

## Patterns And Causes Of Marital Conflict Among Staff Of Selected Universities In Southwest Nigeria

**Johnson Olugbenga Agboola**

Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling  
Faculty of Education  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

**S. A. Oluwatosin**

Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling  
Faculty of Education  
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

### ABSTRACT

This study investigated the patterns and causes of marital conflict among staff of universities in southwest Nigeria. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The study sample was 1330 married staff members proportionately selected from nine universities using multi-stage sampling technique. Prevalence of Patterns of Marital Interaction Questionnaire (PPMIQ) and Causes of Marital Conflict Questionnaire (CMCQ) were used to collect data for the study. The results showed that 67.1% of the staff indicated that they experienced demand-withdraw pattern, while 26.8% experienced constructive pattern. Only 6.1% experienced destructive pattern. The results also showed that poor handling of family finances was considered as the most prominent with the highest RSI value of 0.806 followed by communication gap and time devoted to children with very high values of RSI of 0.804 and 0.7933 respectively. The least popular cause of marital conflict was difference in income level with the least RSI value of 0.681.

**Key Words:** Patterns, Marital Conflict, Staff, Universities

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage, as a basic institution in every society, may be described as one of the important and fundamental human relationships. It is a culturally, religiously and socially recognised union, normally between a man and a woman, who are referred to as husband and wife. This union establishes rights and obligations between a spouse, their children and even between them and their in-laws. As a very important human institution, marriage not only provides the initial structure to establish family relations, but also serves as avenue to raise and train future generations (Bano, Ahmad, Khan, Iqbal & Aleem, 2013). However, research has shown that in recent times, people are turning away from marriages because it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain happy and stable union (Amato, Johnson, Booth and Rogers, 2003). This is so because as Omeje (2014) opined, quite a number of marriages today are into serious conflict and this has posed a severe threat to the supposedly marital satisfaction and happiness that would have been enjoyed by couples. This scenario is created because when a man and a woman come together in marriage, each partner comes into the union with his or her individualised personal characteristics, needs, attitudes, values and peculiarities that may be at variance. In other words, if and when two people live together as intimately as husband and wife, they may experience conflict. A disagreement in marital relationship becomes a conflict when it goes beyond the normal intellectual difference that characterises marital relationships

to the emotional realm invoking feelings of anxiety or anger and followed by abusive languages and hostile actions (Makinde and Adeyinka, 2014).

Marital conflict may, therefore, be described as a struggle, clash, strife, disagreement or quarrel between husband and wife, and sometimes with other members of the household, over opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. Cummings (as cited in Tam & Lim, 2008) defined marital conflict as any major or minor interpersonal interaction that involved a difference of opinion, between a couple, whether it was mostly negative or even mostly positive. Bjornberg (2004) posited that domestic conflict is an expression of structural conflict and power inequality in society. It is built into family life and has various kinds of expressions. Contradictory needs and interest are elementary aspects of couples' everyday lives although they do not necessarily become spelled out in an open conflict. Osarenren, Nwadinigwe and Anyama (2013) opined that marital conflict come in different forms like spouse battery, spouse abuse, sexual abuse, marital irresponsibility, incest, rape, subtle struggle for control between the couple and other abusive behaviours.

Templeton (2001) categorised marital conflict into two major types. The first is a conflict that may be intense and destructive, the couple desires to honour the commitment they made and want to work through their problems. Their level of care for each other or belief and desire to be in the relationship may exist at various levels. But they are willing to work through personal hurts and failed expectations in order to heal the marriage. The nature of the conflict may comprise difficulty in perceptions, communication skills, and external stressors but fundamentally the two want to preserve their marriage. The second category would comprise relationship problems due to one or both partners wanting to get out of the relationship. The core conflict here is between one or both partners and the commitment to be married. Though there may be understandable and justifiable reasons for the union to come under question, for the committed couple, these circumstances do not cause them to want to end the relationship. So, in essence, you have one dyad of people who, regardless of the conflict, are willing to improve the relationship. On the other hand, regardless of the problems or the skills of the couple one or both no longer want to be in the marriage or believe they can remain in the marriage. The question becomes, "Can the relationship work?" regardless of the conflict. Hence, the central question of dealing with marital conflicts is not a matter of all the various kinds of conflicts that can exist, rather it is whether or not the couple want to make the marriage work and suspend their beliefs about it not working. Commitment in the marriage is the ultimate question in marital conflict (Shadoan and Shadoan, 1999).

