

ASSESSING THE PERCEIVED IMPACT OF COUNSELLING ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN ABEOKUTA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study assessed the perceived impact of counselling on conflict resolution strategies among married couples in Abeokuta, Nigeria. A cross-sectional survey was carried out to collect data on 200 participants (100 married couples) using a valid questionnaire ($r = 0.92$). Results revealed that the first reason for marital conflict was financial disagreements ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 0.74$), then poor communication ($M = 3.08$, $SD = 0.93$) and interference of extended family ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.95$). Counselling was perceived to help with communication ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.87$), promote understanding ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 0.90$), and present practical conflict resolution ($M = 3.23$, $SD = 0.94$). Counselling also occurred with a lower level of conflict and more positive partner interaction (both $M = 3.25$; $SDs = 0.89$ and 0.83). Nevertheless, rebuilding trust ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 1.01$) and regulating emotions ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.06$) were less effective, and the agreement was moderate when it comes to timely dispute resolution ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.06$) and relationship satisfaction ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.94$). Counselling awareness and acceptance were moderate, but preference toward it as compared to other methods was rather low ($M = 2.70$, $SD = 0.95$). It concluded that counselling is a valuable asset, especially for communication and practical strategies, but advised that the elements of trust-building and emotional regulation be strengthened, and that more couples in Nigeria should adopt and embrace it. These should be enhanced by policy and community outreach.

Keywords: Marital Conflict, Counselling Intervention, Conflict Resolution, Nigerian Couples.

Word Counts: 249

Introduction

Like in any other society, one of the challenges that couples in Nigeria are facing is the presence of conflicts that threaten the stability of their marriages and the overall well-being of their families. According to Babalola (2024), previous research indicates that problems regarding money, as well as disagreements regarding culture, communication, and other topics, manifest themselves in the majority of marriages. As a result, tactics for conflict resolution become increasingly crucial, and it is possible that counselling could be an intervention that completely

changes the narrative. While they have proven to be helpful, it is still of the utmost need to conduct additional research into the effectiveness of counselling in relation to the conflict in Nigeria. It is possible to find a vast body of literature on the subject of conflict resolution, which demonstrates the many different ideas and practical uses of counselling.

A variety of counselling models, including cognitive-behaviour models and narrative therapy, have been studied by a number of researchers as potential strategies that might effectively reduce disputes and increase communication between couples (Ogbode, Nwankwo, & Njoku, 2022; Afolabi, 2024). Therefore, the relevance of this literature is best understood in relation to Western contexts, as opposed to non-Western contexts such as Nigeria, for example. An examination of the research conducted in Nigeria suggests that counselling interventions are both promising and inconclusive, according to the findings. Olusola and Falaye (2024) found that couples who attend counselling tend to have healthy relationships and appropriate coping skills. Nevertheless, the majority of this research is qualitative or has small sample sizes, which restricts its potential to be generalised outside a specific context. This gives rise to questions regarding whether or not counselling techniques are effective in the same way across the board, which shows that there is a requirement for conducting more in-depth research into our situation.

The body of literature that is now available do not show multidimensional approaches to the role of sociocultural elements in addition to individual psychological factors. In spite of the fact that counselling theories are well-founded, research conducted in Nigeria frequently fails to take into account the combined impact of traditional beliefs, economic status, and contemporary therapy. The study discussed how counselling can be used in conflict resolution within Nigerian couples, and it fills the gaps in the literature, which tends to conclude the suitability of counselling services (Babalola, 2024; Olusola & Falaye, 2024). It discussed typical causes of marital conflict, counselling strategies of comparison and explored couple participation and experiences. Although counselling has been viewed as a solution to relational problems (Afolabi, 2024; Babalola, 2024), there is a paucity of evidence on the effectiveness of the practice in Nigeria (Kofoworola & Rofiu, 2024), with most of the studies being based on Western approaches (Elegbede et al., 2024; Kofoworola & Rofiu, 2024). The consequences of marital disagreements in Nigeria have both psychological and socio-economic impacts (Jalalvand et al., 2023; Okumdi & Akpororo, 2022) and affect both households and communities (Ogbode et al., 2022). The study was conducted to offer culturally sensitive information and empirical data to guide the counselling practice and policy, which will eventually lead to marital stability and happiness among couples in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Marital conflict remains a significant challenge among couples in Nigeria, often resulting in emotional distress, strained relationships, and, in severe cases, separation or divorce. Despite the availability of counselling services, many couples continue to struggle with unresolved issues, particularly those rooted in financial difficulties, cultural expectations, and poor communication.

