

## **CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES AMONG GUIDANCE COUNSELLORS IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE**

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### **Abstract**

*The present study examined conflict management strategies mostly adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State. The study used descriptive survey design and applied stratified and random sampling techniques to select 120 participants from the population of the study. An instrument tagged “Counsellors’ Roles in Conflict Management Questionnaire (CRCMQ)” was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was face validated by five seasoned lecturers. The instrument was also subjected to a split-half reliability test, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86 upon Chronbach Alpha statistical analysis. The data collected for the study were analysed using percentage, mean, standard deviation, rank order, and t-test. The three hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that counsellors have positive perceptions of their roles in conflict management, and the most perceived conflict management strategies among guidance counsellors in Kaduna State; are using of empathic understanding, open communication and application of counselling technique such as cognitive restructuring, and that there was significant difference in the respondents’ expressions based on gender, while no significant difference was noticed based on religion and mode of practice. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended among other things that; guidance and counselling practitioners should continue to make use of different counselling approaches such as; empathy, open*

*communication, and cognitive restructuring to manage conflict among parties that are involved in a conflict.*

**Keywords:** Counsellor, Role, Conflict Management, Expression, Practitioner, Kaduna State

### **Introduction**

Human relationship is naturally characterised by conflict which can arise in various contexts, including personal relationships, workplaces, and community settings. The term conflict has many definitions from different scholars and researchers but all pointed to almost the same meaning. The central meaning to this construct connotes, disagreement, discrepancy, friction or a state of tension that arises as a result of irreconcilable contradiction in, or clash of interest, values, beliefs and goals which leads to hostility or strained relationship between two or more parties. Abdulfattah and Yaser (2019) defined conflict as an antagonistic state of opposition, disagreement or incompatibility between two or more parties. The authors above maintained further that conflicts mostly happen as a result of interactions among interdependent people who might perceive that their interests are in one way or the other, inconsistently exist with each other.

According to Abdulrahim (2020), the word conflict was originally from a Latin word “confligere” which means to strike certain thing together and as it were, it had a physical rather than moral connotation, although the English word of it has both qualities. In the physical sense, it represents two or more different things that is; moving to occupy the same space at the same time, or the logical inconsistency and the process of solution being identical. For instance, the logical or rational inconsistency of two billiard balls occupying the same space at the same time is resolved by the conflict which results in their rolling to two different positions (Abdulrahim, 2020). The above author stressed further that a conflict emerges whenever two or more persons or group of persons seek to possess the same object, occupy the same space or the same exclusive position, play incompatible goals, or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes in particular situation.

Conflict exhibits people in multifarious dimensions such as; intra-personal conflict, inter-personal conflict, intra-group conflict among other categories of conflict. Generally speaking, conflicts develop over time with definable phases of occurrence. However, the course of a conflict can be divided into four distinct phases (that is; from phase 1 to phase IV). These are: latent phase (the early stage of its emergence); conscience phase (the stage at which both parties involved recognise its existence or become aware of it); action phase (both parties involved react in certain ways based on their perceptions or thoughts and feelings or emotions); and lastly, interaction phase (both parties involved interact with alternating conflict modes).

There are endless reasons while conflict arises among people. The Nigerians experiences

are peculiar to prevailing circumstances and literature have documented series of causes such as; religious intolerance, issue of political dominance, resource sharing, ethnicity among other causal factors. Egobueze (2021) affirmed that conflicts in Nigeria context can be better understood, when a critical examination of the origin and evolution of the people of Nigeria is established. Nigeria as a country, has an epic reservoir of history, characterized by several ethnic groups. An ethno-religious complex nation like Nigeria, with over 500 ethnic groups and over 500 languages being spoken by its people this nonetheless, is a potent ground for conflict among people.

