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ROLES OF COUNSELLING ON MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG YOUNG COUPLES IN KARU L.G.A. OF NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the roles of counselling in managing marital conflicts among young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. With rising cases of marital instability, especially among newlyweds, the research sought to understand how professional counselling interventions address conflicts related to gender roles, religious background differences, level of education and temperamental traits. The study employed a descriptive survey research design, involving a sample of 380 young couples (married between 1 and 5 years) selected through multistage sampling from selected couples within Kodakpe district of Karu Local Government. The data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ). Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics (independent t-test) were employed to analyze the data. The findings revealed that counselling significantly contributes to conflict resolution across the examined dimensions, with respondents who received counselling showing higher levels of conflict management and marital stability than those who did not. Specifically, counselling enhanced understanding of gender roles, improved adaptation to religious background's differences, strengthened mutual respect despite differences in levels of education and promoted healthy temperamental crisis management. The study concludes that counselling plays a vital preventive and curative role in stabilizing young marriages. It recommends the institutionalization of premarital and marital counselling within religious and community structures, increased public awareness, and integration of family life education in the society. The findings contribute to the broader understanding of how counselling can foster sustainable family systems in Nigeria.

Keywords: Marital conflict, counselling, young couples, gender roles, religious background differences, level of education, temperamental compatibility, Karu L.G.A.

Introduction

Marriage is a widely accepted social and legal union between an adult man and an adult woman. It is seen as a basic building block of human society. It's more than a ceremonial contract;

it's a close, lifelong partnership based on love, trust, shared values, and a commitment to each other. Religious and cultural teachings both say that marriage should be stable, peaceful, and fulfilling (Adeyeye, 2021). But the truth is that many young couples today are in a different

situation. A lot of people spend time and money getting ready for the wedding day, but not as many people spend time and money getting ready for the marriage itself. Because of this, many marriages start to have problems not long after they start.

Young couples often come from different religious, educational, and emotional backgrounds, which means they have different personalities, ways of looking at the world, and personal goals. Couples who grew up in the same way can still have problems. Differences in personality, family values, how people talk to each other, or what people expect from their gender can all lead to misunderstandings. If these differences aren't recognized and handled correctly, they can cause problems in a marriage or even end it (Okafor & Osakinle, 2020). A lot of young couples think that love is all they need to keep their marriage going. But when their expectations aren't met and the pressure builds, they start to doubt their choices, which makes them angry and emotionally distant.

Conflict in marriage isn't always bad; in fact, it's a normal part of any close relationship. It becomes a problem when it isn't handled well or isn't resolved. There are many things that can cause problems in a marriage, such as gender roles, family history, mental differences, emotional instability, or differences in temperament (Adeyeye, 2021). For instance, a partner who grew up in a strict home might have trouble agreeing with someone who grew up in a more liberal one. Differences in intelligence, emotional maturity, or behavior, like being an introvert or an extrovert, can make things even harder for couples. If these problems are not dealt with or ignored, they could lead to constant fights, emotional distance, or even divorce.

Professional counseling is a crucial step in overcoming these obstacles. Couples can communicate their worries, understand one another, and create productive conflict resolution techniques in a safe, controlled environment that counselling offers. Counsellors guide couples toward understanding and cooperation by assisting them in identifying their unique strengths and differences. A stable marriage also requires interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and reasonable expectations, all of which are promoted by professional counselling (Igbokwe, Ezegbe, & Nwosu, 2022). However, because of cultural stigmas or a lack of access to qualified professionals, many couples still find it difficult to seek counselling.

These concerns are especially pertinent in the Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State, which is home to an increasing number of young, urbanizing couples. Marital relationships are frequently strained by the blending of traditional expectations and contemporary values. In order to better understand how counselling can help young couples in Karu L.G.A. resolve marital conflict, this study will examine how factors like gender differences, background disparities, and mental and temperamental differences affect marital harmony or discord.