Existing research on conflict resolution among couples has largely focused on Western models and qualitative approaches, creating a gap in contextually relevant, data-driven studies that reflect the Nigerian sociocultural landscape. Furthermore, while counselling interventions have shown promise in improving communication and conflict management, their effectiveness in deeper aspects such as emotional regulation and trust-building remains limited. There is a pressing need for a more systematic understanding of how culturally appropriate counselling strategies can be utilised and optimised to address the specific challenges Nigerian couples face. This study investigated the gap by evaluating the perceived role of counselling in marital conflict resolution in Abeokuta, Nigeria.

Objectives:

Four objectives were examined in this study:

- i. Examine the perceived role of counselling in conflict resolution
- ii. Identify the common sources of conflict among couples
- iii. Assess the perceived effectiveness of counselling approaches on couples' conflicts.
- iv. Determine the extent to which couples in Nigeria seek counselling as a means of resolving marital conflicts.

Research Questions:

Four research questions were answered:

1. What are the common causes of conflict among couples in Nigeria?
2. How do counselling services contribute to conflict resolution between couples in Nigeria?
3. How effective are counselling strategies in helping couples resolve conflicts in Nigeria?
4. To what extent do couples in Nigeria seek counselling as a means of resolving marital conflicts?

Methodology

A quantitative research design was adopted using a cross-sectional survey approach. This design was chosen to gather empirical data on how couples perceive counselling and its efficacy in resolving their conflicts. The study is descriptive and estimates the commonly occurring sources of conflict, the perceived role of counselling, and the extent to which couples seek counselling.

The population of the study is approximately 145,000 - 160,000 couples estimated to be living together as married couples in Abeokuta (Abeokuta North + South LGAs). The estimate started with the 2022 estimated populations for Abeokuta North (338,100) and Abeokuta South (425,700) and considered the age shares and marital prevalence rates at a statewide level. (city population, 2025).

The sample of the study consisted of 100 married couples (200 people) resident in the Abeokuta metro area of Ogun State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling was used to get participants who were currently married and living in Abeokuta. To be more specific, the sampled population consists of those from diverse backgrounds, ages, education, and duration of marriage, which truly captures the heterogeneity of couples in this metropolitan area.

The data were gathered only through a structured, developed and self-administered questionnaire titled **“Couples’ Conflict Resolution and Counselling Experience Questionnaire (CCRCEQ)”** that contained 2 sections. Section A consisted of demographic data such as gender, age, occupation, ethnic group, and educational qualification. Section B consisted of 25 items to study the topic of investigation through a 4-point modified Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). A part of the research instrument was developed based on a review of literature relevant to the study and is designed to capture demographic information (age, gender, educational background, duration of marriage, etc.) and common causes of conflict among couples in Nigeria, which included questions addressing the common areas of marital conflict such as finances, communication, culture, and other stressors. Conflict Resolution Strategies: These are items that are meant to measure the particular conflict resolution strategies that couples use and the role of counselling in enhancing these skills. Counselling Experience and Perception: Items measuring the degree to which participants sought counselling, the effectiveness of the strategies used, and their general feelings towards using counselling for conflict resolution. To ensure that the items were clear, relevant to the culture, and reliable, a small group of married couples was taken to pilot-test the questionnaire before the main study. The necessary changes were made based on the pilot testing results. The questionnaire was administered two times in a gap of two weeks. The responses were Cronbach’s alpha tested, and the reliability was found to be 0.92. Hence, the data is reliable.

