

COUNSELLING AND FAMILY CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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Abstract

The study investigated Family Conflict Resolution: Has counselling an answer to it? The population of the study consisted of twenty thousand and eighteen (20018) families in Ngor Okpala LGA in Imo State. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A sample size of one thousand and one (1001) families was drawn from the population using simple random sampling technique. Three purposes and research questions guided the study. A 25 item structured questionnaire titled families conflict resolution strategies (FCRS) was used to elicit information from respondents. The responses pattern adopted for the questionnaire was a four point rating scale pattern. Validation of the instrument was carried out by experts in Measurement and Evaluation, and Guidance and Counselling. The reliability index of 0.80 was established using cronbach Alpha Analysis. Data analysis was done using mean score of 2.5 as the reference for acceptance. The study revealed among others that causes of family conflict are numerous such as communication, financial concerns and sibling's rivalry, also that counselling can be an answer to family conflict. Based on these findings, it was recommended that professional counsellors should extend their services to non-school settings like the family for the good and well-being of members from such families.

Introduction

The family constitutes the basic and essential unit of the society. It is the first socializing agent of the child. The family is described as a social group characterized by common residence, economic cooperation and reproduction (Holborn, 2008), in Ukoha and Opara (2013). In his own contribution, Jayesh (2025) states that a family is considered to be a group of individuals related by blood, who are committed to one another's well-being. Family according to Kunz (2012) is a

group of two people or more related by birth, marriage or adoption and residing together. A

family is made up of father, mother, siblings, and by extension, cousins, nieces, nephews, grandparents, step-parents and in-laws. Our family can be our greatest source of support, comfort and love. But can also be our greatest source of pain and grief. Such as a health crisis, work problems or teenage rebellion, may all threaten to tear a family apart. It can then be seen that the family unit has economic, physical, social and emotional bonds; and whatever affects one member, affects the others.

All families at some time experience difficulties, quarrels and stress. These bring about what are referred to as family conflicts or disputes. From source across the web, beyond intractability (2025) defined family conflict as any conflicts that occur within the family – between husband and wife, parents and children, between siblings, or with extended families (grandparents, aunts, uncles etc.). These family conflicts are caused by many factors such as communication issues, financial concerns, money, personal differences, parenting styles, Health conditions, job burnout, substance abuse, unhealthy expectations, sibling rivalry, conflict avoidance, divorced parents, in-law related conflict, parental relationship problems, care giving responsibilities, grandparent interference, insecurities, marital problems, unresolved past issues and occupational stress (Jayesh, 2025).

Conflict according to Kunz (2012) is an inescapable component of human relationships. Conflict happens when people differ in their feelings, thoughts or behaviours. Conflict can be beneficial if it forces people to confront problems. However, when conflict is not resolved and does not enable personal growth, it can become harmful and may even lead to violence and abuse.

Conflict can happen when family members have different views or beliefs that clash. Sometimes, conflict can occur when people misunderstand each other and jump to the wrong conclusion. As emphasized by Jayesh (2025), family conflicts include any conflict between people who are related in some way, or who are part of a family or have been part of a family in the past. Such as (1) Within families example, between couples, parents and children, siblings (2) Between families, such as adult siblings and their families, grandparents and their children's families, blended or step families; (3) Between separated couples and their families. Families, even the most close-knit, experience conflict such as siblings' rivalry, marital clash and extended family issues. When these causes of conflict are left unaddressed, they can lead to resentment, estrangement, and a breakdown of the family unit (Caplan, 2024).

Caplan (2024) buttressed his view and saw family conflict as a natural part of family life, but when left unresolved, they can lead to significant stress and dysfunction within the family unit. The common ones according to him include marital conflicts, parent-child conflicts, siblings' rivalries and extended family issues. In their own assertion, Sterk family law (2025) presented ten (10) common causes of family conflicts as miscommunication or lack of communication, differing values and beliefs, financial stress, parenting styles, siblings rivalry, roles and responsibilities, unresolved past issues, life transitions, work life balance, external, external

influences and social pressures.