Several literary traditions emphasize the intricacy of marriage and the difficulties couples

frequently encounter in order to put the problem of marital conflict and the function of counseling in perspective. It is commonly acknowledged that marital conflict is a typical aspect of close relationships and that it results from differences in personal expectations from both genders,

differences in religious background, different levels of education and temperamental compatibility (Fincham & Beach, 2010). The stresses of modern life, unstable economies, and conflicting traditional and modern gender roles make marriages more difficult for young couples, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria (Oluwafemi & Abiodun, 2019).

Individual differences like gender roles, temperamental differences, educational and religious upbringing, emotional maturity, and intellectual capacity, have been shown to have a significant impact on how marital conflicts arise and are resolved (Adeyeye, 2021). Unrealistic expectations and differing degrees of readiness are common when couples first get married, which can cause disappointment and a lot of differences and compatibility (Nwankwo & Nwoke, 2018). Due to social stigma, limited access to professional counselling, or an excessive reliance on unofficial sources of guidance like family elders and religious leaders, these issues are frequently not sufficiently addressed (Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2020).

It has been demonstrated that counselling is essential for assisting couples in improving their ability to communicate, cultivate empathy, and settle disputes amicably. It offers a secure environment where underlying problems can be investigated and handled with expert assistance (Igbokwe, Ezegebe, & Nwosu, 2022). However, little is known about the prevalence of counselling and its effects, particularly for young couples in semi-urban Nigerian communities like Karu L.G.A. By examining how counselling interventions specifically help address conflicts related to gender roles, religious background, level of each spouse's education, and temperamental compatibility in young marriages.

Statement of the Problem

Marital conflict has become a major problem in Nigerian society today, especially for young couples. These days, a lot of marriages are marked by emotional strain, frequent misunderstandings, and, in the worst situations, separation or divorce. These difficulties are frequently caused by disparities in temperament, upbringing, gender norms, and levels of education or intellectual development. Nevertheless, these distinctions are usually disregarded in the early phases of a relationship, and couples frequently marry before fully comprehending the consequences of these differences (Eyo, Joshua, & Esuong, 2020).

The situation is consistent with national trends in Nasarawa State's expanding urban community, Karu Local Government Area. In their married lives, couples from diverse religious and educational backgrounds frequently have to adjust to new realities. Unfortunately, a lot of these couples don't have the resources or direction to deal with the inevitable arguments that come up. Professional counselling is still not widely used as a dependable and organized method of resolving marital conflicts, even though some people may seek support from religious or community leaders.

Couples frequently feel overburdened in the absence of early intervention and expert advice, which can result in emotional detachment, animosity, or relationship disintegration. There is little empirical information on how counselling is used, viewed, and valued by young couples in Karu

L.G.A., despite the fact that counselling services are becoming more widely known in other parts of Nigeria. By investigating the function of counselling in resolving marital disputes involving gender-roles differences, religious background, differences in level of education and temperamental compatibility, this study aims to close that gap.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the roles of counselling in resolving marital conflict among young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Investigate the role of counselling in managing gender-related marital conflicts.
2. Examine how counselling addresses conflicts arising from differences in religious background.
3. Ascertain the effectiveness of counselling in resolving conflicts stemming from educational differences between partners.
4. Explore the role of counselling in mitigating conflicts linked to temperamental and emotional differences.

Research Hypotheses

To answer the research questions statistically, the following null hypotheses were tested:

- i. **H₀:** There is no significant role of counselling on gender-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.
- ii. **H₀:** There is no significant role of counselling on religion background-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.
- iii. **H₀:** There is no significant role of counselling on level of education differences-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.
- iv. **H₀:** There is no significant role of counselling on temperamental-related conflicts among young couples in Karu L.G.A.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design to examine the role of counselling in addressing marital conflict among young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State. The target population consisted of couples who had been married between 1 to 5 years, with a sample size of 380 respondents selected through a multistage sampling technique from selected churches in Kodakpe district of Karu LGA. Data were collected using a researcher-designed questionnaire titled Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ), which was

divided into sections addressing key variables such as gender, religious background, levels of education and temperamental differences. The instrument's content validity was reviewed by three experts from the Department of Guidance and Counselling at Bingham University. The logical

