

Relationship between personality factors and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in Abuja Municipal Area Council FCT Abuja

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between personality factors and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in (AMAC) Federal Capital Territory Abuja. Two research questions and corresponding hypotheses were raised to guide this study. The personality factors such as educational qualification and length of marriage were the focus of this study. Samples of a hundred respondents consisting of 50 young and aged married couples, selected using the purposive sampling technique. The research questions were analysed using Pearson Product Moment correlation while the hypotheses were tested using the significance of Pearson (r) at 0.05 level of significance using t-test. The findings revealed that there is a significant relationship; between educational qualification and conflict resolution strategies of married people, also; between the length of marriage and conflict resolution strategies of married people. The study recommended that couples to be should get to understand each other in the area of likes and dislikes, ideologies and personality make-ups.

Keywords: Personality factors, marital conflict resolution strategies and spouses.

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1. Introduction

Personality factors are those human traits that help to distinguish one person from another. Each human being different from one another because of the personal attributes (factors or characteristics) that are an individual's personal attributes, which help to define him or her in broad terms. Ability to tolerate is assumed, dependent on an individual's personal character, as two individuals are not alike. As Nwobi (2005) noted that couples' background factors (or personal characteristics) which include the age of marriage (or length of marriage), academic qualification, income and number of children, type of marriage and type of family have a significant impact on the couple's ability to tolerate one another. She further noted that these personal characteristics influence the marital adjustment of couples in combination with the couple's personality characteristics. No two individuals are alike hence; we have individual differences that make us as individual to behave the way we do. Marriage as revealed in the bible (Genesis 2:18–25) is God ordained, as a relationship between man and woman for companionship and procreation. Dalla (2008) saw it as a legal union of a man and woman for cohabitation and often procreation. This accepted way of life requires much from spouses to sustain the marriage from collapsing, which ideally should be a lifelong agreement between them. Ocho (2006) in her view asserted that marriage is a social process whereby a man and a woman agree to live together as husband and wife for the rest of their lives in the presence of at least two witnesses. According to Sholfer and Shoben (2006), marital relationships experience crisis and conflicts that sometimes result in divorce, separation, broken homes, violence against women or men, child neglect and several other devastating effects of intra-marital conflicts. Despite the fact that couples are aware of the intimate contract they sign while going into marriage and the implications of this contract to their lives, they encounter challenges that they sometimes cannot handle. The survival of such marriages largely depends on how effective the couples are in managing their marital relationship. According to Encyclopedia.com, marital conflict occurs when the needs and desires of spouses diverge and are thus incompatible. These conflicts could be exhibited in verbal and non-verbal forms like fighting, quarrelling, malice keeping and so on. Tunner (2006) stated that marital conflict resolution is important because it prevents marital conflicts from degenerating into a total collapse of the marriages and abuse of children from such marriages. It also ensures that none of the parties in the conflicts will have his or her self-image damaged. The aim of any marital conflict resolution is to minimise misunderstanding and ensure cordial relationship between the couples. Ability to tolerate is assumed to be dependent on an individual's personal character, as two individuals are not alike. Oputa (2003) asserts that marital conflict resolution involves persuasion, dialogue, tolerance, co-operation and mutual understanding. Conflict resolution does not involve the use of verbal or physical force. It does not involve the use of coercion, antagonism, competition and avoidance. All parties involved in family disputes or marital conflicts, must have mutual respect for each other and should address issues and principles involved in the conflicts. The question this study addresses is whether these personal factors have a relationship with the marital conflict resolution strategies employed by married people in solving mutual conflicts. Based on this, the researcher is interested in finding out the relationship between personality factors and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in the Abuja Municipal Area Council (AMAC) Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja.

