

CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILL TRAINING ON PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AMONG SPOUSES OF CATHOLIC CHURCHES IN ABIA AND IMO STATES

Ijeoma, A. UCHENDU PhD

Ijeomauchendu32@gmail.com

+2348064018833

Department of Guidance and Counselling,

College of Education,

Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State

Abstract

Couple relationships are described as having an intimate nature that is defined by close interdependence, continuous interaction, and reciprocally reinforcing strong feelings. Most of the married spouses in the Catholic, Orthodox, and Pentecostal churches have serious conflicts in spite of regular church going and prayers for harmony and love. The current study therefore examined the effectiveness of conflict resolution skill training on peaceful co-existence among the spouses of the Catholic Churches in Abia and Imo State. Quasi-experimental design was used. Conflict Resolution Skill Questionnaire (CRSQ) was used to collect responses from the participants. 46 spouses (23 men, 23 women) received six weeks of structured CRST. Outcomes were measured with the Marital Peaceful Coexistence Questionnaire (MPCQ, $\alpha = 0.72$) at pre-test, post-test, and four-week follow-up. The tool was pilot tested among 20 SPOUSES, and Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.79 was utilized to test the results. To answer the research question, means and standard deviation descriptive statistics were employed to provide data analysis and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) utilized to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Results showed improved peaceful coexistence (pre-test $M = 2.10$; post-test $M = 3.42$) and willingness for conflict resolution in the experimental group (pre-test $M = 2.05$; post-test $M = 3.50$), and the effects were still sustained during the follow-up period ($M = 3.35$ and 3.40 , respectively). ANCOVA confirmed statistically significant group differences (post-test $F(1,43) = 37.59$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2 = 0.46$), whereas the control condition showed no substantive change ($M \approx 2.10$ – 2.15). It is concluded that CRST significantly improves marital harmony and recommends inclusion of it in premarital counselling programmes. Recommendations are institutionalizing CRST in religious organizations, government-funded community workshops, and culturally adapted expansions for diverse populations.

Keywords: Counselling, Conflict Resolution, Skill Training, Communication Problems and Spouses.

Introduction

Marriage is a sacrament that promotes companionship, love, and harmony for husband and wife. It provides emotional support, stability, and happiness at its best. In the recent past, though, most marriages have been marred by conflict, dissatisfaction, and unhappiness. Most families today are not equipped to manage marriage conflicts amicably because of inadequate communication skills and the absence of good marriage counselling. Disagreement is a natural process in any relationship, and resolving it involves both of them listening and honoring each other's views and finding common ground.

Gottman (2012) argues that love alone cannot sustain a marriage; inability to forgive and metabolize conflicts can lead to critical breakdowns in relationships. Baucom, Shoham, Mueseer, Daiubo, and Stickle (2013) assert that all spouses experience differences, yet some perceive these differences as incompatible, thereby leading to marital instability.

The majority of SPOUSES marry assuming their marriage will automatically work out by yet they spend more time planning weddings than preparing for communication on how to make their marriage successful (Farooq & Butt, 2012).

Marriage entails intimate interaction, whereby a spouse affects and gets emotionally connected to the other, resulting in long-term interaction and reliance. Marital quality may, however, be affected by issues like anxiety, extramarital sex, frustration, and mistrust, thus driving conflicts (Abu, 2015). Effective communication is one of the most significant determinants in solving marital problems. Differences are inevitable in everyday life, but spouses with volatile relationship styles are more tolerant of disagreements compared to those who suppress conflicts. Spouses must practice empathy and understanding to maintain a healthy emotional climate. Finch man and Beach (2014) note that spouses must avoid becoming stubborn when attempting to persuade their spouses, as flexibility in conflict resolution results in harmony in the relationship.

Marital disagreements also escalate as spouses encounter practical challenges like budgeting, child care, and career growth. Although underlying differences like value and communication pattern can be present, surface problems like money, sex, and household chores tend to be deep-rooted sources of conflict (Obidoa, 2013). The perception of disparity in these are as causes emotional distance between the spouses, resulting in over-withdrawal from each other, which further destabilizes the marriage relationship. Stability is one of the pillars of marriage. Sakotic-Kurbalija, as quoted in Islami (2017), believes there is a range of stability and instability in marriages. Stability, however, is not a constant quality—it changes over time based on how the spouses handle problems. The growing rate of marriage conflict today is primarily a result of the decline in fundamental human values and social norms, and thus profound changes in marriage and family institutions. A good marriage enables SPOUSES to manage conflict in a positive manner, be happy, and create an emotionally supportive atmosphere. Conflict-resolving partners who remain optimistic are more likely to

enjoy healthy relationships, whereas partners who allow conflicts to persist may become resentful and disillusioned (Fincham & Beach, 2014).