validity index after the experts' review was 0.81. The pilot study result was subjected to Cronbach's Alpha method of determining the reliability of internal consistency which gave a score of 0.79. Descriptive statistics (frequency and percentage) were used to analyze demographic data, while independent sample t-tests were applied to test the null hypotheses using SPSS. The t-test was chosen for its appropriateness in comparing mean differences between groups and assessing the significance of counselling in resolving various marital conflicts.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The information gathered from 380 young couples in Nasarawa State's Karu Local Government Area using the Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ) is presented in this section. According to the study's previously stated research questions and hypotheses, the data was gathered with precision to support answers and present equity, and both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the analysis. A 4-point Likert scale (SA = 4, A = 3, D = 2, SD = 1) was used. The mean and standard deviation were used to analyze each section of the RCMCQ.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1: *The demographic data of respondents were analyzed using frequency counts and*

percentages.

Variable	Category	Frequency (%)	Percentage %
Gender	Male	190	50.0%
	Female	190	50.0%
	Total	380	100%
Level of Education	Secondary	50	13.2%
	NCE/OND	90	23.7%
	HND/Bachelor	170	44.7%
	Postgraduate	70	18.4%
	Total	380	100%
Occupation	Civil Servant	130	34.2%
	Teacher	70	18.4%
	Business Owner	100	26.3%
	Artisan	80	21.1%
	Total	380	100%
Background (Religion)	Christianity	290	76.3%
	Islam	60	15.8%
	Traditional	30	7.9%
	Total	380	100%
Counselling Attended	None	60	15.8%
	Marital only	80	21.1%
	Both	100	26.3%
	Total	380	100%
Temperamental Conflict Experience	Yes	300	78.9%
	No	80	21.1%
	Total	380	100%

The distribution of the 380 young couples who took part in the study in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State is shown in the demographic data in the table above. With 190 respondents each (50.0%), the gender distribution demonstrates an equal representation of men and women. The majority of respondents (44.7%) had an HND or bachelor's degree, followed by NCE/OND (23.7%), postgraduate degrees (18.4%), and secondary school completion (13.2%). Those who worked, 34.2% were civil servants, 26.3% were entrepreneurs, 21.1% were craftspeople, and 18.4% were educators. Christian respondents were made up of 76.3% of the participants, followed by Muslims (15.8%) and traditionalists (7.9%). According to the table, 15.8% had no counselling experience, 21.1% had only marital counseling, 26.3% had both pre-marital and marital counseling, and 36.8% had pre-marital counseling. Interestingly, a sizable percentage of respondents (78.9%) stated that they had dealt with temperamental related marital conflict, while only 21.1% had no conflict.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and Gender-Related Conflict*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q1	Understanding gender differences helps settle conflict	3.15	0.89	Agree
Q2	Counselling improved gender appreciation	3.19	0.88	Agree
Q3	Difficulty accepting spouse's gender influence	2.13	1.01	Disagree
Q4	Marital counselling improved gender role understanding	3.21	0.87	Agree
Q5	Counselling led to respect for gender differences	3.17	0.84	Agree

Interpretation: According to the descriptive statistics in Table 2, majority of respondents believed that counselling is helpful in resolving gender-related marital conflicts. The respondents, whose mean scores ranged from 3.15 to 3.21, concurred that their appreciation and comprehension of their spouse's gender roles were greatly enhanced by counselling support (Q2), marital counseling (Q4), and understanding gender differences (Q1). Additionally, they concurred that counselling encouraged tolerance for these distinctions (Q5, $M = 3.17$). It's interesting to note that item Q3, which asks about how difficult it is to accept a spouse's gender influence in decision-making, had a higher standard deviation ($SD = 1.01$) and a lower mean (2.13), suggesting that most respondents disagreed with the statement, albeit with more variation in their answers. Overall, the evidence points to the benefits of counselling for raising gender awareness and lowering gender-related disputes in young couples.