1.1. Statement of the problem

In an attempt to resolve marital conflicts, some couples employed different wrong strategies; such strategies could be as a result of their experiences in life. Environmental factors play an important role in who an individual is which eventually affects how he or she handles the issues of life, including marital issues. In the light of the above, the researcher tends to find out how educational qualification and length of marriage affects marital conflict resolution. Higher educational qualification could help couples to resolve marital issues better. Years of marital experiences can also help to resolve marriage issues. Personality traits like calmness, aggression, tolerance, respect for others and their opinions or otherwise could make or mar resolution of conflicts in marriage. In recent times, there is an increase

in divorce cases and separation, which indicates that resolving marital conflicts is becoming very difficult among couples. Chioma (2020) revealed in her statistical research that in the FCT High Court, there have been over 2,000 divorce cases filed between 2019 and early 2020, with an average of 30 cases being entertained every day. The FCT High Court has dissolved 200 marriages in the last year, and there were over 4,000 cases filed in FCT Abuja within the first two months of the year 2020 alone. As a result of the above account, the researcher looked into the relationship between personality factors and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja.

1.2. Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study generally was to find out the relationship between personality factors and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja. Specifically, the study sought to:

- I. find out the relationship between educational qualification of spouse and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja.
- II. investigate the relationship between length of marriage and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja.

1.3. Research question

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

- I. What is the relationship between educational qualification and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja?
- II. What is the relationship between length of marriage and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja?

1.4. Research hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance to guide this study.

H01: There is no significant relationship between educational qualification of spouse and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja.

H02: There is no significant relationship between length of the marriage of spouses and marital conflict resolution strategies among spouses in AMAC FCT Abuja.

1.5. Significance of the study

The study would be of immense benefit for married couples and intended couples. The findings of this study would increase the knowledge of couples in handling marital conflicts. It would also help couples experiencing conflicts in their marriage to engage appropriate strategies in solving their conflicts. The intended couples would benefit from the study by taking steps to find out the compatibility and the incompatibility that could exist before marriage and seek counselling before finally contracting the marriage.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theory of marital conflict: the social learning theory model

The Social Learning Theory Model was propounded by Bandura (1977). The theory assumes that when conflicts result in any marriage, it is the responsibility of both husband and wife. It proposed

that when conflicts arose in a marriage, the couples who are in interaction have to be blamed. What this implies is that the root cause of the problem may be from friends, peer groups, neighbours, colleagues in the same religion or from in-laws.

The theory equally proposes that when a marriage fails to function effectively, the cause may be traced from the parents where parents were models to their children. This is because people learn through imitation. The tendency is that, after imitation, the partner, who acquires such behaviour, tries to exhibit the behaviour in his or her marriage, and there is a likelihood that it may not be acceptable by the other partner. This may result in conflict.

Based on the above, the social learning theory model stipulates that marital conflict results from the interaction of couples as well as the influence of significant others in their life. Their action or activities are a product of their interaction with the environment as well as the behaviour of the individuals/couples. The theory emphasises imitation as a major means of learning and when one of them exhibits such learnt negative behaviour, there is every tendency that the other might not accept it; this will result in a conflict.

2.2. Concept of marital conflict

Conflicts are bound to emanate from marriages and can arise when a misunderstanding is the order of the day between spouses. In some families, especially the illiterate or poor families, they understand marriage as the avenue for baby-making as the pre-requisites of a peaceful home. Homes, where there is childlessness, may breed marital conflicts. Marital conflicts refer to difficult relationships experienced by husband and wife in their marriage. Nwoye (2001) found that a conflict in a marriage refers to dissensions between marital partners over values, beliefs, mores and behaviours that make up the structure of the nuclear unit. In other words, marital conflict is a negative interaction in marriage, which can be verbal, non-verbal or both in which the husband and the wife aim to neutralise, injure and disgrace each other.

Marital instability (conflict) is the failure of husband and wife to perform their role obligations in marriage. Instability can be equated to disorganization and perceived unstable marriage.

Marital conflict can be referred to as marital disruption, low marital quality and less frequently desertion, which affects the stability of marriage (Alan & Johnson, 2013). Marital crises can be described as a period or situation in the marriage which requires some adjustment so that harmony in marriage relationships can be restored. A marital crisis can come from either within or outside the family. In addition, many ordinary situations can often develop into crisis when the ability to deal with its demands is not there.