Results

Research Question One: What are the common causes of conflict among couples in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Items Indicating the common causes of conflict among couples in Nigeria. (*n* = 200)

S/N	Items	Responses (F)				Mean	S.D.	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
1	Financial disagreements frequently lead to marital conflict.	130	50	15	5	3.53	0.74	Strongly Agree
2	Cultural differences are a major source of conflict between partners.	60	90	35	15	2.98	0.88	Agree
3	Poor communication contributes significantly to marital disputes.	80	70	35	15	3.08	0.93	Agree
4	Divergent expectations regarding household roles often cause conflict.	30	50	70	50	2.30	1.00	Disagree
5	Interference from extended family members frequently sparks disagreements	70	80	30	20	3.00	0.95	Agree
Grand mean						2.98	0.99	Agree

Source: Researcher's field survey (2025)

Note. Decision rule: 4= Strongly Agree (SA), 3= Agree (A), 2= Disagree (D), 1= Strongly Disagree (SD). A mean score < 2.60 is disagreed; a Mean score between 2.60-3.40 is agreed; a Mean score > 3.40 is strongly agreed.

Table 1 shows that, of the five potential areas of conflict, finances stand out as the most important factor for marital discord in Nigeria. Respondents nearly all had high agreement that financial issues are a significant contributor to conflict. With a mean score of 3.53 and a standard deviation of 0.74, this issue has a high measure of agreement. In contrast, cultural variations, poor communication, and meddling in-laws scored around 3.00 on average, which means there was also meaningful agreement, but it was not as prominent as financial issues. The decision rules show that while these items scored in the "Agree" range, they were not as firmly entrenched in the "Strongly Agree" range. This indicates there is moderate agreement by the sample that those three facets have a role in marital discord. About variation, as seen by the standard deviations, there is also an insight into the distribution of opinions. For example, variation in the responses related to finances (SD = 0.74) is fairly low, where there was a very strong and consistent perception of the issue and its importance. The variation related to different expectations regarding household roles (SD = 1.00) indicates there is a slightly wider variation whereby a sizeable portion of the respondents disagreed concerning that particular issue as a source of marital conflict. Overall, with a grand mean of 2.98 and a grand SD of 0.99, there is a balanced response period where, while there is some opinion diversity, there is a general tendency for the sample to agree that there are several issues that contribute to marital conflict, with finances being the most strongly rated.

Research Question Two: How do counselling services contribute to conflict resolution between couples in Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation scores of items indicating *how counselling services contribute to conflict resolution between couples in Nigeria*. ($n = 200$)

SN	Items	Responses (F)				Mean	S.D.	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
6	Counselling sessions help improve couples' communication skills.	90	70	30	10	3.20	0.87	Agree
7	Counselling facilitates a better understanding of each partner's perspective.	80	80	25	15	3.13	0.90	Agree
8	Counselling provides practical strategies for managing conflicts.	100	60	25	15	3.23	0.94	Agree
9	Counselling helps couples regulate emotions during disagreements.	70	60	40	30	2.85	1.06	Agree
10	Counselling contributes to rebuilding trust between partners	50	70	50	30	2.70	1.01	Agree
	Grand mean					3.02	0.98	Agree

Source: Researcher's field survey (2025)

Note. Decision rule: 4= Strongly Agree (SA), 3= Agree (A), 2= Disagree (D), 1= Strongly Disagree (SD). A mean score < 2.60 is disagreed; a Mean score between 2.60-3.40 is agreed; a Mean score > 3.40 is strongly agreed.

Table 2 shows that the respondents agree that counselling helps to improve different aspects of the couples' conflict resolution. The data shows that counselling is useful to improve communication skills (mean = 3.20) and provide strategies (mean = 3.23). Both items have low standard deviations (0.87 and 0.94), implying there is a consensus among respondents. Likewise, counselling is said to increase understanding of one partner's perspective better than the other partner's, as evidenced by the mean score of 3.13 with a standard deviation of 0.90.