Table 3: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and Religious Background-Related Conflict*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q6	Counselling helped adjust to spouse's religious background	3.16	0.85	Agree
Q7	Religious background incompatibility causes conflict	2.22	0.95	Disagree
Q8	Counselling supports background-related adjustments	3.24	0.82	Agree
Q9	Premarital counselling prepared us for religious differences	3.15	0.91	Agree
Q10	Counselling helps manage religious differences	3.17	0.84	Agree

Interpretation: Descriptive statistics on respondents' opinions of counselling in handling marital disputes relating to religious background are shown in Table 4.3. According to the findings, most respondents agreed that counseling has been helpful in assisting them in adjusting to their spouse's religious background (Q6, $M = 3.16$), supporting these adjustments (Q8, $M = 3.24$), and assisting in overcoming difficulties arising from religious differences (Q10, $M = 3.17$). Additionally, they

confirmed that premarital counseling helped them prepare for religious background differences in

marriage (Q9, $M = 3.15$). Notably, item Q7, which asserts that background incompatibility inevitably leads to conflict, had a mean score of 2.22, indicating that respondents disagreed and that, with appropriate management, religious differences might not always lead to conflict. Overall, the results highlight how counseling lowers the risk of conflict by assisting couples in navigating and adjusting to their varied religious background.

Table 4: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and couple's level of education*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q11	Counselling handled level of education differences	3.13	0.89	Agree
Q12	Counselling helped manage differences in level of edu	3.26	0.78	Strongly Agree
Q13	Counselling boosted self-esteem	3.10	0.92	Agree
Q14	Educational differences can cause marital conflict	3.26	0.79	Strongly Agree
Q15	Equal level of education not required for marriage success	3.21	0.82	Agree

Interpretation: The information in Table 4 illustrates how respondents felt counselling affected the way different levels of education in marriage were handled. Most respondents concurred that counselling was essential for elucidating different levels of education (Q11, $M = 3.13$) and increasing relationship self-esteem (Q13, $M = 3.10$). They acknowledged that, if left unchecked, the differences could cause marital strife (Q14, $M = 3.26$), and they strongly agreed that counselling greatly aided in managing the effects of education differences (Q12, $M = 3.26$). Additionally, respondents agreed that a successful marriage does not require equal education level (Q15, $M = 3.21$), indicating a mature understanding that compatibility does not equate to sameness. Overall, the findings support the value of counselling in assisting couples in identifying, comprehending, and adjusting to educational and intellectual differences, which helps to lessen marital disputes pertaining to the level of education of couple.

Table 5: *Descriptive Statistics on Counselling and Temperamental Differences*

Item	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Status
Q16	Counselling improved temperamental management	3.13	0.89	Agree
Q17	Counselling resolved temperament incompatibility	3.14	0.85	Agree
Q18	Introvert/extrovert can coexist with counselling	3.29	0.77	Strongly Agree
Q19	Opposite temperaments can complement each other	3.21	0.83	Agree
Q20	Counselling helps partners adjust to temperament	3.18	0.84	Agree

Interpretation: Respondents' opinions regarding the function of counselling in resolving

temperamental conflicts in marriage are shown in Table 5. The information indicates that there is broad consensus that counselling has greatly enhanced temperamental trait management (Q16, M = 3.13) and assisted in resolving temperamental incompatibilities (Q17, M = 3.14). Both respondents strongly agreed that opposite temperaments can complement one another when properly guided (Q19, M = 3.21) and that introverts and extroverts can coexist in marriage with appropriate counselling (Q18, M = 3.29). Furthermore, they confirmed that counselling helps partners with different emotional dispositions adjust and understand one another (Q20, M = 3.18). All of these results point to the effectiveness of counselling in improving young couples' emotional compatibility and lowering temperament-related disputes.

Test of Hypotheses

Four null hypotheses were proposed to examine whether counselling significantly influences different types of marital conflict among young couples in Karu L.G.A. Below is the **comprehensive table** presentation of t-test results and interpretations of all four hypotheses tested in the study on *The Roles of Counselling on Marital Conflict Among Young Couples in Karu L.G.A. of Nasarawa State*. The table includes the mean scores for couples who attended counselling and those who did not, the t-test values, degrees of freedom (df), p-values, and decisions made based on the 0.05 significance level.