Most of these ethnic groups are chauvinistic in nature, with unbridled primordial instincts which fuel crisis and disagreement among its constituents (Egobueze, 2021). The above source also stated that a nation is divided along the line of religion and ethnicity, with bigots that are sentimentally attached to their beliefs and wild interests for greediness and primitive accumulation and socio-economic exploitation of other groups which have made the people more divided among themselves and caused much hydra-headed conflict. Abdulrahim (2020) quoted Paul Bohannon in his work as follows:

“...society is impossible without conflict. But society is worse than impossible without the control of conflict”....

Going by the above quote, effective conflict management is therefore a vital tool for maintaining peace and tranquility among different set of people under any form of relationship. The term conflict management equally has varied definitions this is based on the field of study or the orientations of their users. Saqif and Anshori (2023) focused on group and defined conflict management as a factor system and organizational structure that supports group goals and improve group performance through learning and inspiration in the context of organizational improvement. Obona (2021) enlisted a number of mechanisms or strategies which are non-violent methods used to manage conflict in Nigeria these include; communication, collaboration, negotiation, conciliation, mediation, arbitration, adjudication, and education.

Wairisal (2022) highlighted key factors in the behavioural theory of conflict management and affirmed that there are three main approaches for conflict management behaviours, namely: collaboration, confrontation and accommodation. From the psychological point of view, conflict theory has three assumptions that is; human-beings are self-interested, the societies operate under a perpetual scarcity of resources and that, conflict is pervasive and unavoidable within and between social groups in any society.

Guidance and Counselling being at the centre of every human relationship, is of necessity to play a pivotal role in mediating and resolving conflicts among people, using various counselling strategies and techniques to facilitate effective communication, understanding and peaceful resolution of every matter that degenerates into conflict. However, effective conflict management skills are essential for promoting social cohesion and psychological well-beings

among people of diverse demographic characteristics which trained counsellors can instill in individuals or society at large.

Counsellors by their trainings and calling, are the professional individuals who have in-depth knowledge of psychological characteristics inherent in human natures through diverse counselling theories, counselling skills and techniques which can be applied to modify behaviours of individuals or groups to navigate through phases of conflict that arises in the course of relationship. Counsellors' roles are indeed plethora in this context, and they are applicable to all categories of people and situations. This is justified by the assertion made by a renowned professor of counselling psychology, Prof. Isaac Oludaisi Makinde in Idowu (2016) which stated that:

“.....Guidance and Counselling is based on the assumption that every individual in any given society has had, is having and will have one problem or the other that he or she alone could not solve.....”

The roles of guidance counsellors include but not limited to, ability to facilitate effective communication, fostering empathic understanding among people, and helping two or more parties to discover and understand the underlying factors in a hostile relationship. Living in peace and harmony among people of different interests remain the cornerstone of a prosperous society, in fact no society can develop without peace. This therefore makes a cardinal duty of trained counsellors through conflict management and preventive intervention. However, maintaining peace in society is a complex process and it involves many things.

According to Ghulum, Unsa, Sarfarz, Muhammed and Tooba (2023), to achieve an enduring peace in any society remains a difficult or herculean task that involves many activities or processes. The above source suggested that peaceful co-existence among people can be accomplished by a number of strategies and approaches such as diplomacy, mediation, conflict resolution and encouragement of flow communication and reconciliatory talk among conflicting parties. The authors in the above maintained further that the maintenance of peace is a task that involves all people in the society, as peace itself is a basic human ambition. Peace however, is a direct opposite of conflict and remains a multi-dimensional factor in the context of human relationship. There is point in arguing either Nigeria is experiencing conflict or not. The recent study conducted by Makinde, Olaoye and Alawode (2023) stated that conflict among people of Nigeria is something which needs to be urgently addressed.

