship.

Keywords: Conflicts, Marriage, Management, Settlement

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is the state of being united with a person of the opposite sex as husband or wife for the purpose companionship, procreation maintaining a family. Marital conflict has become a thing of concern in this contemporary society and this is associated with separation, divorce, and widowhood. Separation and divorce are social phenomena created by either husband or the wife or both, but widowhood is beyond the control of human being, it is related to death and thus universal. It is imperative to note that when marriage is dissolved in the court of law, it is called divorce, but when it is dissolved by death is called widowhood (Amina, 2008). Marital instability is used to refer to the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce.

Marriage is considered to represent a lifelong commitment by two people to teach other and it is signified by a contract sanctioned by the state. It thus involves legal rights, responsibilities, and duties that are enforced by both secular and sacred laws. As a legal contract ratified by the state, marriage can only be dissolved with state permission. Marital conflict has been described as a situation whereby the couples deliberately decided to separate for one reason or the other.

According to Dunkins 2000 posited that there are numbers of factors that are seriously threatening instability of marriage in Nigeria and most of these factors are traceable to some inherited behaviour and thinking from the ancient African society, and imported ideas from other sources that are beyond the African concept of marriage. These factors are the significant causes of marriage instability in Nigeria society; as a result of their functions and effects within a home. Schandorf, (2000) noted that the conjugal family is weak in residential and economic terms when compared with the matrilineage. Asare (2005) also observed that families nowadays seem not to care about their wards marriages because in most cases the choice of partner is made by the wards themselves contrary to tradition, where a choice was made by parents.

Crises in homes or families do not just go unnoticed because wherever a crisis exists in the family, the atmosphere of such a family is everything but congenial, the atmosphere changes – a once happy, family would become chaotic and characterized further by teenage rebellion, child abuse, spousal violence, alcoholism, extra-marital affairs, gambling, drug addiction and in extreme cases health problems such as hypertension, heart-attack/failure and emotional breakdown follow as consequences. Problems and attitudes regarding material things can divide families in many ways. Divisions may develop when marriage mates work securely and cultivate a “my money-your money” attitude. When a marriage starts to witness resentment, constant arguing, infidelity, bitter speech, hostile reactions to simple questions or minor mistakes, mistrust, bickering to mention a few, that marriage is prone to crisis in no distant time. A sudden loss of interest in normal family activities, a sudden need to leave home early to go to work and keeping of late hours after work, a sudden inability to please one’s spouse, sudden and unexplained trips out of town are all symptomatic of a crisis-prone marital union (Amadi, 2009).

Marital conflicts could originate from different sources some of which could be psychological and/or psychosomatic in nature. Tobin (2004) attesting to the above claim retorts that more and more marriages run into crisis and eventually pack up because one partner has a borderline personality disorder such as narcissist, antisocial, psychopathic personality disorders. These sorts of people are abusers by nature where as some are even unaware or unconscious of their near helpless conditions. Many families have been and some are still seriously at war with themselves simply because of their failure to arrest, manage or resolve conflicting issues between couples or families. The effects on the children, couples themselves and community as well as nation as a whole are devastating, as had been observed by the researcher. The problem therefore is to examine the marital conflict in Nigeria: Causes and management.

Theoretic Framework

This research employs two basic theories which are; the Social Learning Theory and Conflict and Leadership Theory of “the Blender and the Juice Extractor” of Iroye Samuel Opeyemi (2020) as the basis of its study. The Social Learning Theory assumes that modelling influences produce learning principally through their informative functions and observers acquire mainly symbolic representations of modelled activities rather than specific stimulus-response association. A person cannot learn much by observation if he does not attend to, or recognize, the essential features of the model’s behaviour. One of the component functions in learning by example is therefore concerned with intentional processes. Among the numerous factors that determine observational experiences, associational preferences are undoubtedly of major importance. The people with whom one regularly associates delimit the types of behaviour that one will repeatedly observe and hence learn most thoroughly. On the other hand, the “Blender and Juice Extractor” theory attributes the success or failure of an organization to the attitude and acts of the leader who can either apply the blender’s style of all-inclusive or the extractor’s style of elimination of weak values. The Blender sees no waste in the act of processing. It accommodates all and makes them material necessary for the end product while the Juice extractor focuses only on the liquid extracted as its main target while disposing the solid part of the fruit as waste.