Table 6: *Summary of Hypotheses Testing Using t-test Analysis (N = 380)*

Hypothesis	Variable	Group	Mean	SD	t(df)	p-value	Decision
H ₀₁	Gender-related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.24	0.68	t(378) = 4.91	0.000	Reject H ₀₁
		Did Not Attend	2.74	0.82			
H ₀₂	Religious background-related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.18	0.72	t(378) = 3.59	0.000	Reject H ₀₂
		Did Not Attend	2.80	0.79			
H ₀₃	Levels of education related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.22	0.70	t(378) = 2.88	0.004	Reject H ₀₃
		Did Not Attend	2.91	0.75			
H ₀₄	Temperamental-related conflict	Attended Counselling	3.25	0.68	t(378) = 3.78	0.000	Reject H ₀₄
		Did Not Attend	2.86	0.80			

Table 6 signifies that counseling has a statistically significant role in helping couples resolve marital conflicts relating to gender differences, religious background, different levels of education

and temperament, as evidenced by the rejection of all four null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of

significance.

Discussion

The results of the descriptive and inferential statistics provide compelling evidence for the crucial role that counselling plays in reducing marital disputes in young couples. Participants viewed counselling as a useful tool for enhancing marital stability, as evidenced by the high levels of agreement (Mean $\approx$ 3.2) across gender, religious background, different levels of education, and temperamental domains.

These results support the claims made by Adeyeye (2021), who noted that counselling is essential for resolving major marital conflicts like religious background differences, temperamental incompatibility, and poor communication. Furthermore, the data supports the assertion made by Aremu and Lawal (2020) that counselling enhances mutual understanding in relationships, fosters emotional intelligence, and facilitates conflict resolution.

Crucially, across all four domains, the t-test results showed statistically significant differences between couples who received counselling and those who did not. This is in line with the structural functionalist theory, which contends that when counselling services are used well, they promote social harmony and stability.

Summary of Findings

This study investigated how counselling can help young couples in Karu Local Government Area of Nasarawa State especially in resolving marital disputes. Using a descriptive survey design, the study included 380 respondents who were young couples in their first five years of marriage. Four aspects of marital conflict were examined by using the Roles of Counselling in Marital Conflict Questionnaire (RCMCQ): temperamental incompatibility, differences in levels of education, religious background incompatibility, and gender roles differences.

With 78.9% of respondents admitting to having marital conflict in their homes, the demographic data analysis showed that it is a common problem. According to the descriptive analysis, premarital, marital, or both couples who had received counselling reported much higher levels of satisfaction with their capacity to resolve disputes. All conflict dimensions showed statistically significant differences ($p < 0.05$) between couples who received counselling and those who did not, according to inferential statistics (independent t-tests).

In particular, counselling was found to assist couples in recognizing and adjusting to differences in their level of education, managing cultural and religious background differences, understanding and respecting gender roles, and constructively navigating temperamental differences. These results confirmed that counselling plays a vital role in helping young couples develop comprehension, empathy, and problem-solving techniques, which eventually promotes marital stability and harmony.

Conclusion

Despite being a deep and rewarding institution, marriage is frequently hampered by a variety of interpersonal dynamics resulting from individual differences. According to the study's findings, counselling is essential for giving young couples the skills and knowledge they need to deal with these difficulties. The results showed that counselling promotes different gender self-awareness, respect for one another's roles, handling religious, temperamental and level of education differences, all of which are critical components of a happy marriage.

Thus, especially for young couples, incorporating counselling services into premarital and marital support networks can greatly lower the rate of marital dissolution. The assistance of qualified marriage counsellors can strengthen commitment, foster compatibility, and demystify irrational expectations. In summary, counselling is a proactive and preventive strategy for fostering long-lasting marriages rather than just a reactive one.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings:

1. Marriage counsellors should include self-awareness and appreciation of gender roles, understanding partner's religious background and education as well as handling temperamental compatibility in their counselling session.
2. Religious organizations and community leaders should mandate and continue premarital and marital counselling for young couples.
3. The government and non-governmental organizations ought to make investments in the education and employment of certified marriage counsellors in family welfare units.

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