In this context, guidance counsellors need to implore different counselling approaches such as client-centred, emotional regulation, deep relaxation, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), rational emotive therapy (REBT), and psychoanalysis among other therapeutic interventions to deal with conflict situations among people of Nigeria. However, the role of guidance counsellors in conflict management is particularly critical due to complexity of Nigeria's socio-political landscape. Kaduna State for example, has a diverse socio-cultural history. The state is known over the year for its ethno-religious tensions and conflict, which

poses challenges for guidance counsellors to apply appropriate counselling approaches at every level of relationship to guarantee peaceful co-existence among people. Moreover, understanding how professional counsellors in any region perceive counselling dimension to conflict management, will indeed provide valuable insights into the level of awareness of their responsibilities in this context.

Conflict in Kaduna State has become a consistent and reoccurring experience among its residents with different approaches used to tame its tiding waves seem to be ineffective enough. The need to look for alternative solutions such as counselling intervention is of great necessity. Various empirical studies have been conducted in relation to the variable of this study “conflict management” in the recent past for instance, Adewumi, Salami and Dogara (2021), Nwankwo (2010), Akinwale (2010), Obona (2021). However, it is crystal clear that previous studies to the best knowledge of researchers, left behind them certain gaps in terms of their locale, population, sample and timing which this study aimed to fill. Hence, this study investigated conflict management strategies, focusing specifically on the experiences and perceptions of guidance counsellors in Kaduna State, Nigeria. It also examined the moderating effect of gender, religion and mode of practice on the participants’ responses on the above subject matter.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study stood on the following objectives:

1. To find out the conflict management strategies mostly adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State, Nigeria.
2. To examine whether gender, religion and mode of practice of the respondents have moderating effect on their responses.

### **Research Question**

1. What are the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State, Nigeria?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested in this study:

- H0<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State, Nigeria based on gender.
- H0<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State, Nigeria based on religion.
- H0<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in managing conflict among people in Kaduna State, Nigeria based on mode of practice.

### **Methodology**

The present study employed descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey design allows the researchers to describe the opinion, characteristics, behaviours or attitude of the

respondents of their study which were selected from a fair large population in order to infer the outcome of their study on them. Hence, the descriptive design adopted for this study is considered appropriate for the study. However, one main research question was raised and answered in this study, while three null hypotheses were formulated and also tested. A researchers' design questionnaire with a title: "Conflict Management Strategies Questionnaire (CMSQ)" was used in this study. The instrument was face validated by five experts that is, senior lecturers in the fields of Peace and Strategic Studies, and Educational Psychology and Counselling. The CMSQ was also subjected to a Split-Half reliability test, and a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of 0.86 was got from the test. This result affirmed that the instrument used for this study is reliable.

The above mentioned instrument consisted of two sections that is; section A and B. The section A comprises demographic data of the respondents which include; gender, religion and type of practice. Section B on the other hand, consists of 10 structured items that explore responses on the roles of counsellors in conflict management. The section A of the instrument was scored using frequency counts and percentage, while sections B which was patterned on four Likert-type scale was scored as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points; Agree (A) = 3 points; Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point.

For decision making on the response of the participant either it is positive or negative, the above scores were added together and divided by four as follows:  $(1+2+3+4 = 10/4 = 2.5)$ . However, any score that is above 2.5 was considered as positive response while any score that is below it was regarded as positive response. The population for this study consisted of all guidance counsellors practicing in both private and public sector in Kaduna State. Their figure was put as 378 (Field Survey, 2023) from which a total sample size of 120 were selected to participate in the study using both the stratified and sample random techniques. The researchers employed both descriptive and inferential statistics for the data analysis. The demographic data were analysed by frequency count and percentage, research question was answered by mean and rank order and finally, the hypotheses were tested by t-test statistic under 0.05 level of significance. The data analysis was carried by the researchers using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25.