Many researchers, both local and foreign, have conducted studies on the causes of marital conflict across communities, societies and cultures. Their findings came up with various factors that cannot be extensively reviewed in this paper due to space limitation. A few will however suffice. A study conducted by Storaasli and Markman (1990) identified ten common problem areas. These areas were money, communication, relatives, sex, religion, recreation, friends, alcohol/drugs, children, and jealousy. A majority of the husbands that participated in the study indicated that most of the conflict they experienced was due to communication and sex. The wives, on the other hand, pinpointed communication, sex, relatives and jealousy as the major sources of conflict in their relationships. The study showed that the intensity of conflict was highest for men in regards to communication and sex, while the intensity of conflict was highest for women in regards to communication, sex, relatives, and jealousy.

Another study conducted by Storaasli and Markman (1990) found that money was the most consistent and intense problem for married couples and over 90% of couples rated this as being their first or second problem area. Also, a study conducted by Kurdek (1994) found that

conflict involving power in a marital relationship had a larger effect on marital dissolution than conflict involving intimacy. Fincham and Beach (1999) found that recently married couples, as well as partners who had been married for several years, stated that their sources of conflict vary from personal characteristics to verbal and physical abuse. The researchers found that an unequal division of household labour was correlated with marital conflict. Another factor that may cause marital conflict is the level of exposure of couple. Expatriating on this factor, Iheagwam (2001) opined that academic and social exposure of couples can make or mar a marriage. He submitted that when couples are not well exposed or enlightened enough academically and socially, they are prone to disharmony, misunderstanding or misrepresentation of issues concerning their married life. Most marriages among literate couples have been undergoing trying times as stated by Carew (1995) and Obe (1997) who in separate studies found that educated couples, despite their qualifications and ethnic affiliation have discrepancies in their views concerning marital disharmony, especially, as it concerned their values and marriage expectations. The person who took decisions or dominated the decision making process in marriage was capable of creating disharmony in the union. This was prevalent among literate couples, who both contributed substantially to the family income and would want to take part equally in decision making in the family. When the man took up this role, as it was common in most societies, the wife rebelled, thus creating situations of disharmony and in some cases, a break or separation (Ibe, Obidoa & Uzoechina, 2013).

Kelley and Thibaut (as cited in Templeton, 2001) listed different interests, goals, desires or expectations that are not compatible, and perceptions that the spouse disputes or does not value one's goal-directed behaviour as causes of marital conflict. But conflict, in their opinion, does not have to arise if the couple skillfully moves from a clash in styles or priorities to opportunities for cooperative interaction. Studies conducted by Aina (2004), Aderinto (2004) and Tenuche (2004) identified refusal to submit to the husband's authority, interference by in-laws, sexual misconduct by wives, conflicts between career and domestic duties by wives, religious differences, extra-marital affairs by husbands, and inability of husbands to live up to domestic responsibilities, as some of the major causes of marital conflict. Moreover, a study carried out by Onwuasoanya (2006) revealed that age at marriage, educational level, religious affiliation, marriage types, income, communication, cultural background, sexual incompatibility, lack of trust, fertility status and in-laws interference are some of the causes of marital conflict.

Mcvey (as cited in Anim, 2012) highlighted financial problems, immaturity before marriage, in-laws, accommodation problems and sexual incompatibilities as resulting in marital distress. Also, Adei (as cited in Anim, 2012) blamed marital conflict on factors such as differences in personalities or temperaments, differences in the sexes, differences in upbringing, communication difficulties, western education and emancipation of women, intrusion of third parties and failure to adjust. Anim (2012) identified self-esteem and assertiveness as causes of marital conflict. He stated that if self-esteem is not properly developed in people, they may enter marital relationships only to find out that they are not really mature enough to handle physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual conflicts that erupt in marital relationships. Osarenren, Nwadinigwe and Anyama (2013) submitted that marital conflicts are often caused by childlessness, forced marriage, incompatibility, communication gap, interference by in-laws, finances, infidelity, sex of children and lack of appreciation.