The blender theory postulates the principle of modification and assimilation to the effect that no value is a waste even a negative value can be seen as progressive depending on the perception of the people. Thus, the blender theory focuses on the leader’s ability to manage and accommodate the weakness and excesses of an individual will bring about a positive response that will make the individual become a part of the progressive process for a better end result. On the other hand, the extractor’s theory postulates the principle of alienation and elimination in that certain elements believed to be useless to the system are alienated from the whole and afterwards eliminated. While all elements are material to the blender, only a few are found to be material to the extractor. The blender uses all and become thicker and stronger

while the extractor is thinner because it has disposed the thickening materials which it considers as “threat” to the system, and thus invariably incurring more losses. In application to this study, the researcher believes that the success in marital relationship is dependent on value appropriation. That is, the ability of parties in the relationship to identify material value necessary for its success and imbibe them and on the other hand identify negative value likely to be injurious to the relationship and alienate them for elimination.

Literature Review

Marital Conflicts are misunderstandings, disagreements, struggles and contentions that often arise in a marriage relationship which ever type it may be or form it may be presented. Marriage is a legal union of a man and a woman for co-habitation and often for procreation (Della, 1998). The institution of marriage is necessary and important in any giving society as it helps to facilitate the total and overall development of every member of the institution. The institution of marriage aids the logical and proper upbringing of children. According to Gardiner and Kosmitski, 2005, the institution of marriage offers intimacy, commitment, friendship, affect, sexual fulfilment, companionship, and an opportunity for emotional growth, as well as new sources of identity and self-esteem. But all these values might be rendered irrelevant in the face of an imminent conflict not well, properly and adequately halted on time. Certain challenges which often occurs within a marriage present problem that are inevitable and often lead to conflict (Storaasli and Markman, 1990) of any degree or magnitude.

Conflict is disagreement, clashes, discordance in interests or ideas (White and Klein, 2002) and it may often arise or be presented in any form and an unsuspecting marriage may often carelessly fall for its devastating vices and hazardous implications. Such implications may include but not limited to poor health and chronic illness (Impett and Peplau, 2006) and in some cases it can occasion both mental and emotional instability resulting from depression and anxiety. Marital union is expected to be an exciting and beautiful adventure (Tolorunleke, 2008) which if well-handled should get better with every passing of its existence. However, improper attitude and responses to little fracas in this relationship can become a whole lot of

great and serious issues and in accordance to Okafor (2002) such can occasion serious frictions and eventual separation and, in some cases, death of partners have been occasioned.

Causes of Marital Conflicts

Marriage like any other human institution cannot and will never be devoid of conflict, because as long as there are interactions, there are bound to be dissensions and contentions but this is not to say that such must have negative or destructive undertone. It is worthy of note that it is only when Marital conflict is poorly managed that it will present serious risk and may give room for marital dissatisfaction and future divorce. According to Onyia and Aniche, 2002; Nkwocha, 2002; Kumuyi, 2004; Ezeh, 2000 highlighted some of the causes of marital instability to include; childlessness, unsatisfactory sexual relationship, non-payment of dowry; polygamy; rumour and faction; lack of commitment towards marriage, sexual incompatibility and infidelity; lack of communication between spouses; abandonment, alcohol addiction, substance abuse; physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse; inability to manage or resolve conflict; differences in personal and career goals; different expectations about household tasks and financial problems; intellectual incompatibility and inflexibility; mental instability or mental illness; religious beliefs, cultural and lifestyle differences. According to Onyechi (2003) such factors include lack of sexual satisfaction, childlessness communication gap, in-law influence, poverty among other these factors generate crisis and conflicts that are detrimental to marital relationships such as desertion, negligence, malicious beating, child abuse, abscondment, assault, disobedience and several other feature in marital relationship.

Unpreparedness for the institution of marriage which make many young people to enter into it out of desperation is believed to be a major cause of marriage failures and according to Linus, 2012, the female folks are often the major culprits in this regard. Amato, Johnson, Booth, and Rogers (2003) asserts that marital happiness is negatively affected by premarital cohabitation, extramarital affairs, wives' job demands, and wives' longer working hours. It is the opinion of this researcher that though there are a whole lot of factors that may be responsible for marital conflicts but major factors and these includes; Religious dogmatism,

social media impact, role contention, poor communication, irresponsibility, unfaithfulness and negative friendships. These factors are hereby examined as follows:

