

MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG COUPLES IN EKITI STATE: A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH

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Abstract

The family, as an integral part of every system is saddled to build and nurture a cultured society. It is noteworthy; no family can survive without conflict for perfect understanding of marriage. Hence, this descriptive study explored the causes, nature and consequences of marital conflict due to *rising profile of conflict among couples leading to broken homes, divorce or untimely death*. A513 couples were selected using accidental sampling technique from some purposively selected communities in Ekiti state. Questionnaire was used to elicit quantitative data. Findings revealed 92.0% respondents agreed that husbands and wives do have misunderstanding. To causes of marital conflict, 47.0% strongly agreed its infidelity/extra marital affair, 41.5% strongly agreed lack of trust/keeping secrets, 42.5% strongly agreed its refusal of wives to submit to the husband, 41.0% strongly agreed sexual deprivation, 36.0% strongly agreed repeated quarrels. The prevalence of marital conflict, 48.5% experience marital conflict frequently while 28.0% experience it once a while. On the consequences, 71.5% don't talk to each other for sometimes, 70.0% deny each other sex, 64.5% keep distances from

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spouse while 60.0% said money for housekeep is withdrawn and stop eating together. Study concluded that, conflict is inevitable no matter our statuses and should be managed constructively to save the family. Study recommended that couples should perceive misunderstanding as a normal thing and should be handled with absolute care and patience so as not to degenerate into destructive act. Both couples should not give room to third party in their marriage especially during misunderstanding.

Key Words: Marriage, marital conflict, couples and inevitable

Introduction

Marriage is said to be a union between a man and a woman from different socio-economic and religious background (Interpersonal Communication, 2024). A man and a woman that will live the rest of their lives together will of course be people who have interest in themselves and share everything humanly possible together till death do them part. Despite the fact that marriage was ordained by God according to the Holy Books, it is sacrosanct to say it is not devoid of feud in order to strengthen the union when the parties understands themselves better (Interpersonal Communication, 2024). For instance, Omoge (2013) opined that, it is, "Better to live alone in a tumbledown shack than share a mansion with a nagging spouse." Equally, "it is better to dwell in the wilderness, than with a contentious and an angry woman." (Holy Bible, Proverbs 21:9, 19, MSG, KJV). The incessant growth in the development of science and technology has totally affected and change marriages to be practice that parties entered into blindly without the usual cultural values as a guide to selection of mate thereby leading to early crumble of the union due to one reason or the other not minding the age of the union (Interpersonal Communication, 2024). It is true mankind cannot do without disagreement. Conflict is part and parcel of human beings. Constructive marital feud is meant to cement existing relationships in order to reinforce the union and to perpetuate its functions. However, it is noteworthy to state that the nature of conflict in most marriages today is nothing to write home about (Interpersonal Communication, 2024). Today, marriages are crisis ridden to the extent that many homes are at the verge of collapsing and some have totally collapsed most especially in this period of

economic crux. It is on the backdrop that the study provides a sociological explanation on marital conflict among couples among people of Ekiti state in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Causes of Marital Crises

It is unrealistic to expect a marriage to be problem-free. After all, even well-matched marriage, partners are not perfectly compatible hence difficulties of some sort are inevitable. Marital conflicts can be defined as the state of tension or stress between marital partners as the couple try to carry out their marital roles (Opera, 2014). The fact that two people agree or plan to live together as husband and wife calls for different expectations and hopes, some of which might be fulfilled while others remain unfulfilled. Since couples are humans and no gods, it is only natural to expect that there will be differences in opinions, values, needs, desires and habits that are the stuff of everyday living (Amadi et al, 2014; Tolorunleke, 2013). 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. Some affected couple becomes addicted to their work yet others develop varying degrees of mental disorder including psychotic and psychopathological health conditions.

Keeping away from strife is normal and proper. But the question remains 'whether we should or can handle these crises in order to avoid them developing into conflicts'. Wasson (2010) while, counseling on 'How to keep hope alive during marriage crises' maintains that because of human desires, we will still have misunderstandings, differing opinions, selfish times, lazy moments etc. Though in marriage such differences are presumed to melt away but as a couple, it is not always easy to give up that uniqueness or individualism in our everyday life. This is notably so because both husband:

and wife have different habits, were nurtured from different socio-economic and psychological backgrounds, with different biological parentage hence different genetic makeup, different educational background, different personalities and different emotional scars (DeHaans, 1986) 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 (The Watch Bible and Tract Society, 1996).