Amadi and Amadi (2014) identified nine cause of marital conflict. These are social incompatibility of marriage partners, sexual incompatibility, extreme sexual orientation, extended family affairs/issues and lack of mutual respect between partners. Others are dishonesty and moral decadence, negligence behaviour of spouses, unwholesome social

behaviour and poor marital communication. Stressing the importance of communication to the sustainability of a healthy union, Edger (1996) observed that it has occupied a central position in all discourse concerning successful marriage. Effective marital communication entails that couples discuss issues, respond to questions, call for explanations and accept same timely (when given), as any delay may send out a wrong signal which a partner is bound to interpret same way. Effective marital communication can in fact assuage many other marital disquiets before they could degenerate into crisis situations. Put differently, poor marital communication has been blamed for some other marital problems that have even culminated into divorce or separation of spouses. Purposeful open dialogue between couples often tends to be overtaken by incessant arguments about anything, everything, and nothing; misinterpretation generates misunderstandings; verbal attacks are countered by keeping silence especially on the husband's side (Amadi & Amadi, 2014).

Patterns of marital conflict have been studied extensively in interpersonal conflicts of couples. In literature, the patterns of behaviour exhibited by couples have been discussed from the perspectives of communication mode and physical reactions to conflict situations. Fletcher (as cited in Sadeghi, Hezardastan, Ahmadi, Bahrami, Etemadi and Fatehizadeh, 2011) opined that communication plays an important role in determining satisfaction in marriage and close relationship. To accentuate this position, Christensen and Shenk (as cited in Sadeghi et al., 2011) posited that how one communicates with one's partner is important in setting the overall tone of the relationship and give rise to predict patterns of behaviour, especially when attempting to solve the everyday problems and challenges that confront most couples.

Gottman and Katz (1993) identified a negative marital interaction pattern which they labelled as "Mutually Hostile pattern of conflict resolution", because couples were found to usually engage in negative communication style. When spouses are contemptuous toward each other, they communicate a sense of superiority and moralistic disapproval through insults, mockery, or attributions of the partner's incompetence. Contemptuous statements are often accompanied by belligerent demands in which the spouse contests his or her partner's statements by trying to provoke a response or get a rise out of the partner (Gottman and Katz, 1993).

Researchers such as Pasch and Bradbury (1998) Crohan (1996), Kurdek (1995), Oggins, Veroff and Leber (1993), have all categorised conflict patterns or behaviours as destructive, constructive and withdrawal. Other researchers have defined conflict behaviours as negative or positive affect expression (Gottman, Coan, Carrere & Swanson, 1998), hostile or warm (Matthews, Wickrama, & Conger, 1996), and negative, positive, or disengaged (Smith, Vivian, & O'Leary, 1990) as cited in Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, and McIlvane (2010). In literature, the most described or discussed patterns of marital interaction are the destructive, constructive and demand/withdrawal patterns.

### **Destructive Pattern**

Destructive behaviours include overtly negative reactions to marital problems such as yelling, insults, criticism, belligerence, and contempt (Birditt et al., 2010). As noted by Roloff and Reznik (2008) often individuals are unable to resolve an interpersonal conflict in a single episode and go on to have reoccurring argumentative episodes about that issue. Roloff and Johnson (as cited in Roloff & Reznik, 2008) defined such serial arguing as argumentative episodes focused on a given issue that occur at least twice This pattern, research has shown often leads to negative evaluation of marriage, which in turns leads to a decline in marital satisfaction and stability. Gottman, Markman and Notarius (1977) observed that distressed couples more than non-distressed often engaged in what they described as cross-complaining.

In this pattern of interaction, one spouse's complaint is met with a counter complaint by the partner. In giving a further insight into this pattern of marital interaction, Roloff and Reznik (2008) stated that one spouse might complain that his or her partner never helps around the house and the other counters by noting that the spouse only spends money but does not generate any family income. Research has further found that destructive behaviours (e.g., criticism, defensiveness and contempt) used in observed interactions predicted divorce among newlyweds up to 7 years later and among longer married couples (married an average of 5 years) up to 14 years later (Gottman & Levenson, 1992, 2000, 2002) as cited in Birditt, Brown, Orbuch and McIlvane (2010).