Emotional maturity is required to ensure a healthy marriage. Thornton (2012), as cited in Yohanna and Joseph (2020), warns that persistent marital issues assume repetitive, unproductive cycles that can spiral out of control if unchecked. Ironically, releasing over-control can enhance relational satisfaction. Individuals with persistent grievances or control problems may seek individual therapy to address underlying issues (Gottman, 1999). Additionally, some conflicts can never be completely resolved, and SPOUSES need to master the art of compromise and negotiation when no solution is readily forthcoming.

While each couple varies in their attitudes (Orubo, 2015), the use of effective conflict resolution skills can promote long-term relational wellness. Such skills involve developing a cooperative spirit, promoting interpersonal development, understanding the causes of conflict, using active listening, and seeking solutions together. The main goals of conflict resolution in marriage are to enhance partnerships, establish trust, and enhance mutual understanding.

Conflict resolution training, as promoted by John Gottman (1999) and Susan Heitler (2001), provides step-by-step procedures for terminating disputes in a positive way. This training typically includes:

1. Emotional Regulation Skills – How to teach others to control anger and frustration while in conflict.
2. Active Listening Skills – Promoting empathetic listening to learn from one another's viewpoints.
3. Problem-Solving Models – Introducing systematic methods of negotiating agreements.
4. De-escalation Techniques – Minimizing hostility by not blaming or criticizing.
5. Compromise and Collaboration – Encouraging mutual concessions and joint problem-solving.

These skills are instrumental in fostering harmonious relationships by reducing conflict and encouraging positive interactions. By incorporating such training, spouses can shift from conflict-driven interactions to constructive problem-solving, ultimately enhancing marital stability.

Gilbert (2015) confirms that conflict resolution skills—learning to listen, communicate, and respond positively—actually enhance marital relationships. spouses therapists are instrumental in helping SPOUSES learn to be assertive, actively listen, and establish effective feedback mechanisms (Olson, 2014). Happy spouses ultimately communicate openly and honestly to resolve conflicts, express feelings, and establish mutual respect, tolerance, and honesty. Unhappy marriages shun conflict resolution, hence the persistent misunderstandings and resentment.

The purpose of this research was to equip Catholic Church spouses in Abia State and Imo

State with effective counselling and conflict resolution techniques and impart skills that can help them achieve long-lasting marital harmony.

Statement of the Problem

It is clear that in most churches, whether Catholic and Orthodox churches, or other Pentecostal churches, despite their frequent attendance to church activities and hearing God's word, and praying for love, peace, and harmony for fellow human beings, many married spouses still live like rats and cats in their respective homes. It is just as clear that the common incidence of marital incompatibility and lack of stability amongst most of the spouses has seen the filings for divorce multiply at most Magistrate courts of choice in the two (2) areas under research due to marriage dissatisfaction as well as a lack of love within the husband and wife relationship. A valid question arises here: were hateful spouses offered therapeutic sessions or designed counselling interventions before the marriage ceremony?

The answer reflects a systemic lack—therapeutically trained functional counselling centers are scarce. Most premarital counselling efforts are conducted by organizations that lack the proper qualifications, and few Catholic churches even try to incorporate professional marriage counselors into their preparation courses. Despite this, attendance does not always equate to participation; the majority of spouses attend only to fulfill ceremonial requirements or gain approval for marriage, barely listening to the counsel given (Yohanna & Joseph, 2020).

The study identifies broader institutional and social barriers undermining the efficacy of marriage counselling interventions. Economic insecurity, competing financial demands, consumerism, and warped perceptions of marriage all diminish the reach and impact of such interventions. More basic relational problems—e.g., communication disintegration, commitment, inherited polygamy expectations, and childbearing based on gender expectations—contribute to marital distress. Left unchecked, such problems ensnare spouses in cycles of strife, continuing emotional pain (loneliness, worry, sorrow) that spreads beyond the couple to destabilize families, communities, and societal institutions.

The critical problem is the absence of empirical links between premarital counselling strategies and the outcome variable: peaceful coexistence in marriages. Existing programmes are most often free of standardized, evidence-based conflict resolution training—a major deficit, given that unresolved conflicts highly predict the failure of marriages (Gottman, 1999). While studies acknowledge socioeconomic and cultural barriers to marital harmony (Yohanna & Joseph, 2020), few assess the potential benefit of organized therapeutic interventions, notably conflict resolution skill acquisition, in overcoming such barriers.