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 crises 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 sort of people are abusers by nature where as some are even unaware or unconscious of their near helpless conditions.

The following are the causes of marital crises;

I. Social Incompatibility of Marriage Partners: There is no doubt that some marriages have absolutely no foundation or basis for being contracted at the first instance. This is so because the pair is socially incompatible and may only manage to get along for a short while before signs of incompatibility would start to manifest. It would then be discovered that the couple are strange bed fellows - socially, religiously and ideologically. Crises are bound to ensue in a situation where a marriage partner sets high and unrealistic standards in the home. The fallibility of man is unquestionable and as such it is not possible that such idealistic standards are realized. This is capable of degenerating into crisis in the home. Many married people

become disillusioned when they discover that their union is not all they had expected and that their spouse is not quite what they had envisioned him/her to be (Buckwell, 2010). Additionally, some couples unrealistically expect to get more out of marriage than they put into it.

ii. **Sexual Incompatibility:** Poor sexual-satisfaction on the part of a marital partner may spice up crisis in the union which not properly- and timely detected and managed could lead to extramarital sexual affairs - a situation that if on its own leads to disaffection and loss of trust (Buckwell, 2010).

iii. **Extreme Sexual Orientation:** Extreme sexual orientation of one of a marriage partner is capable of endangering a marital union. 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 (Buckwell, 2010).

iv. **Extended Family Affairs/Issues:** Some once upon -a-time happy couples have had their marriages rocked for their inability to properly manage extended family issues. In most cases, women find it difficult to accommodate relations of the husband (especially mothers and sisters - in-law) and vice versa on the part of some husbands, a situation most marriage partners may find difficult to accommodate. Some men/women often quarrel with spouses whose interests are only on the betterment of their own relations (Buckwell, 2010).

v. **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. The Holy Bible admonishes couples thus: wives respect your husband who in turn should love their wives as they would their own body (Buckwell, 2010). One can quickly assume that each of the above mentioned

conditions is a sine qua non for the other since a husband might find it difficult to continue to love a wife who doesn't respect him or his authority; neither would a wife respect the husband who does not love her. 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, failure which fans the embers of marital discord and discontent (Buckwell, 2010).

vi. Dishonesty and Moral Decadence: 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. (Buckwell, 2010)

vii. Negligent Behaviour of Spouses: 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 that could mar their union. But experience has shown that soon after, some marriages collapsed on the strength of negligence of such avowed obligations (Amadi et al, 2014). On this, a partner would start to feel cheated thus giving opportunity for tension to build up.

viii. Poor Marital Communication: A factor that has occupied central position in all discourse concerning successful marriage is 'marital communication (Edger, 1996). 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 (Amadi et al, 2014). Effective marital communication can in fact assuage many other marital disquiets before they could degenerate into crisis

situations. Put differently, poor marital communication has been blamed for some other marital problems that have even culminated into divorce or separation of spouses. Purposeful open dialogue between couples often tends to be overtaken by incessant arguments about anything, everything, and nothing; misinterpretation generates misunderstandings; verbal attacks are countered by keeping silence especially on the husband's side (Amadi et al, 2014).

ix. **Unwholesome Social Behaviour:** Bickering, unnecessary criticisms, gossip or what may simple be tagged nagging has rocked some good families. It is not an over statement that majority of the women take to nagging instead of politely confronting their husbands with issues (Amadi et al, 2014). Most men in turn do not take kindly to such threats and would go a long way to crushing such tendencies. This case of attack and counter attack is crisis prone, as no reasonable man would want his authority as the family head be usurped.

Consequences of Marital Crises

Marital crises may have had some deleterious consequences on couples, their children and the society at large. Available literature reveal as follows:

Social Vices and Crimes: Social vices and crimes may become the order of the day as delinquent children from crisis-ridden or broken homes ultimately graduate into irresponsible adult population. The adolescence is a stage at which human beings are highly emotionally unbalanced, character formation not yet stabilized and as such people can always tilt to either side of the scale at the slightest pressure (Amadi et al, 2014; Tolorunleke, 2013).

Objectives

The main objective of the research is to investigate a sociological analysis of marital conflict among couples in Ekiti State. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Identify the causes of marital conflict among couples in Ekiti state;
- ii. Explore the opinion of the respondents on marital conflict among couples in Ekiti state and;
- iii. Examine the consequences of marital conflict among the couples in Ekiti State.