### **Constructive Pattern**

Marital conflict is said to be constructive when partners handle conflicts in positive ways by displaying behaviours, such as verbal and physical affection, problem solving and support (Goeke-Morey, Cummings, Harold, & Shelton, 2003). Birditt et al. (2010) posited that constructive behaviour involved overtly positive reactions such as saying nice things, calmly discussing the problem, and actively listening. In others words, couples who interact in a constructive manner engage in constructive communication that prevents conflict escalation. For example, rather than cross-complaining or problem escalation, non-distressed spouses engage in validation loops in which they acknowledge each other's complaints and are willing to discuss them (Gottman et al., 1977) as cited in Roloff and Reznik (2008). While lending credence to this viewpoint, Sadeghi et al. (2011) opined that in mutually constructive communication, partners discuss the issues affecting them, express their feelings in a positive way and work towards a resolution of the problem. In giving an example of constructive interaction, Roloff and Reznik (2008) explained that when one spouse accuses the other of not helping around the house, the partner responds, "I understand; let's talk about how we can share the load." When doing so, they validate each other while avoiding conflict escalation (Roloff & Reznik, 2008).

Constructive pattern of communication and behaviour have certain benefits for couples who make use of it in their marital relationships. Constructive communication may reduce stress. Although, constructive relational partners are expressing their concerns and feelings, they are also focused on resolving the problem rather than winning the fight or hurting each other. By validating each other's viewpoint and offering to work together to address emotional complaints, they may emotionally soothe each other (Gottman, Coan, Carrere, & Swanson, 1998) as cited in Roloff and Reznik, 2008). In addition, Davidson, MacGregor, Stuhr, Dixon and MacLean (2000) found that normalised blood pressure of sampled couples correlated with constructive disagreements, including problem solving and generating constructive solutions.

### **Demand-Withdraw Pattern**

The demand-withdraw interaction pattern is a pattern of conflict in which one-spouse pressures or blames while the other avoids or withdraws (Donato, Parise, Pagani, Bertoni, & Iafrate, 2013). Christensen and Heavey (as cited in Kline and Song, 2016) stated that demand-withdraw generally occurs when one partner pressures the other through emotional demands, criticism, and complaints, while the other retreats through withdrawal, defensiveness, and passive inaction. The demand-withdraw interaction pattern is present in diverse types of relationships, including romantic relationships, friendships, parent-child relationships, and married couples (Kline and Song, 2016). The focus of this study however, is the presence of this pattern among married couples.

Research over the years has offered several explanations of this pattern with emphasis on why women are often frequent initiators of the pattern (e.g. Caughlin & Scott 2010; Schrodtt, Witt, &

Shimkowski, 2014). The sex difference perspective explains that the frequency of women in the demand role and men in the withdraw role is from socialized gender roles and differences in intimacy needs. Women seek intimacy and closeness by engaging in higher use of DW, while men seek more autonomy through withdrawal behaviours. The individual difference perspective further explains that differences in closeness/autonomy can result from differences in personality and attachment needs. In support of this perspective, the DW pattern is more frequently observed when partners have discrepant intimacy needs that are associated with discrepant attachment styles (Millwood & Waltz 2008) as cited in Kline and Song (2016). A noticeable gap in literature, at least to the knowledge of this researcher, is that not much empirical studies have been conducted in this area as far as members of staff of universities in Nigeria are concerned. Many studies have been dedicated to academic activities within the university system but not much empirical studies have been conducted on the affective life of the staff members. Since no marital relationship is devoid of disagreements and conflicts, as studies have shown, this study assumed that currently, many staff members of universities in south-west Nigeria may be having one form of marital conflict or the other. Apart from the fact that the patterns and causes of such conflicts are currently not known to this researcher, unresolved marital conflict may negatively affect interpersonal relationships among staff members and with the students. It may also affect the work output of the staff which may manifest in lateness to work and outright absenteeism from duty; hence this study.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are to:

- i. determine the patterns of marital conflict among staff of selected universities in southwest Nigeria;
- ii. identify the causes of marital conflict among the staff in the study area.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- i. what are the patterns of marital conflict among staff of selected universities in southwest Nigeria?
- ii. what are the causes of marital conflict among staff of selected universities in southwest Nigeria?