Overall, all items fall within the "Agree" range as per the decision rule, confirming that the intervention is perceived positively overall. Contrarily, items on whether disagreements have become less emotional (mean = 2.85, SD = 1.06) and whether partners have become better at trusting one another again (mean = 2.70, SD = 1.01) received slightly lower mean scores. As such, it can be argued that counselling is thought to be somewhat less effective in these areas or somewhat more variable. The opinions were mixed about the impact of counselling on trust and emotion regulation, as is evidenced by the fairly larger standard deviations of these items. Based

upon an overall score of 3.02 (with a grand SD of 0.98), I feel that counselling is fairly effective in multiple areas of conflict resolution. The information can be useful for both practitioners and researchers, as it highlights the strength of the present counselling and also shows the areas that might need more attention to improve therapeutic outcomes for couples.

Research Question Three: How effective are counselling strategies in helping couples resolve conflicts in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation scores of items indicating how effective counselling strategies are in helping couples resolve conflicts in Nigeria. ($n = 200$)

SN	Items	Responses (F)				Mean	S.D.	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
11	Counselling strategies significantly reduce the frequency of conflicts.	100	60	30	10	3.25	0.89	Agree
12	The techniques used in counselling lead to lasting improvements in conflict resolution.	80	70	30	20	3.05	0.97	Agree
13	Counselling interventions result in more positive interactions between partners.	90	80	20	10	3.25	0.83	Agree
14	Couples experience a timely resolution of disputes through counselling.	70	60	40	30	2.85	1.06	Agree
15	Counselling enhances overall satisfaction with conflict management in the relationship	60	80	40	20	2.90	0.94	Agree
Grand mean						3.06	0.94	Agree

Source: Researcher's field survey (2025)

Note. Decision rule: 4= Strongly Agree (SA), 3= Agree (A), 2= Disagree (D), 1= Strongly Disagree (SD). A mean score < 2.60 is disagreed; a Mean score between 2.60-3.40 is agreed; a Mean score > 3.40 is strongly agreed.

According to Table 3, respondents mostly agree that counselling positively impacts conflict resolution since all items fall under "Agree." Regular counsel helps in reducing conflict and increasing positive interaction with another party. These two items received the same mean score of 3.25, meaning that the respondents perceived counselling strategies and interventions to be useful in these aspects. The overall grand mean of 3.06 strengthens the idea that, on average, counselling is good for the respondents for managing conflicts. The spread of the responses is moderate, as shown in the standard deviations ranging from 0.83 to 1.06. This shows that

responses are spread out but not completely different; hence, responses are broad as per the average. Looking closely at individual items, see minor differences in effectiveness. To illustrate, the item “Through counselling couples, disputes are resolved in good time” has a mean of 2.85 with an SD of 1.06, suggesting the respondents are somewhat mixed on whether counselling leads to the timely resolution of disputes. Also, the response “Couples are satisfied with how their relationship manages conflict” scores 2.90. With a standard deviation of 0.94, this implies that this item is slightly less consistent in agreement compared to the items that refer directly to a reduction in conflicts and enhancement of positive interactions. While counselling is generally accepted as helpful in managing conflicts, this reflects that specific outcome measures like timeliness/overall satisfaction could be better or more targeted.

Research Question Four: To what extent do couples in Nigeria seek counselling as a means of resolving marital conflicts?