This study sought to fill that gap by investigating the efficacy of formal conflict resolution training—drawing on proponents like Markman et al. (2010) and Johnson (2008)—to foster peaceful coexistence. The training (treatment) focuses on equipping married adults with practical skills for de-escalation, active listening, and problem-solving through collaborative effort, skills that are not adequately covered in conventional premarital therapy. By quantifying

and separating these competencies, the research aims to demonstrate their immediate impact on conflict minimization and maintenance of relational stability, thereby offering a replicable model for counselling programmes.

The aforementioned information therefore led the researcher to conduct a study to determine the value of counselling for effective conflict resolution skills training and communication among Catholic Church spouses in Nigerian states of Abia and Imo.

Objectives of the Study

Generally, the objective of this study was to examine the conflict resolution skill training on peaceful co-existence among spouses of catholic church in Abia and Imo state. Specifically, the study sought to investigate:

1. The impact of conflict resolution skill training on peaceful co-existence of spouses of Catholic Church in Abia and Imo State,
2. The difference in the post-test mean scores of spouses effective communication exposed to conflict resolution skill training and control group in their willingness for peaceful co-existence.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study:

1. What is the impact of conflict resolution skill training on peaceful co-existence of spouses of Catholic Church in Abia and Imo States?
2. What are the difference in the post-test mean scores of spouses effective communication exposed to conflict resolution skill training and control group in their willingness for peaceful co-existence?

Research Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the post-test mean scores of spouses (participants) exposed to conflict resolution skill training and control group in their willingness for peaceful co-existence

Methodology

This study used a quasi-experimental design, i.e., 2 x 2 factorial matrix with non-random pre-test, post-test, and control groups. Nworgu (2015) describes quasi-experimental design as the use of intact or existing groups rather than assigning randomly to experimental and control groups.

The study was conducted in Abia and Imo States, where the target population was 1,189,000 Catholic spouses in both states. 46 wives were assigned at random to the treatment group (experimental), and a comparable control was maintained. Sampling was done in multiple stages to make it representative.

A simple random sampling technique was initially employed to select the two study states (Abia and Imo). Later, a stratified sampling technique was used to choose two high-turnout Catholic cathedrals—Mater Dei Cathedral in Umuahia, Abia State, and Maria Assumpta Cathedral in Owerri, Imo State—so that there would be gender-balanced samples.

Finally, purposive sampling was used in the recruitment of spouses with marital issues so that 46 participants (23 men and 23 women) were placed in the experimental group and an equal-sized matched control group. The experimental group was given an exposure to a systematic Conflict Resolution Skill Training (CRST) programme, with the purpose of promoting harmonious coexistence (the dependent variable). The training, which lasted for six weeks and was administered by licensed marriage counselors experienced in cognitive-behavioural and Gottman-based conflict resolution techniques, consisted of weekly 90-minute sessions covering key elements of active listening, emotional control, de-escalation, and problem-solving together. The control group received no intervention, which allowed for comparison of treatment effects.

Gender was employed as a moderating variable to establish differential effects for male and female participants. In order to measure the dependent variable (peaceful coexistence), the researcher developed the Marital Peaceful Coexistence Questionnaire (MPCQ), a 25-item instrument with two parts. Section A gathered biodata, and Section B quantified marital harmony using a four-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree = 4; Agree = 3; Disagree = 2; Strongly Disagree = 1). A score of ≥ 2.5 mean indicated satisfactory conflict resolution skills, and < 2.5 indicated deficiency.

MPCQ was extensively tested and validated by three experts in Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, and Measurement and Evaluation at Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. Their feedback was utilized to enter the revisions. The instrument was pilot-tested on 15 SPOUSES in Anambra State, and it indicated a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of 0.72, which is an indication of internal consistency. Data collection was in a four-stage sequence:

Pre-treatment: Baseline administration of MPCQ,

Treatment: Six-week CRST for the treatment group,

Post-treatment: Re-administration of MPCQ to both groups and

Follow-up: Delayed post-test after four weeks to assess retention.

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were used to address research questions, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test null hypotheses at $p < 0.05$ after adjusting for pre-test differences.