Donald (2013) regards family conflict as an interpersonal process that occurs whenever the action of one person interferes with the actions of another. Partners or family members can come into conflict over practically any kind of issue. The family members do not experience this interference in the same areas and at same levels of intensity. These conflicts if not properly handled, can escalate to the point where interventions become necessary. There are many out of court processes like mediation and negotiation used to resolve conflicts, often with the help of a neutral third party. Counselling also comes in here as an intervention strategy to conflict resolution.

Conflict resolution according to Kunz (2013) is the process of attenuating or eliminating a source of conflict resolution of family conflicts is of great importance in that (1) It minimizes stress (2) Protects children (3) Preserves relationships (AI Overview, 2024) and reduces (4) arguments and resentments (better-health, 2024).

In family conflict resolution, it can end in one way or the other either destructively or constructively. A destructive outcome is one that has damaging effect on later interactions, while those with constructive outcome have positive benefits. However, many studies (Stephen & Ronald 1995, Joaquin, 2008) in Kunz, (2012) have shown that couples with similar conflict management styles are more likely to be satisfied with their union because similar conflict resolution styles are less likely to cause misinterpretation.

Donald (2013) feels that the way a couple deals with conflict determines whether or not the conflict will be harmful to their family/marriage, continuing, he said that the inability to deal with conflict constructively is a potent force in dampening marriage satisfaction. Therefore, since conflicts occur repeatedly, it becomes important to learn to handle conflict approximately. When conflict is not resolved in a functional way, it can have serious negative effects. Research like Eric and Malinda (2006) has documented links between conflicts in the marriage and feelings of depression and anxiety.

Jayesh (2025) is of the view that family conflict can be difficult and emotional. When relationship change, it can be hard for family members to handle things on their own. There are a number of services available to assist such as – Family Therapy, - Counselling – Mediation – Group work and support services. Giving early attention to these conflicts issues can prevent them from becoming insurmountable obstacles in a relationship.

Counselling has been variously defined by professionals. Durojaiye (1980) in Ukoha and Oparah (2013) opined that counselling involves the development of interaction between a counsellor and a person in a perceived temporary state of indecision, confusion, malfunction, habit disorder, distress or despair. The process helps the counsellor to make his own decisions to correct his behaviour disorder, to evolve new habits and to overcome distress and despair. Counselling is a way to gain perspective on your behaviour, emotions and relationships. It

provides a means to express your feelings and identity patterns of thinking. It alleviates anxiety

and anger in many forms. It helps to develop communication skills for dealing with conflicts and frustration. So, can counselling help resolve family conflicts? Yes, counselling can be a very effective way to resolve family conflicts. Family counselling which is the counselling given to one or more family members provides a safe and supportive environment for family members to communicate openly, understand each other's perspectives and develop healthy conflict – resolution skills. Through counselling, families can address underlying issues, improve communication patterns, and rebuild trust and connection (AI, Overview 2025). It can also help to understand family dynamics and prevent future conflicts, as well as enable active listening and understanding.

Family members through counselling are taught specific conflict resolution techniques such as negotiation, compromise and collaboration. Counselling further enables family members to be quick in understanding patterns and dynamics of contributory factors to conflict – individual persons with their temperaments and emotional needs. This will lead the family members to greater awareness and empathy.

Caplan (2024) reiterated that counselling can help rebuild trust, deepen connections and foster a more supportive family environment by addressing conflict and improving communication among family members. Having equipped family members with the necessary skills; they can now handle future conflicts constructively so that they don't become insurmountable.

Donald (2013) posited that counselling helps both partners to mutually participate in conflict resolution. This enables them to develop creative agreements that are acceptable to both and that are in line with their common goals. When this is accomplished, power and responsibilities are shared equally and cooperation replaces resistance within the family relationship.

The conflict theory of Karl Marx influenced this study. This theory believes that those who control the resources in a family have all the power. Conflict theorists believe that conflict is inevitable and necessary in a family because it results to change and adaptation. Individual family members are motivated to pursue their own needs, goals, values, which often conflict with the needs, values and goals of other family members, resulting in a struggle for power. Sources of power within a family, to these theorists include legitimacy, money, physical coercion, and love. People who have power want to maintain status quo, while people without power want to change the system to make it fairer (Kunz, 2012).