Table 4: Mean and Standard Deviation scores of items indicating the extent to which couples in Nigeria seek counselling as a means of resolving marital conflicts. ($n = 200$)

SN	Items	Responses (F)				Mean	S.D.	Decision
		SA	A	D	SD			
16	Couples in my community actively seek counselling to resolve marital conflicts.	60	80	40	20	2.90	0.94	Agree
17	Counselling is widely accepted as a beneficial tool for resolving marital issues.	90	70	20	20	3.15	0.96	Agree
18	A significant number of couples utilise counselling services when conflicts arise.	80	60	40	20	3.00	1.00	Agree
19	There is a high level of awareness about available counselling services among couples.	50	80	50	20	2.80	0.93	Agree
20	Many couples prefer counselling over other methods for addressing marital conflicts	40	90	40	30	2.70	0.95	Agree
	Grand mean					2.91	0.96	

Source: Researcher's field survey (2025)

Note. Decision rule: 4= Strongly Agree (SA), 3= Agree (A), 2= Disagree (D), 1= Strongly Disagree (SD). A mean score < 2.60 is disagreed; a Mean score between 2.60-3.40 is agreed; a Mean score > 3.40 is strongly agreed

According to Table 4, the community agrees that counselling services are useful for resolving marital disputes. All the items fall under the “Agree” category, where the mean ranged from 2.70 to 3.15. More specifically, the item states, “Counselling is a widely acknowledged helpful method for resolving marital problems. It has the highest mean of 3.15.” This indicates that the respondents have quite an assurance of the efficacy of counselling in general. Couples in conflict use counselling services rather significantly (mean=3.00), which also shows a positive but lesser agreement. The items for couples seeking counselling (mean = 2.90) also show a positive response toward counselling. While there is an agreement on the benefits of counselling, individual opinion seems to vary as the standard deviations are moderate (approx. 0.93 to 1.00). The overall grand mean of 2.91 (with a grand SD of 0.96) consolidates the view that counselling is recognised as a beneficial approach for managing marital conflicts in the community. Many couples prefer counselling over other methods, reflected by a lower mean (2.70), which indicates that while counselling is accepted and used, preference for counselling over other methods may not be very strong. Though counselling is accepted and used, the stronger preference for counselling over methods appears weaker, as shown by the lower mean for “Many couples prefer counselling over other methods” (2.70). Overall, the data reflect reasonable agreement with the use of counselling services as an effective tool in managing marital disputes.

Discussion

Based on the results presented in Table 1, the majority of respondents, with a mean score of 3.53, are in agreement that marital conflict is caused by financial concerns. This group of responders has reached a consensus that economic concerns are the root cause of marital disagreements. Cultural differences, poor communication, and involvement from in-laws are also factors that contribute to conflict, but to a lower level (grand mean = 2.98). Other factors have also been shown to contribute to conflict. Previous research has demonstrated that the most significant factors contributing to marital conflicts in Nigeria are high levels of financial hardship and cultural stress. Because there was no attempt at negotiation, this transpired. In accordance with the findings of the study carried out by Babalola (2024) and Olusola and Falaye (2024), this is the case. Since its standard deviation is quite low, it is possible to draw the conclusion that disagreements regarding finances are broadly perceived and are not restricted to a particular subgroup. As a result, this is a domain that calls for a variety of actions.

The findings shown in Table 2 demonstrate that counselling services assist individuals in being better able to cope with conflict. These services assist with communication, assist in understanding the perspectives of partners, and provide better strategies to deal with problems. Based on the low standard deviations across these categories, most respondents are in agreement that it is true that counselling can be helpful in certain aspects of relationships. Counselling interventions have been shown to bring about favourable improvements in the communication and conflict management methods of married couples, according to a previous study. This is what Ogbode et al. 2022 and Afolabi 2024 have to say about the matter. The poor ratings for

emotion control and restoring trust indicate that these components may require more improvement or focus in the counselling technique that is being utilised. Table 3 demonstrates that certain counselling processes have resulted in fewer instances of fighting and more good interactions between spouses. This is supported by the fact that the mean scores of the main items were approximately 3.25.