Results

Research Question One: What is the impact of conflict resolution skill training on peaceful co-existence of Spouses of Catholic Church in Abia and Imo States?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Peaceful Coexistence Across Groups

Group	Phase	Mean Score (MPCQ)	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Experimental	Pre-test	2.10	0.45	Low peaceful coexistence
Experimental	Post-test	3.42	0.38	High peaceful coexistence
Experimental	Follow-up	3.35	0.40	High peaceful coexistence (retained)
Control	Pre-test	2.08	0.47	Low peaceful coexistence
Control	Post-test	2.15	0.43	No significant improvement
Control	Follow-up	2.12	0.41	No significant change

Table 1 compared the experimental group (receiving Conflict Resolution Skill Training, CRST) and the control group (receiving no intervention) on three stages: pre-test, post-test, and follow-up. The results revealed a notable boost in peaceful living among the experimental group after training. Their mean score increased from 2.10 (pre-test) to 3.42 (post-test), an indication of very strong positive impact of the CRST programme. The 3.35 follow-up score then confirmed that these gains persisted over the long term. On their part, the control group had no significant change, with mean scores varying around 2.10 during all phases. The stability of the control group then confirms that any gains realized by the experimental group could only have been due to the CRST intervention and not to some other variable. The significant effect size (mean difference of 1.32 points) also highlights the practical significance of the training.

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviations of Willingness for Peaceful Coexistence

Group	Phase	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Experimental	Pre-test	2.05	0.42	Low willingness
Experimental	Post-test	3.50	0.35	High willingness
Experimental	Follow-up	3.40	0.38	High willingness (retained)
Control	Pre-test	2.03	0.45	Low willingness
Control	Post-test	2.10	0.40	No improvement
Control	Follow-up	2.07	0.41	No change

Table 2 assessed participants' readiness for peaceful coexistence before and after intervention. The experimental group's mean score rose considerably from 2.05 (pre-test) to 3.50 (post-test), reflecting a high level of readiness to settle conflicts after training. The follow-up score of 3.40 indicated that the readiness was maintained. The control group's scores remained at approximately 2.00, reflecting no natural readiness development without intervention. The group difference was significant ($p < 0.05$) and the effect size was large ($\eta^2 = 0.42$), reflecting the efficacy of the CRST programme for the development of a proactive style of marital conflict resolution. The absence of gender differences suggests that the training was

effective for both women and men.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the post-test mean scores of participants exposed to conflict resolution skill training and control group in in their willingness for peaceful co-existence.

Table 3: ANCOVA on Post-test Mean Scores of Experimental and Control Groups

Source of Variation	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Squares	F-value	p-value	Partial η^2
Pre-test (Covariate)	12.45	1	12.45	10.33	0.003*	0.19
Group (CRST vs. Control)	45.28	1	45.28	37.59	<0.001*	0.46
Error	52.17	43	1.21	-	-	-
Total	111.90	45	-	-	-	-

Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates statistical significance.

The ANCOVA results provided strong statistical support for the effectiveness of the intervention. After pre-test differences were controlled, the experimental condition significantly outperformed the control condition on post-test willingness measures ($F[1,43] = 37.59$, $p < 0.001$), with a large effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.46$). This suggests that 46% of post-test variance was explained by the CRST intervention alone. The significant covariate effect ($F[1,43] = 10.33$, $p = 0.003$) justified the application of ANCOVA for adjusting for differences at baseline.

Discussion

The findings of the study agree with earlier research on the efficiency of formal conflict resolution training in promoting the harmony of marriage. Previous study by Markman et al. (2010) have established that Spouses receiving targeted interventions make notable improvements in the constructive resolution of conflicts. Pre- to post-test change in experimental group mean scores (2.10 to 3.42) captures results of Fincham and Beach (2014) studies, where SPOUSES exposed to methods for resolving disputes showed higher relational satisfaction. Long-term persistence of these gains at follow-up (mean = 3.35) supports long-term benefits identified in Johnson (2008) studies, giving priority to continuity of conflict resolution skills over time. Conversely, the control group's stagnant scores (approximately 2.10) affirm that in the absence of intervention, SPOUSES are trapped in vicious conflict circles, as emphasized by Yohanna and Joseph (2020). This necessitates evidence-based programmes to break such cycles and attain enduring marital harmony.

The evidence presented with theoretical constructs that relate desire for peaceful existence with positive abilities to resolve conflicts behaviour. The marked enhancement in the experimental group (mean = 2.05 to 3.50) finds a place within concepts in the cooperative

conflict resolution model by Heitler (2001), wherein training creates an adversarial to cooperative problem-solving frame shift in an individual. This is in agreement with Orubo's (2015) assertion that marital stability is contingent upon the readiness of partners to practice resolution rather than avoidance. The control group's scores not changing (around 2.00) is in line with studies by Thornton (2012, as cited in Yohanna & Joseph, 2020), where untreated spouses exhibited enduring resistance to resolving conflicts, further exacerbating relational dispute.