In a 2006 study of 106 boys by Eric and Malunt, they found out and concluded that children from conflicted families have fewer friends compared with children from families with less conflict. In another study of 450 married couples in 2004 by Annmarie, Daniel and Wanda, they looked at these couples during the first two years of their marriage and found out that couples who expressed unhappiness in their marriages were more likely to exhibit negative communication behaviours such as withdrawing.

Statement of the Problem

The rate at which families get troubled and destabilized at any little instance is heart rendering. Little issues tend to get so blown up, disproportionate and destabilize members of the family, just because of different, unreliable orientations they have concerning family issues and their resolution, consequently families are plunged into conflicts that make the family dysfunctional.

The authors believe that with proper reorientation towards family conflict, particularly receiving counselling, and learning effective skills and techniques, will go a long way in equipping family members to handle future conflicts constructively thereby strengthening family bonds. It is based on this premise that the researchers set out to examine counselling and family conflict resolution.

Purpose of the Study

The study generally is to find out if counselling is an answer to conflict resolutions in families in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. Specifically, it sets out to:

1. Determine the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.
2. Ascertain the different resolution methods for family conflicts in Ngor Okpala.
3. Determine if counselling can be used as an effective method for family conflict resolution.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?
2. What other resolution methods can be used for family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?
3. Can counselling be used as an effective method for family conflict resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprises of all the 20018 families in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. of Imo State. Simple random sampling with non-replacement techniques was used to select 5% families representing a sample of 1001 families. Instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire on a four (4) point rating scale of strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SA), with a scale of 4, 3, 2, 1 respectively. The face and content validity of the instrument were ascertained by two experts from Measurement and Evaluation, and two from Guidance and Counselling Reliability of the instrument was determined using test-retest method, and a reliability index of 0.86 was obtained using cronbach Alpha technique. All the instrument administered were collected, but twenty two of them were wrongly filled learning 979 for data analysis. Data analysis were done using mean, with mean of 2.5 as reference for acceptance while below 2.5 were rejected.

Results

Research Question One: What are the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala?

Table 1: *Mean scores of the major causes of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
1.	Communication Issues	2496	540	180	85	3301	3.37	Accepted
2.	Financial Concerns	2356	690	144	88	3278	3.35	“
3.	Personal Differences	1548	561	432	189	2730	2.79	“
4.	Parenting Styles	1712	945	326	73	3056	3.12	“
5.	Health Conditions	1448	636	484	163	2731	2.78	“
6.	Job Burnout	1560	801	402	121	2884	2.95	“
7.	Substance Abuse	1640	927	306	107	2980	3.04	“
8.	Unhealthy Expectations	1432	594	460	193	2679	2.74	“
9.	Sibling Rivalry	2700	639	182	-	3521	3.6	“
10.	Conflict Avoidance	1488	733	408	162	2781	2.84	“
11.	In-Law Related Conflicts	2244	663	206	94	3207	3.28	“
12.	Grand Parent Interference	1916	906	202	97	3121	3.19	“
13.	Marital Problems	1116	1245	362	104	2827	2.89	“
14.	Unresolved Past Issues	852	2025	150	16	3043	3.11	“

Results of data analysis presented in Table 1 above shows that family conflict has many causes such as analyzed on the table. This is seen in items 1-14 with their mean scores ranging from 2.79 – 3.37, all being above the reference mean of 2.5 and so accepted. Based on the data above, the answer to research question 2 is that there are many major causes of family conflict in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Research Question Two: What other methods can be used for resolution of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?

Table 2: *Mean scores of other methods for family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
15.	Mediation	2496	540	180	85	3301	3.37	Accepted
16.	Negotiation	2356	690	144	88	3278	3.35	“
17.	Counselling	884	1683	206	94	2869	2.93	“
18.	Compromise	1560	801	402	121	2884	2.95	“
19.	Collaboration	792	1074	460	193	2519	2.57	“
20.	Conciliation	1208	1437	202	97	2944	3.01	“

Results of data analysis presented in Table 2 above revealed that there are resolution methods that can be used to resolve family conflicts. Evidence is shown by items 15, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20 with their means scores of 3.37, 2.93, 3.35, 2.95, 2.57 and 3.01 respectively, all above the reference mean of 2.5. This means that all the items on the table are possible methods that can be used in the resolution of family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Research Question Three: Can counselling be used as an effective method of family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.?