- a. **Religious Dogmatism:** Dogmatism in religion is often the product of variant sentiments which most often times have no solid basis other than a biased view or perception of the Holy Scriptures. Eric Brahm (2005) States that in virtually every heterogeneous society, religious difference serves as a source of potential conflict. He asserts that religious extremists can contribute to conflict [escalation](#) and this researcher believes that such can even affects marital relationship in some dimension. Religious dogma that affects the home includes, health management, attendance of religious outings, different faith denominations, style of child upbringing and finance management. For example, some religious belief holds that couples should maintain joint account while the others disagree and where couples belong to the opposing sides of religious beliefs on money management there are bound to be contentions in such home.
- b. **Social Media Impact:** The access to social media has now become a sort of nightmare to many marriages most particularly as regards how its features negatively affects couple's bonding. The social media commands and demands a whole lot of attention which can make its users prioritize it above any other thing and where this is the case in a marital relationship, couples might be contending for attention which they should automatically enjoy. Apart from the above assertion, the social media gives unguided exposure on certain issues of life which most often time are injurious or detrimental to the existence of a marital relationship. The social media has the potential to contaminate the trust upon which a marital relationship is based and where the couples are not consciously reacting to its influence positively.
- c. **Role Contention:** Role performance is how a person expresses his or her role. To every creature in existence there are God given roles which if properly exhibited and demonstrated aids the sustenance of a peaceful society. Same is the case when it comes to a marriage relationship where each party is expected to function in their God given

role for the sustenance of the family. This assertion agrees with Goffman exposure on the term ‘self’ which is believed has a lot of impact on roles identity. He postulated the identity theory which distinguishes three types of identity in a basic sense that is still valid at the beginning of the twenty-first century: (1) social identity as a person's role set, (2) personal identity as a person's synchronic and diachronic individuality ascribed to him by observers, and (3) ego identity as a person's inner self-reference. Goffman’s theory focuses on tiny moments of people's behavior, which they themselves find more or less natural and are unaware of. The implication of this theory to this research is the fact that the distortion of the role performance of an individual can be disrupted by “ego” untamed.

- d. **Lack of Mutual Respect between partners:** Mutual respect for one’s spouse is critical for marital union sustenance and lack of it is a crisis factor capable of rocking even the strongest marital foundation of hitherto blissful homes. Respect and love are reciprocal variables in every marital union and as such, a spouse owes it an obligation to respect and love his/her marriage partner.
 - e. **Poor marital communication:** A factor that has occupied central position in all discourse concerning successful marriage is ‘marital communication’. Inability of spouses to communicate effectively with each other is very unhealthy to the union. Effective marital communication entails that couples discuss issues, respond to questions, call for explanations and accept same timely (when given), as any delay may send out a wrong signal which a partner is bound to interpret same way. Effective marital communication can in fact assuage many other marital disquiets before they could degenerate into crisis situations. Poor marital communication has been blamed for some other marital problems that have even culminated into divorce or separation of spouses.
- Irresponsibility:** Negligent behaviour on the part of marital partners is a critical crisis factor. In taking marital vows, a couple normally would promise to oblige the partner of his/her responsibility towards him/her, while avoiding indulgences attitude. But

experience has shown that soon after, some marriages collapsed on the strength of negligence of such avowed obligations.

- f. **Unfaithfulness:** Dishonest behaviour coupled with moral decadence in the family can generate crisis in the home. A situation where a couple cannot tell each other simple truth is not healthy for the union. Once such morality gap is discovered in any of the spouses, mistrust sets in and confidence gradually gets eroded with crisis eventually taking over the home front. Poor morality or decadent moral culture may unwittingly be imbibed by the children of such a family in which case the entire family fabric weakens due largely to an atmosphere of mutual mistrust that eventually envelops it.
- g. **Negative friendships:** Extreme sexual orientation of one of the marriage partners is capable of endangering a marital unit. Such orientations like homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, sodomy, oral sex, excessive sexual appetite especially when the other partner is at the other extreme of the scale can generate crisis in the homes. Most of the time, such extreme sexual behaviours or orientations are discovered rather too late or midway into the marriage that it becomes very difficult to pull out of the engagement. And when once a partner cannot get along crisis ensues.

Factors that aid Marital Harmony: There however some positive factors such as good communications, marital intimacy among others that tends to strengthen marital relationship. Amato, Johnson, Booth, and Rogers (2003) found marital happiness was positively affected by increased economic resources, equal decision making, non-traditional gender attitudes, and support for the norm of lifelong marriage. According to Undiyaundeye and Ugal (2006) who carried out a study to test the educational levels of couples and their effectiveness in handling marital conflicts and discovered that educational attainment goes a long way in affecting the ability to handle marital conflicts.