**Table 1:** Distributions of Participants’ Demographic Characteristics

N	Variables		Frequency	Percentage %
1.	Gender	Male	68	57.0
		Female	52	43.0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>
2.	Religion	Christianity	37	31.0
		Islam	83	69.0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>
3.	Mode of Practice	Private	34	28.0
		Public	86	72.0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 presents the participants’ demographic information. The table indicated that 120 participants involved in the study. 68 (57.0%) were male, while 52 (43.0%) were female participants hence, more than half (57.0%) of the participants were male. Regards to religion practice of the participants, only Christians and Muslims practitioners were reported. This indicated that 37 (31.0%) were Christians while 83 (69.0%) were Muslims. However, no participant was reported practicing African Traditional Religion (ATR) based on the result of the analysis. On the mode of practice adopted by the participants, 34 (28.0%) were practicing in the private sector, while 86 (72.0%) were in the public sector.

**Research Question 1:** What are the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State?

**Table 2:** Mean and Rank Order of Participants' Responses on the Conflict Management Strategies

S/N	Items:	Mean	SD	Rank Order
2.	Using empathic understanding to resolve conflict that arises among people	2.86	1.22	1 <sup>st</sup>
10.	Encourage open communication among parties involved	2.84	1.20	2 <sup>nd</sup>
5.	Apply appropriate counselling technique (e.g. cognitive restructuring) to change behaviour	2.83	1.99	3 <sup>rd</sup>
7.	To facilitate active listening among conflicting parties	2.80	1.96	4 <sup>th</sup>
3.	Apply collaborative problem-solving skills to resolve crisis among worrying parties	2.79	1.89	5 <sup>th</sup>
9.	Use appropriate standardized tests to establish genesis of conflict among people	2.77	1.77	6 <sup>th</sup>
1.	Using unconditional positive regards to resolve strained relationship structure	2.72	1.70	7 <sup>th</sup>
4.	Analysing communication styles among people	2.68		
8.	Setting of appropriate goals to stir up individual commitment	2.64	0.99	8 <sup>th</sup>
6.	Promoting personal responsibilities among people in conflict situation	2.62	1.72	9 <sup>th</sup>
			1.75	10 <sup>th</sup>
Overall Average Mean Score		2.76		

From Table 2, items 2, 10 and 5 with statements such as; using empathic understanding to resolve conflict among people, encourage open communication among parties involved, and apply appropriate counselling techniques (e.g. cognitive restructuring), and they were ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> respectively. The rank table on the other hand, indicated that items 4, 8 and 6 with statements such as; analysing communication styles among people, setting of appropriate goals to stir up individual commitment, and promoting personal responsibilities among people in conflict situation, make the least responded to items on the rank table and as such; they were ranked 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> respectively. The entire items on the rank order indicated positive responses from the respondents based on the fact that none of the 10 presented items falls short of 2.5 mean score which was initially set as the benchmark for making decision.



**Hypotheses Testing**

In the present study, three null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance and their results are presented as follows:

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on gender.

**Table 3:** Mean, SD and t-test Result Showing Difference in Respondents’ Responses Based on Gender.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value	Decision
Male	68	32.78	3.20	118	2.33*	1.98	0.021	Rejected
Female	52	28.86	3.89					

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that for a df of 118, the calculated t-value of 2.33 is greater than the critical t-value of 1.98, with a corresponding p-value of 0.021 which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is significant difference in the in conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors based on gender. Hence, the hypothesis one which stated that there is no significant difference in conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on gender was rejected. This implies that male and female guidance counsellors differ in their responses on the strategies used for conflict management in the society.

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on religion.

**Table 4:** Mean, SD and t-test Result Showing Difference in Participants’ Responses Based on Religion.

Religion	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value	Decision
Christianity	37	24.66	6.40	118	1.83	1.98	0.069	Accepted
Islam	82	30.45	7.68					

Table 4 shows that for a df of 118, the calculated t-value of 1.83 is less than the critical t-value of 1.98, with a corresponding p-value of 0.069 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This result suggests that there is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors based on religion. Hence, the hypothesis two which stated that there is no significant difference in conflict management

strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on religion was accepted. This result implies further that both Christian and Muslim guidance counsellors in Kaduna State were not different in their responses on conflict management strategies that they used among people in the society.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on mode of practice.