Theoretical Framework

The researcher employed the "Social Exchange Theory". This theory was propounded by Homans George (1961). This theory implies interaction between two or more individuals or groups. A social interaction is also exchange relationships. Two persons are in exchange relations when one gives or receives gifts, services etc from the other. In this exchange theory, I understand that husband and wife are expected to receive good services from each other. When the services are not rendered appropriately, problems will arise. People also exchange greetings, good deeds etc, while living in societies. In the same manner, money and commodities change hands in the market and daughters are exchanged for bride wealth between two social groups during marriages. Why conflict theory is chosen in this study, is because family performs those primary functional fundamentals to human and social life, so without the sexual and reproductive function of the family, society cannot continue to exist and without economic functions it will not be sustained. People get married because they have needs and expectation to satisfy. When these needs are not gotten, conflict will arise, which destabilizes the family.

Methods

The study engaged descriptive design. The population for this study was married people selected using accidental sampling technique in purposively selected communities such as Ado, Ikere, Aramoko, Ilupeju, Ifaki and Oye in Ekiti state. A total of 513 respondents (married couples) was the sample size. The empirical study used semi-structure questionnaire to elicit quantitative data for this study. The instrument was stratified into different sections in line with the objectives of the study. The quantitative data was analysed using SPSS version 21. The data was presented using inferential statistics.

Findings and Discussion:**Table 1: SocioDemographic Characteristics of the Respondents (n= 513)**

Variable	Frequency (n,%)
Age (y):	
<20 – 30	183(35.7)
31 – 40	204(34.0)
41 – 50	55(17.5)
51 +	71(18.0)
Sex:	
Male	212(41.3)
Female	301(58.7)
Religious Affiliation:	
Christianity	462(90.1)
Muslim	51(9.9)
Occupation:	
Civil Servant	306(59.6)
Trader	155(30.2)
Students	14(2.7)
Unemployed	38(7.4)
Ethnicity:	
Yoruba	471(91.8)
Igbo	30(5.8)
Hausa/Fulani	03(0.6)
Others	09(1.8)
Educational Qualification:	
No Formal Education	03(0.6)
Primary Education	33(6.4)
Secondary Education	87(17.0)
Tertiary Education	363(70.8)
Postgraduate	18(3.6)
Others	09(1.8)
Monthly Income:	
< N5,000 – N25,000	82(16.0)
N26,000 – N46,000	112(21.8)
N47,000 – N67,000	150(29.2)
N68,000 – N108,000	120(23.4)
N109,000 – N129,000	21(4.1)
N130,000 above	28(5.5)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

The above table consists of the major demographic variables of the respondents drawn from the population for this study. It is noteworthy, that these variables are very sacrosanct when considering reasons or causes of conflict among married people in Nigeria with reference to Ekiti state.

Disagreement between Married Couples

Table 2: Opinion on disagreement among Couples in Ekiti (n=513)

Do Husband and Wife have Disagreements?			Should Husband and Wife have disagreement?		
Option	Frequency	Percentage	Option	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	475	92.0	Yes	204	39.8
No	32	7.0	No	302	58.9
Don't Know	06	1.0	Don't Know	07	1.3
Total	513	100.0	Total	513	100.0

Source: Fieldwork INPUT, 2023.

Table 2 focused on two main issues. That is, whether couples disagree and if they should have disagreement. To this end, 92.0% respondents said yes, husbands and wives do have disagreement but 7.0% said no. On the other hand, 58.9% said no, husbands and wives should not have disagreement while 39.8% of the respondents said yes they should. This simply connote that the functional compatibility and bond that exist between them does not stop them from disagreeing on any matter for better understanding of the marriage because conflict is inexorable among mankind. However, the management of disagreement among couples is the major bane of fleet of marital conflicts witness in most emerging economic communities especially in Nigeria.