Conclusion

This study's findings, drawing on previous research, confirm that having the ability to resolve and training is a transformative intervention for marital balance. In bridging the gap between theoretical concepts and empirical outcomes, it offers an implementable template for averting marital dispute in similar sociocultural settings. The alignment of these findings with global scholarship enhances the international applicability of the principles of conflict resolution and their central role in peaceful coexistence. In conclusion, this study brings to the fore the transformative potential of conflict resolution training and skills in fostering marital harmony. With theory-practice connection, it provides a working model for the prevention of marital conflicts in comparable sociocultural arrangements.

Recommendations

In view of this present research, the following recommendations are made, there is:

- i. Due to the improvement in peaceful coexistence and willingness to resolve conflicts among spouses who were given the Conflict Resolution Skill Training (CRST) was observed, religious and secular marriage counselling institutions—particularly within Catholic dioceses and other places of worship should include structured modules of conflict resolution into their premarital course curricula.
- ii. Since economic uncertainty and lack of access to professional counselling were obstacles to marital harmony, local governments and NGOs should fund subsidised or free community-based counselling workshops on how to resolve conflict for married spouses.

References

- Abu, K. (2015). *Effect of family communication*. Retrieved from <http://Kubanni.abu.edu> on 4/2/2017.
- Baucom, D. H., Shoham, V., Mueser, K. T., Daiuto, A. D., & Stickle, T. R. (2013). Empirically supported couple and family interventions for marital distress and adult mental health problems. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 66, 53-88.
- Farooq, Z. & Butt, F. Y. (2012). *Attachment styles, conflict resolution techniques and relationship quality in married SPOUSES*. [BS (Hons.) Thesis]. Applied Psychology Department, University of

- the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan.
- Fincham, F. D., & Beach, S. R. (2014). Marital conflict: Implications for working with SPOUSES. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 350(4), 47-77.
- Gilbert, S. (2015). Marriage with problem? Theory may not help. Retrieved from <https://archives.hiscom/smart/marriage/2005/April/mogo18-html> on 23rd August, 2024.
- Gottman, J. M. (2012). *Why marriages succeed or fail*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Horrocks, A. M. (2010). Financial management practices and conflict management styles of SPOUSES in great marriage. (All graduate theses and dissertations). Paper 733. Utah state university. Retrieved from <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/733>
- Islami, H. (2017). Resolving marital conflicts. *Seeu Review, De Gruyter Open*, 1, 1-12. doi: 10.1515/seeur-2017-0005.
- Lin, W. (2014). *A dissertation and family therapy*. Texas: Texas Tech University. Retrieved from [Linwood.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/parenting.htm](http://linwood.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/parenting.htm) (2004) on 27th August, 2024
- Metz, M. E., & Epstein, N. B. (2013). Relationship conflict research findings. From [http://www.michaelmetzphd.com/includes/Relationship Conflict Research Findings.pdf](http://www.michaelmetzphd.com/includes/Relationship%20Conflict%20Research%20Findings.pdf).
- Obidoa, M. A. (2013). Resolution strategies adopted in resolving marital disharmony among SPOUSES in Enugu State. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 4(25), 182-187.
- Olson, D. H. (2014). Circumplex model of marital and family systems. *Journal of Family Therapy*, 22, 144-167.
- Orbuch, T. (2013). Focus on the family. Retrieved from <http://www.focusonthefamly.com/ma> on 25th July, 2024.
- Orubo, M. (2015). The Vanguard News, family News retrieved from <http://www.family.news> on 25/01/2017
- Saaida, D., Aisha, S., & Sumaira, Y. (2013). Intimate Enemies: Marital Conflicts and Conflict Resolution Styles in Dissatisfied Married SPOUSES. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research*, 15 (10): 1433-1439. DOI: 10.5829/idosi.mejsr.2013.15.10.11581
- Sakotic-Kurbalija, J. (2011). Karakteristike bralnog odnosa I trazenje psiholoske pomoci. Doktorska disertacija. Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet.
- Tartaskovsku, M. (2012). How Healthy SPOUSES deal with In-laws. Retrieved from on the 21st Century, on 5th August, 2024.
- Thornton, B. (2012). Toward a linear prediction of marital happiness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 3(6), 674-676.
- Yohanna, Y. A., & Joseph, A. O. (2020). Effect of marital counselling on SPOUSES' conflict resolution of members of Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC) in Nassarawa State and Abuja. *Benue State University Journal of Education (BSUJE)*, 20(2), 43-50.