**Table 5:** Mean, SD and t-test Result Showing Difference in Participants’ Responses Based on Mode of Practice.

Mode of Practice	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t	Crit. t	p-value	Decision
Private	34	22.80	7.90	118	1.95	1.98	0.052	Accepted
Public	86	30.92	10.60					

Table 5 shows that for a df of 118, the calculated t-value of 1.95 is less than the critical t-value of 1.98, with a corresponding p-value of 0.052 which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. This result indicates that there is no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors based on the mode of practice. Hence, the hypothesis three which stated that there is no significant difference in conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on the mode of practice was accepted. This implies further that the respondents were not differing in their responses on the conflict management strategies adopted by guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on mode of practice.

**Discussion**

The first result of this study suggested that counsellors’ roles in conflict management are well perceived among guidance counsellors in Kaduna State and the common roles as expressed by them are; using empathic understanding to resolve conflict among people, encourage open communication among parties involved, and apply appropriate counselling techniques (For example, cognitive restructuring counselling technique). These results supported the previous findings of Olga (2019); Michal, Shiri and Shiri (2022), who discovered in their studies that empathy is used by counsellors to manage conflict, and Oachesu (2016) and Amaka and Amaka (2016) studies also resolved that communications are used to manage conflicts among people, and finally, Frey, Buhler and Ruppert (2022) whose study affirmed that cognitive approach was used by counsellors to manage conflicts.

The hypothesis one tested in this study revealed that there was difference in the expression of the respondents on the conflict management strategies adopted by the guidance counsellors in Kaduna State on the basis of gender. This finding supported the findings of

Dildar and Amjad (2017) whose study revealed a difference in the conflict management strategies used by male and female individuals. This results however, contradicts the findings of Aigboje and Uwaifor (2013) who noticed no difference in their respondents' views on conflict management strategies. The second hypothesis tested revealed that there was no significant difference in the strategies adopted by the guidance counsellors in conflict management in Kaduna State based on religion. This finding was aligned with the finding of the study of Ettang and Ogunnubi (2018) who had earlier discovered that Christians and Muslims were not different in their approaches to maintain peace in Plateau State. Lastly, the hypothesis three tested also revealed that there was no significant difference in the conflict management strategies adopted by the guidance counsellors in Kaduna State based on the mode of their practice. This finding was in tandem with the finding of the study of Din, Khan, Rehman and Bibi (2011) whose study unveiled that professionals in both the public and private universities were not differ in their strategies of managing conflict in their respective institutions. The findings of the present study therefore build on the already existing knowledge and make available new facts on the subject matter as presented above.

### **Implication for Peaceful Co-existence among People**

The adoption of counselling approaches to mediate among people in conflict situation cannot be overemphasized. Traditionally, counselling is at centre of human relationship. Counsellors by their calling are professionals in all sectors of human relationship and they are so trained to facilitate adaptive relationship among people not only during this period, but after the conflict through post counselling feedback effect. Counselling applies long lasting approaches to resolve all matters that result into conflict or crises among people and is striving towards re-engineering relationship into productive type without reducing quality of life from either side of the conflicting parties. Applying counselling approaches to manage conflict among people has proved a surpassing results among other methods used in the same situations.

### **Conclusion**

From the results of this study, it was concluded that male and female counsellors differ in their responses on the roles of counsellors in conflict management. It is also concluded that gender has moderating effect on the respondents' responses on the subject matter, while both religion and mode of practice did have such moderating effect.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. Guidance and counselling practitioners should make use of different counselling approaches such as, empathy, open communication, and cognitive restructuring to manage conflict among parties that involved in a conflict.
2. The female practitioners should be encouraged to apply appropriate counselling approaches to resolve conflict like their male counterparts.

3. Counsellors irrespective of their religious affiliations should help people resolve their conflicts using counselling based interventions.
4. The practitioners in the field of guidance and counselling irrespective of their mode of practice, should be deeply involved in conflict management using evident based counselling therapeutic approaches.

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