Marital conflict can be both internal and external. According to Lock and Thomas (2011), studies in marital conflict demonstrated that much overt conflict is a symbol of some underlying tension in an area of behaviour than the one in which the overt is manifested. In the same line, Saxton (2002) stated that there are two categories of marital conflict: internal and external. Internal to him is when the two opposing needs that produce the conflict are felt by one person only but the conflict affects the couple in their relationship. While it is external when there are two opposing needs between the couples, one person wants what the other does not want. Nwoye (2001) opined that conflict may be centred on any or all conceivable areas of interaction in marriage relationship such as economic, leisure, child rearing, decision making, role demand, religion, social activities, sex relation, lack of communication, extra-marital affairs among others. A failure in a marital relationship is an indication of the presence of marital conflicts.

2.3. Marital conflict resolution strategies

Conflict occurs in every marriage. What often distinguishes a happier marriage from a less happy marriage is how the conflict is resolved. Some couples never actually resolve conflict. Instead, the conflict just seems to go away with time; however, it is certainly somewhere under the surface that breeding resentment will usually come up again in the future. Some couples insist they have no conflicts. In this case, one person usually gives in to the other and not complaining about it; however, the person giving in will usually have problems at some point, such as depression or anxiety. There are so many other ways that couples handle conflicts, some healthy and some not. Resolution of conflict involves talking (verbal and non-verbal) and cooperation (not avoidance, competition, antagonism or coercion). Marriage enrichment programme as a strategy for marital conflict resolution was designed specifically as an instructional group-counselling package. The programme was designed to improve not only marital adjustment but also other marriage-related skills including interpersonal skills, decision making and programming skill as different techniques employed in marital negotiation skills could also be improved by the programme (Emment & Emment, 2004). Gurin, Joseph and Sheila (2010) have advocated that personal involvement in one's problem has been found to be positively related to marital happiness. A crucial element in a healthy relationship is where communication is effective. An effective communication gives marital partners the opportunity to share their problems, anxiety and concerns with each other. As noted by Shyrook (2009), the possibility of couples living happily forever depends on their avoidance of negative factors, which tend to disrupt the home and also on the more positive technique of making provision for those customs and attributes which strengthen the matrimonial bond. Bornstein and Bornstein (2006) posit that communication deficits occur among couples during attempted conflict resolution discussions. They, however, suggested that whatever the origin of the deficit, appropriate training in the acquisition of skilful responses would help in developing more effective communication behaviour for couples. Accordingly, Sanni and Eneh (2008) recommended marriage counselling typifying psychodynamic that are treating marital problems based on early childhood experience, the co-joint family therapeutic approach (bringing family's communication, network into play). It is hoped, however, that if a sour relationship becomes irresolvable by the couples, a genuine effort could be made to reach a professional helper, who is supposed to help couples to recover or to salvage their failing marriage by helping them discover the toxins in their union and to learn those missing interpersonal skills they need, to enrich and improve the emotional situation in their marriage (Nwoye, 2001).

2.4. Empirical studies on personal factors as correlates of marital conflict resolution strategies

Multivariate studies have, however, suggested a variable such as communication, commitment, emotional maturity, age of an individual, length of marriage or companionship as indicative of judgement of couples in the marriage. Rabbin and Rahar (2015) investigated the similarities and differences between older and younger couples and between couples of different ages and cultures. Results showed that the older couples had significantly lower levels of distress, less desire for change in their marriage and better perceptual accuracy of the changes desired by their partners than younger couples did across culture. Kemp (2004) found that those whose marriage functioned well are characterised as having self-esteem and equalitarian role expectations attempting to promote growth in each other, and agreeing on the goals of marriage. In another study, Adeloje (2003) examined some antecedent pre-marital correlates to marital stability: A case study of women in Federal College of Education, where the result of the study showed that age at marriage, graduation and establishment in a vocation before marriage were positively correlated with marital stability.