Table 3: *Mean scores of how counselling can be used as an effective method of family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.*

S/N	Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total	X	Decision
	Counselling can be used to foster the following in a family conflict resolution							
21.	It helps family members to learn to communicate effectively	496	639	180	52	3367	3.44	Accepted
22.	It minimizes stress for our family members	2408	557	262	47	3314	3.39	“
23.	It will help us to preserve our relationships	2340	609	226	78	3253	3.32	“
24.	It facilitates understanding among family members	2204	507	364	77	3152	3.22	“
25.	It enables family members to handle conflicts constructively	2588	612	220	18	3438	3.51	“

Results of data in Table 3 above, indicate that counselling can be used as an effective method of family conflicts resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. This is observed from items 21, 22, 23, 24

and 25 with their mean scores of 3.44, 3.39, 3.32, 3.22 and 3.51 respectively being above the

reference mean of 2.5. Based on the data above, the answer to research question 3 is that counselling can be used as an effective method of family conflict resolution in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Discussion

The results of data analysis for research question one in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. This is observed from the mean scores of all the items being above the reference mean of 2.5. This agrees with the stipulation of Jayesh (2025) that family conflicts are caused by many factors such as communication issues, financial concerns, money, personal differences, parenting styles, health conditions, job burnout, substance abuse etc. It's also in line with sterk family law (2025) ascertain that ten (10) causes of family conflict include miscommunication or lack of communication, financial stress, parenting styles, sibling rivalry, unresolved past issue, extend influences etc. The implication of the above is that couples awareness that family conflict is inevitable, will help them to identify these causes early as to know how to handle conflict appropriately to avoid negative effects and gain marital satisfaction.

On research question two, table 2, the analysis revealed that all the items listed on the table are other resolution methods that can be used for family conflicts in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. obviously, all the mean scores of six (6) items are above the reference mean of 2.5 and therefore all accepted. This implies that professional family counsellors can use these other methods to resolve family conflicts. This is in agreement with Donald (2013) who stated that there are many out of court process like mediation, and negotiation used to resolve conflicts, often with the help of a neutral third party. So also counselling. Moreso, the result supports Jayesh (2025) view that when relationships change, it can be hard for family members to handle things on their own. There are a number of services available to assist such as family therapy, counselling, mediation, group work and support services. This implies that families should seek for these available services in handling their imminent conflict issues early before they become insurmountable obstacles in their relationships.

Results of data analysis for research question three, revealed that counselling can be used as an effective method for family conflict in Ngor Okpala L.G.A. This is observed from the mean scores of all the items being above the reference mean of 2.5. This finding collaborates Caplan (2025) view that counselling can help rebuild trust, deepen connections and foster a more supportive family environment by addressing conflict and improving communication, among family members. It also confirms with Donald's (2013) view that counselling helps both partners to mutually participate in conflict resolution. This enables them to develop creative agreements that are acceptable to both and that are in line with their common goals. The implication of this is that family members should be exposed to family counselling early enough to have a safe and supportive environment for family members to communicate openly, understand each other's perspectives and develop healthy conflict resolution skills, as well as prevent future conflicts in families in Ngor Okpala L.G.A.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Families should be aware that conflicts are natural and inevitable; therefore they should learn more about the causes of family conflict, and how to handle family conflicts constructively.
2. The counsellors should arm themselves with these different methods to resolve family conflicts.
3. Professional counsellors should extend their services to non-school settings like the family, for the good and well-being of members from such families.

Conclusion

This study has extensively looked at family conflicts and counselling as resolution. Recognizing and addressing the common causes of family conflict is essential for maintaining a healthy and functional family dynamics. Counselling offers a powerful tool for resolving conflicts and fostering healthier relationships within the family unit. With counselling, families can overcome obstacles, strengthen their bonds and develop healthier patterns of interaction that will serve them well within and beyond the counselling experience.

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