Table 3: Causes of marital conflict among spouses in Ekiti

Causes of Marital Conflict	Strongly Agree 5	Agree 4	Indifference 3	Disagree 2	Strongly Disagree 1
Repeated Quarrels	206 36.0%	146 31.0%	21 3.5%	82 17.0	75 12.5
Spouse beating	207 34.5%	122 27.0%	27 4.5%	81 18.5	76 15.5%
Infidelity/extramarital affairs	285 47.0%	108 23.0%	26 6.0%	52 11.5%	42 12.0%
Religious differences	101 18.0%	201 33.5%	21 3.5%	104 29.0%	86 16.0%
Ethnic differences	76 16.0%	210 35.0%	11 3.0%	162 32.0%	64 14.0%
Illiteracy of spouse/Educational Gap	118 23.0%	210 35.0%	20 4.5%	112 22.0%	63 15.5%
Intrusion from extended family	162 31.5%	255 42.5%	27 4.5%	54 14.0%	25 7.5%
Infertility/bareness of either spouse	127 29.5%	213 35.5%	23 5.0%	104 19.0%	46 11.0%
Unemployment of either Spouse	140 30.0%	219 36.5%	14 4.0%	109 21.5%	31 8.0%
Sickness and other health problems	123 20.5%	210 35.0%	33 5.5%	107 24.5%	40 14.5%
Unfriendliness/lack of communication	207 34.5%	222 37.0%	10 4.5%	36 13.5%	38 10.5%
Lack of Trust/Keeping secrets	264 41.5%	162 32.0%	20 5.0%	42 11.5%	40 10.0%
Sorcery/witchcraft/cultism	101 28.5%	210 35.0%	10 7.0%	90 19.5%	15 10.0%
Poverty/severe lack	197 34.5%	213 35.5%	19 15.5%	63 15.5%	21 8.0%
Sexual deprivation	246 41.0%	186 31.0%	13 5.5%	51 13.5%	24 9.0%
Early Marriage	171 28.5%	177 29.5%	26 5.5%	92 21.5%	50 15.0%
Refusal of wives to submit to the Husband	255 42.5%	179 31.5%	20 5.0%	38 13.0%	21 8.0%
Addiction of Spouse	172 31.5%	234 39.0%	15 5.0%	71 16.0%	21 8.5%
Tension of work load	170 29.5	219 36.5%	23 5.5%	80 20.0%	21 8.5%
Differences of opinion	183 30.5%	210 35.0%	11 3.0%	55 17.5%	54 14.0%
Number and gender of children	123 20.5%	204 34.0%	20 4.5%	94 24.0%	62 17.0%
Age gap between you and spouse	117 19.5%	156 26.0%	20 4.5%	130 30.0%	70 20.0%

Source: Fieldwork INPUT, 2023.

The above table measured causes of marital conflict among married people in Ekiti.

The major causes of marital conflict among Ekiti people include repeated

quarrel (36.0%), infidelity/extramarital affairs 47.0%, Illiteracy of spouse/Educational gap (35.0%), Unemployment of either spouse (36.5%), Unfriendliness/lack of communication (37.0%), 35.5% Poverty/severe lack, Refusal of wives to submit to the Husband (42.5%), 36.5% Tension of work load (Odhiambo et al, 2013). However, what cause marital conflict in a particular family might not be capable enough to cause marital conflict in another family. A critical look at the above table showed that infidelity/extra-marital marital affairs are the main causes of marital conflicts among couples in Ekiti-State. This supports Tang and Curran (2012) position that marital discord grows out of differences in socialization of spouses. It is also important to note that wives want their husbands to help with childcare and domestic chores because they now find themselves in paid employment which challenge traditional role expectations and greatly have contributed to conflict in marriages (Cerrato, and Cifre, 2018).

Table 4: Experienced marital conflict (n= 513)

Option	Frequency (n,%)
Yes	273(48.5)
No	210(35.0)
Don't Know	12(2.0)
Total	513(100.0)

Source: Fieldwork INPUT, 2023.

From table 4, 48.5% said yes, they have experience marital conflict, 35.0% said no while 2.0% said don't know. From the above, it showed that apart from some of the respondents that shared or give information about marital conflict among couples, almost 50.0% of the respondents gave their personal experience of marital conflict between them and their spouses. To corroborate this finding, Odhiambo et al, (2013), found out that about 81% of these respondents claimed they knew spouses who still stayed within abusive marriages. It means truly there are couples living in marital conflicts.

Table 5: Frequency of marital conflict experience (n= 513)

Option	Frequency (n,%)
Very Often	72(12.0)
Often	71(11.8)
Not Often	45(7.5)
Once a while	168(28.0)
Total	513(100.0)

Source: Fieldwork INPUT, 2023.

Table 5 is on the prevalence of marital conflict among couples in Ekiti, 28.0% confirmed that marital conflict happen once a while, 12.0% said very often, 11.5% very often while only 7.5% experience marital conflict not often.