The level of education attainment of couples determines their success in marriage. Bernard (2012) explained that the proportion of men who have extramarital relations is more with couples with less education than with couples who are highly educated.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Design

A co-relational research design was adopted because it involves the determination of the degree to which the variables under study were related (Anderson, 2008). This is essential, as the study did not involve manipulation of the independent variables. In addition, the method gives room for the collection of information from a large sample size and for testing the relationship between personality factors and marital conflict resolution strategies.

3.2. Population

The population of this study consisted of married couples living in AMAC FCT Abuja. It includes both young and aged couples.

3.3. Sample and sampling technique

The study sample includes 50 married couples, 50 males and 50 females residing in the different districts of AMAC FCT Abuja. The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select the sample from various levels and types of couples. The respondents were married males and females of various educational qualifications with different length of time of marriage. In all, a sample of 100 respondents was purposively selected for the study.

3.4. Instrument

Self-developed questionnaire was the instrument used in this study. It was divided into two sections A, made up of Bio-data of the respondents and section B, which consisted of items developed according to the variables in the research topic. The respondents were asked to indicate their agreement or disagreement. A 4-point Likert rating scale was used to score the respondents' responses. The weight was: i. Strongly Agree (SA); ii. Agree (A); iii. Disagree (D); iv. Strongly Disagree (SD).

3.5. Validity of instrument

The research instrument was validated by marriage counselling experts and other experts in the Guidance and Counselling. They examined the suitability of content, logical sequence and appropriateness of the terms used. Necessary corrections on the grammatical expressions made as they also ensured that the items tested what they were supposed to test hence the instrument was judged valid for the study.

3.6. Reliability of the instrument

The reliability of the instrument was established after a test-retest study was carried out to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. A sample of 10 couples was randomly selected to test the reliability of the instrument. The instrument was given to the respondents as a re-test after 4 weeks interval as a re-test among the same couples. These sets of couples were not among the actual respondents that were used for the study. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained using Cronbach's alpha test; therefore, the instrument was deemed adequate for the study.

4. Data analysis

The tables below present the data analysis of the data collated from the respondents' responses.

4.1. Results

Table 1. Frequency and percentages distribution of respondents' according to educational qualification and length of marriage

Edu. qualification	Frequency	%	Length of marriage	Frequency	%
SSCE	10	10	1–5	8	8
NCE/OND	18	18	6–10	12	12
B.Sc./HND	37	37	11–15	29	29
M.Sc.	30	30	16–20	15	15
Ph.D.	5	5	20 and above	36	36
Total	100	100	Total	100	100

Table 1 under Educational qualification, (10) 10% of respondents had SSCE, (18) 18% NCE/OND, (37) 37% B.Sc./HND, (30) 30% M.Sc. and (5) 5% Ph.D. While the Length of marriage showed (8) 8% of respondents have been married between 1 and 5 years, (12) 12% between 6 and 10 years, (29) 29% between 11 and 15 years, (15) 15% between 16 and 20 years and (36) 36% 20 and above years.

Table 2. Research question 1: relationship between educational qualification and conflict resolution strategies of married people?

Variable	Mean	SD	N	r	Interpretation
Educational qualification	63.27	9.04	100	0.44	Significant
Resolution strategies	16.48	2.62			

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N = Number of respondents; r = Pearson coefficient.

The data presented in Table 2 provides an answer to research question 1, which shows a significant positive correlation between educational qualification and conflict resolution strategies among couples ($r = -0.44$, $p < 0.05$). The value of correlation coefficient represented in Table above revealed a positive correlation between the two variables. This result shows that the educational qualification of married couples is significantly related to marital conflict resolution strategies among married couples.

Table 3. Research question 2: relationship between length of marriage and conflict resolution strategies of married people?

Variable	Mean	SD	N	r	Interpretation
Length of marriage	60.89	9.04	100	0.28	Significant
Resolution strategies	56.91	8.59			

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

N = Number of respondents; r = Pearson coefficient.

Data processing in Table 3 provides an answer to research question 2, which shows that the length of marriage mean score is 60.89 while resolution strategies mean score is 56.91; this implies a positive significant correlation between Length of marriage and resolution strategies ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$). The value of correlation coefficient represented in Table 3 revealed a high correlation between the two variables. This result shows that the length of marriage of married couples is significantly related to the marital conflict resolution strategies among married couples.