Effects of Marital Conflicts

Family conflict is a common occurrence among all races and generations. No family is exempted from contention and controversies at some point in their relationship. Family

conflict can be short lived and can rage longer than expected. However, it is worthy of note that continuous family conflict, such as abuse, poverty, or mental instability can cause problems that ripple through the entire family unit. The term family conflict did not emerge until the 1960's as psychotherapy was emerging as an acceptable treatment option for individuals and families. Many theories such as structural/functional theory emerged, describing families as a social institution and asserting that social order needed to be followed for a cohesive and supportive environment (Rasheed, Rasheed, and Marley, 2011). A family conflict is defined as any conflict that occurs within a family. This could include conflicts between husbands and wives, children, siblings, grandparents, and extended families (Borst, 2015). Family conflict may escalate to physical abuse, physically harming family members. These various family conflicts can cause tremendous stressors such as anxiety, long term health effects such as high blood pressure, suppression of the immune system, premature aging, increase the risks of mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression (Fabricius and Luecken, 2007).

Family conflict is believed to be a major cause of health compromise and risky behaviours such as; excessive drinking, smoking, using illegal drugs, and engaging in risky sexual behaviors, such as having unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners (Fish, Pavkov. Wetchler, and Bercik, 2012). Not only can family conflict cause health compromising and risky behaviors amongst children and adult children, it can lead to interpersonal relationship struggles (Thorson, 2009). Research has shown that children's knowledge of an extra-marital affair causes changes in the way they communicate with others in their relationships and other peers. This may cause poor communication skills and poor boundaries may be developed (Thorson, 2009). Studies indicate that divorce and parental infidelity have caused offspring to develop more insecure attachment styles as compared to individuals who were raised in families with little family conflict (Crowell, Treboux, and Brockmeyer, 2009).

Field Study Report:

A field study was carried out for the purpose of having a factual representation of issues of concern in this research and also for the purpose of justifying the assertions of authors as presented in the literature review and the data are presented and analyzed accordingly as presented in the tables herein.

Study Population

This research carried out a study in three major cities in Nigeria, which are Ikeja in Lagos State, Gwagwalada in Abuja, FCT, and Kano in Kano State. The total population for this study was 150 residents of these selected communities. The main data collection instrument used in this study was both structured and unstructured interview. The results of the analysis are presented in tables with the appropriate interpretations. One Hundred and Fifty (150) copies of questionnaire were duly administered to respondents who are all married, same were returned and well analyzed below.

Analysis of the Study Population

Table 1 Distribution of Respondents based on their Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	80	53.3
Female	70	46.6
Total	150	100.0

Source: Field Survey Iroye Samuel Opeyemi, 2021

The table presents that 53.3% which accounts for eighty respondents of the total sampled population are male while 46.6% accounting for seventy respondents are female.

Causes of Marital Conflicts

This research using the respondents stated above in Table 1.1 finds out the underlining factors responsible for marital conflicts in Nigeria using both unstructured and structured interview and the answers provided by the Respondents are analyzed as presented in the Table below:

Table 2: The Causes of Marital Conflicts

Variable	Number of Respondents	Percent
Communication Barrier	142	94.6%
Variant Sexual Orientation	138	92.0%
Social Media	130	86.6%
Wrong Marriage Orientation	126	84.0%
Financial Problem	126	84.0%
Improper Association	118	78.6%
Bad Upbringing	111	74.0%
Role Contention	110	73.3%
Variant Cultural Values	96	64.0%
Source: Field Research data, Iroye Samuel Opeyemi, 2021		

The above figures present to us in different percentages the opinions of the Respondents as to the factors responsible for marital conflicts in Nigeria. Each of these factors identified by the respondents are highly above average and these implies that the factors are common phenomenon which cuts across the ethnic regions in Nigeria as represented by the respondents. The data as presented above therefore present a factual representation of the causes of marital conflicts in Nigeria and this therefor justifies the assertion of the Researcher herein as stated above.

Management of Marital Conflict

This research tried to find out whether people believes that marital conflict can be effectively managed without resulting to violence or divorce.