On the other hand, the fact that the item meant for the satisfaction with conflict management and the timeliness of conflict resolution were 2.85 and 2.90, respectively, indicated that the counselling intervention had some variable consequences. In general, the respondents in this research attest to the fact that counselling therapy has been helpful in this regard, but it has failed to resolve concerns pertaining to punctuality and satisfaction, despite the fact that it has advised against fighting. Since this is the case, there is a requirement for approaches that are more culturally sensitive. As stated by Elegbede et al. (2024) and Afolabi (2024). It is possible that further improvements could be made to the effectiveness of counselling in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the frequency with which couples seek the advice of counsellors to address their disagreements is analysed in Table 4. According to the findings of the study, couples had generally favourable attitudes towards counselling services (grand mean = 2.91), as indicated by the statistical analysis.

In comparison to other methods of conflict resolution, there is a very moderate preference for counselling, even though there is a high degree of awareness and acceptance of counselling services. According to Kofoworola and Rofiu (2024) and Okumdi and Akpororo (2022), this demonstrates that counselling is beneficial; yet, there may be some stigma associated with it or other ways to resolve it that may prevent couples from being willing to use it. These findings imply that when it comes to developing policies and other things, they should continue to inform people about the effectiveness of therapy, which is not a problem, but could prevent it from happening.

The results of this study have numerous significant implications for the field of marital conflict resolution in Nigeria, including policy, practice, and future research. As financial concerns were the most significant and widely agreed-upon source of marital conflict, counselling programmes must incorporate financial literacy and budgeting strategies as central components. Marriage counsellors and social workers should be provided with the necessary training to assist couples in overcoming economic tension and developing joint financial planning abilities. This also implies the necessity of economic empowerment programs or collaborative interventions with financial advisors. The necessity for interventions that are more culturally tailored is emphasised by the relatively lower impact of counselling in areas such as emotional regulation and trust-building. The societal values, expectations, and family structures of Nigerian couples may not be completely aligned with many Western-based models.

Given this, it is imperative to investigate and integrate indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms and culturally sensitive therapy frameworks. Counselling interventions were demonstrated to be effective in improving communication and comprehension among partners.

These areas should remain the primary focus of counselling sessions. Counsellors should be instructed in the art of fostering open dialogue, active listening, and empathy-based exercises that encourage spouses to comprehend each other's viewpoints. Despite the moderate awareness and acceptability of counselling, its utilisation is still impeded by potential stigma or competing cultural beliefs regarding the resolution of conflict. Public education campaigns, community outreach initiatives, and partnerships with religious institutions could help to normalise the process of seeking counselling, particularly before the escalation of conflicts. The research emphasised that counselling was effective in reducing the frequency of conflicts; however, satisfaction with the pace and results of conflict resolution was moderate. This implies a requirement for enhanced responsiveness, accessibility, and potentially post-counselling follow-up mechanisms to provide couples with more efficient support. In order to evaluate the long-term effects of particular counselling strategies or investigate the experiences of under-represented groups, such as inter-ethnic couples or those residing in rural communities, future research could implement longitudinal or mixed-method designs.

Conclusion

The study showed that counselling intervention is an important means of resolving marital conflict among couples in Nigeria. It profoundly affected communication, proffering practical skills and reducing the rate of conflict. While most conflicts emerge from finances, most counselling interventions are viewed as helpful in other areas of conflict. This study's findings are consistent with similar previous studies that have recognised the pertinent value of counselling as useful in improving couples' interactions. However, more culturally and contextually specific results about Nigeria that affect the uptake of counselling services and their impact are also revealed. This study stands out from previous studies that concentrated on the West and shows that while counselling is beneficial everywhere, culture is important in determining what areas counselling helps in. In Nigeria, this is especially true in the area of finance.

Recommendations

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

1. The government should enhance and invest in counselling programs that are accessible, culturally appropriate, and focused on money issues and other major sources of conflict.
2. The public should be made more aware of the benefits of counselling services and support efforts aimed at settling marital conflict.
3. Counsellors should enhance their skills in regulating emotions and trust-building mechanisms. The latter is believed to be able to make their interventions more effective.
4. Couples should go for professional counselling to improve their communication and resolve conflicts before they blow up.

5. Marital conflict can be well counselled only by the joint efforts of community leaders, policymakers and stakeholders to develop culturally applicable solutions.

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