Table 6: Effects of conflict on marriages among Ekiti people

Option	Yes	No	Don't Know	Total	
				F	P (%)
Don't talk to each other for sometimes	429 71.5%	150 25.0%	21 3.5%	513	100.0%
Children suffer care	339 56.5%	231 38.5%	30 5.0%	513	100.0%
Money for housekeep is withdrawn	363 60.5%	189 31.5%	48 8.0%	513	100.0%
We deny each other sex	420 71.5%	150 25.0%	30 5.0%	513	100.0%
We stop eating together	363 60.5%	210 35.0%	27 4.5%	513	100.0%
We stop praying together	354 59.0%	216 36.0%	30 5.0%	513	100.0%
Keep to self/keeping a distance from spouse	387 64.5%	186 31.0%	27 4.5%	513	100.0%
Keep away from the house or stay out late	312 52.0%	237 39.5%	51 8.5%	513	100.0%
Separation or divorce	270 45.0%	258 43.0%	72 12.0%	513	100.0%

Source: Fieldwork INPUT, 2023.

Table 6 measures the effects of conflict on marriages. The above table displayed that 71.5% said yes, couples don't talk to each other for sometimes during conflict, 56.5% said children suffer care, 60.5% said money for

housekeep is withdrawn and stop eating together, 64.5% said keep to self/keeping a distance from spouse while 45.0% said yes, separation or divorce, (Ming Lo, Chen, Qiqi Chen, and Ko-Ling, 2023; Ali, P.A., McGarry, and Maqsood, 2022).

Discussion of findings

The concept of conflict is a global phenomenon. It is as old as society itself. Literatures from different scholars confirmed that conflict is inescapable/or inevitable among mankind (Omage, 2014). That is, it is a thing people cannot do without. Therefore, the need for critical and scholarly studying of conflict across human status is sacrosanct in order to have a good understating of misunderstanding and to educate the general public on what conflict is all about and its resolution techniques. Also, of importance is the devastating effect of conflict on all the stakes especially when conflict is not properly managed (Buckwell, 2010). The home is the first station of every child through family. No matter the nature of love that exists between husband and wife or knitted they cannot live forever without experiencing some level of crisis. Consequently, couples should be exposed to acquiring modern day strategies/or techniques of managing marital conflicts in this 21st Century. From the demographic statistics of this study, it revealed that over 80.0% of the respondents falls within <20 – 50 years while only 18.0% were from 51 years and above. The implication of this suggests that the respondents were practically young. Their knowledge of managing or handling marital crisis is likely to be nothing to none. That explains the relevance of this research in order to reduce to the barest minimum the incessant cases of marital conflict globally, especially in developing nations like Nigeria (Amadi et al, 2014).

It is noteworthy that the causes of marital conflict are very many such that the causes of marital conflict in a household differ from another household. Also, the causes of marital conflict in developed nations are quite different from what brings about marital conflict in developing countries like Nigeria (Odhiambo et al, 2013). The overwhelming effect of marital conflict cannot be overemphasized. All the stakeholders share heavily from the effects especially women and mostly the children. This is because the man and the woman can decide to remarry should the marriage collapsed and the

children will be distributed to available members of either the man's family or both families as the case may be. No matter the decision taking, the children are not at liberty anywhere they are different from their biological parents. A Yoruba adage says, "Oju oloju ko le jo oju eni". Meaning, someone else's eyes cannot be a person's particular eyes. Marital conflict should be given urgent and necessary attention.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is true that conflict is inexorable. Hence, married couples cannot do without conflict if the marriage must last as planned or proposed from the beginning. This will enable the couples to know and understand themselves very much better and also both of them will be able to take good care of their children wholistically. However, if the above goals must be attained in any marriage, both couples must learn, know and applied the principles of conflict resolution or management in marriages. So that anytime conflict arises between couples, they will know how best to handle it in order not to degenerate into destructive conflict which affect most marriages in this present time.

Recommendation

Within the context of this study, the following recommendation is advanced:

- i. The need for constant conflict workshop especially on the management of conflict is very important for married people.
- ii. Couples should learn to tolerate themselves all the time no matter what it may be,
- iii. From the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the religious leaders especially Christians and people in authority (educational status) should always teach their members and followers respectively on how to manage marital conflict since it is inevitable.
- iv. Actors should always remember the consequences of marital conflict especially on women and their children

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