Table 4. Research Hypothesis 1: T-test analysis of the relationship between educational qualification and marital conflict resolution strategies of couples

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Df	t-cal	t-table
Male	63.27	9.04	100	99	2.11	1.97
Female	16.49	2.62				

$p < 0.05$.

The result of Table 4 provides an answer for hypothesis one that the t-calculated of 2.11 is greater than the t-critical table value of 1.97 at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the result, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between educational qualification and marital conflict resolution strategies of couples was rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between the educational qualification of married couples and marital conflict resolution strategies of couples. This implies that the educational qualification of married couples is related to the marital conflict resolution strategies of couples.

Table 5. Research Hypothesis 2: T-test analysis of the relationship between length of marriage and marital conflict resolution strategies of couples

Variable	Mean	SD	N	Df	t-cal	t-table
Male	60.89	9.04	100	99	2.09	2.00
Female	56.97	8.59				

$p < 0.05$.

The result in Table 5 provides an answer to hypothesis 2, which shows that the t-calculated of 2.09 is greater than the t-critical of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. Based on the result, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between the length of marriage and marital conflict resolution strategies of couples was rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between the length of marriage of married couples and marital conflict resolution strategies of couples. This implies that the length of marriage of married couples is related to the marital conflict resolution strategies of couples.

5. Discussion of findings

One of the findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between the educational qualification of married couples and conflict resolution strategies. The finding is in collaboration with Bernard (2012) which stated that the level of educational attainment of couples determines their success in marriage. The findings showed us that the proportion of men who have extramarital relations is more with couples with less education than couples who are highly educated.

Second, the findings in this study state that there is a relationship between length and age of marriage with marital conflict resolution strategy. The result of the study by Rabbin and Rahar (2015) states that length and age of marriage have a significant influence on the marital conflict resolution. This means that couples with longer years of marriage and older couples resolve their marital conflicts better than those of lesser years of marriage and younger couples.

6. Conclusion

All marriages experience conflict in different ways. The strategies used to resolve marital conflict makes the difference between marriage stability and marriage instability. Marriage creates the smallest units of the society that brings together different individuals that make up the society at large. The importance of marriage and its stability is very crucial to the stability of a society at large. The types of homes also influence the society hence employing workable strategies to resolve marital conflicts is imperative to happy homes and stable society. From the findings of this study, it has been shown that individuals involved in marriages have their distinct personalities which invariably affect their behaviour and actions even in marital relationships. The fact, therefore, remains that personality factors of couples is very crucial to a marriage relationship and couples should always consider that when going into a relationship and even after the marriage has been contracted. The increased rate in divorce and breaking of homes have shown that understanding the personality of couples would go a long way to reduce marriage breaking downs which affect the offspring of the marriages more and eventually reflect on the society.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, recommendations made are:

- i. Intended Couples to be should go through marriage counselling. A professional advice helps them to appreciate that being from different backgrounds, they need to learn and understand each other for them to be able to live together as husband and wife.
- ii. For a married couple, the sustenance of the stability of marriage should be on the base of understanding each other personality and learn to live with it or try to discuss the behaviour that causes disaffection within them. When this is done, they would be conscious of what they can do to please their parents and tolerate each other.
- iii. From the result of this study, it has been established that the length of marriage and educational qualification of the spouses have a significant relationship on marital conflict resolution. This implies that young couples have more conflicts in their marriages but with time their marriages would stabilise. In this regard, therefore, couples would try to seek counselling from marriage counsellors to get them through their troubling time. Marriage counselling helps couples to identify what causes disaffection within their marriage and proffers solution appropriate for them.
- iv. The government on its own part should provide avenues for married couples to be assisted to resolve marital conflicts amicably so as to prevent total breakdown of marriages. Other agencies like the churches and the mosques have significant roles to play in stabilising marriages through marriage counselling and consultations especially in relationship to their beliefs.

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