Table 3: Can Marital Conflicts be effectively Managed without resulting to violence or divorce?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agree	92	61.3%
Agree	38	25.3%
Disagree	20	13.3%
Total	150	100%

Source: Field Research Date, Iroye Samuel Opeyemi 2021

Table 3 shows that 61.3% of the respondents strongly agree that it is possible to manage marital conflicts without resulting to violence or divorce, 25.3% of the respondents also agree, while 13.3% of the respondents totally disagree. The result shows that the majority of the respondents are of the opinion that marital conflicts can be effectively managed and possible prevent violence or divorce.

Factors that can aid and sustain harmony in a marital relationship

This research using the respondents stated above in Table 1.1 finds out the underlining factors that can help in managing marital conflicts in Nigeria using both unstructured and structured interview and the answers provided by the Respondents are analyzed as presented in the Table below:

Table 4: Factors that can help in the management of Marital Conflicts

Variable	Number of Respondents	Percent
Good Communication Skills	149	99.3%
Mutual Respect	122	81.3%
Financial Sustenance	141	94.0%
Good Family Upbringing	120	80.0%
Proper Character and Ethics	126	84.0%
Transparency and Trust	146	97.3%
Positive Friendship	90	60.0%
Training	78	52.0%
God Factor	144	96.0%
Source: Field Research data, Iroye Samuel Opeyemi, 2021		

The above figures present to us in different percentages the opinions of the Respondents as to the factors help in breeding Marital harmony and thus, assist in managing marital conflicts in Nigeria. Each of these factors identified by the respondents are highly above average and these implies that the factors are common phenomenon thus, giving credence to its reliability.

Discussion of Findings

Our discussion focuses on **Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4. Table 4.2.1 presents The Causes of Marital Conflicts** as; Communication Barrier, Variant Sexual Orientation, Social Media,

Wrong Marriage Orientation, Financial Problem, Improper Association, Bad Upbringing, Role Contention and Variant Cultural Values. The data presented in percentage shows the fact that all these factors without any exception are potent enough either as a single factor or joint factors to wreak havoc in a marital relationship. **Table 3** from the data presentation shows that conflict in a marital relationship can be well managed or handled without the involvement of any act of violence whatsoever. On the final analysis, **Table 4** from the data collection presents the fact that a whole lot of elements can aid the management of marital conflicts and these are stated to include; Good Communication Skills, Mutual Respect, Financial Sustenance, Good Family Upbringing, Proper Character and Ethics, Transparency and Trust, Positive Friendship, Training and God Factor. From the data presentation all these factors are considered as potent elements that can aid in breeding peace and harmony in a marital relationship.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals possible consequences of marital conflicts include; loss of spousal confidence, emotional trauma on both couple and children, negative mentoring for children, poor physical, emotional and mental health, escalation of social vices and threats to life of partner. It is believed that the negative implications of these factors are gross and could be very disastrous. This study reveals and discussed the various factors responsible for marital conflict in the Nigeria. It also examines the consequences of marital conflict and make recommendations on strategies that can reduce or manage marital conflicts in general. This study asserts that there is no marriage that is free from certain trouble zones as every marriage relationship has its own challenging times but the way such are handled will determine whether such relationship will be sustained. Marital relationship should not only be built on the weak foundation of attraction and passion but rather on the strong elements of unconditional love, understanding and commitment.

Marital conflicts can be managed when they occur or prevented in resulting to partial or total collapse of homes. Marital success results from a lot of endurance, tolerance, patience

and effective management of individual differences. Successful marriages as opined by Nadir (2003), are not those in which there has never been conflict but those in which conflicts have served useful purposes. The harmony of a marital relationship is only sustainable when both parties are ready to imbibe the right attitude and take the right actions at every material time in that relationship and this will make them one indivisible body just as alluded by the Holy Scripture in Ecclesiastes 4:12 which says; ‘‘Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken’’.

This study hereby recommends that for even and positive sustenance of harmony in marital relationship, it will be necessary to embrace the traditional value system of marriage which by all standard and ramification encourages members of the immediate extended family and the immediate community to help in nurturing newly established family until they are fully matured. This work also recommends that our religious houses and settings should give priority to teaching doctrines that promote positive and indivisible family relationship instead of teachings based on prosperity and self-centeredness. On a final note, this study recommends that teachings or subjects bothering on positive marriage values and home building should be introduced into the Nigeria Schools’ curriculum right from the primary to tertiary institutions so as to ensure that young people cultivate the habits of peaceful home relationship as against the violence prone society as it is now being experienced all over the world.

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