### **METHOD**

The study employed the descriptive survey design because the study was basically exploratory and was meant to establish the patterns and causes of marital conflict being experienced by married staff of universities in southwest Nigeria.

The study sample comprised 1330 staff members proportionally selected from nine universities. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select the sample for the study. Three out of the six states in southwest Nigeria were selected using simple random sampling technique. In each of the three states, three universities were selected using stratified sampling technique with ownership as basis for stratification. This gave nine universities altogether for the study. Respondents were proportionally selected based on the staff population of each university. Five faculties were selected in each of the universities using simple random sampling technique. Respondents from each faculty were selected using convenience sampling technique

Two instruments titled "Patterns of Marital Interaction Questionnaire (PMIQ)" and "Causes of Marital Conflict Questionnaire (CMCQ)" were used to collect data. The PMIQ was adapted from three standardised instruments titled: "Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979)", "Gottman Sound Relationship House Questionnaires-Constructive versus Destructive Conflict Measure"

(Gottman, 1999) and “Gottman Sound Relationship House Questionnaires-The Three Relationship Processes” (Gottman, 1999). The original versions of the instruments contained 19, 103 and 55 items respectively, covering harsh startup, the four horsemen, gridlock on perpetual issues, accepting influence, compromise, flooding, negative sentiments override and effective repair attempts. The adapted version, which also contained information, gathered from relevant literature, has two sub-sections: B (i) and B (ii). Sub-section B (i) described three major patterns of marital conflict namely: destructive, constructive and demand/withdraw. Sub-section B (ii) contained 20 items meant to elicit information on couples’ patterns/frequency of marital conflict. The questionnaire was scored using a four-point Likert rating scale with 3 being “Always”, 2 “Sometimes”, 1 “Rarely” and 0 being “Never”.

The CMCQ was adapted was from a standardised instrument titled “Life Distress Inventory” (LDI; Thomas, Yoshioka, & Ager, 1993) and materials from relevant literature. It contained 20 items formed to elicit information from respondents on the causes of conflict in their relationships. Scores were determined using a five-point Likert rating scale with 4 being Strongly Agree, 3 Agree, 2 Disagree, 1 Strongly Disagree.

Data were collected by the researcher and field assistants who have been trained on how to administer the questionnaires. A total of 1330 married staff members were given the questionnaire to answer but 1100 staff returned the administered questionnaire, while 15 copies returned were improperly filled or blank, hence they became void. Data collection was adjudged highly successful because of the percentage (83%) of the respondents that returned the questionnaire.

Data collected were analysed descriptively using percentages, Relative Significance Index (RSI) and k-means cluster analysis to answer the only research question.

## RESULTS

### **Research Question 1: What are the patterns of marital conflict among staff of selected universities in southwest Nigeria?**

To answer this research question, three approaches were adopted. In the first approach the responses of the selected staff to the section B of the questionnaire was analysed descriptively using percentages and Relative Significance Index (RSI) and the result is presented in Table 1

**Table 1: Patterns of marital interaction during conflicts**

	Items on pattern of marital conflict. How frequently does my spouse.....?	Always		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		No response		RSI	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%		
1	Yells at me	79	7.3	255	23.5	318	29.3	388	35.8	45	4.1	0.506	11
2	Gives up quickly to end an argument	333	30.7	379	34.9	270	24.9	80	7.4	23	2.1	0.727	6
3	Hurts me with some objects	42	3.9	136	12.5	131	12.1	752	69.3	24	2.2	0.375	17
4	Withdraws from arguments	333	30.7	424	39.1	187	17.2	109	10.0	32	2.9	0.733	5
5	Pushes me down	50	4.6	105	9.7	136	12.5	762	70.2	32	2.9	0.368	18
6	Is good at resolving our differences	527	48.6	383	36.3	100	9.2	45	4.1	30	2.8	0.830	2
7	Criticises my personality	79	7.3	217	20.0	335	30.9	424	39.1	30	2.8	0.488	12
8	Keeps quiet during disagreements	265	24.4	458	42.2	216	19.9	124	11.4	22	2.0	0.703	8
9	Slaps my face	47	4.3	71	6.5	129	11.9	812	74.8	26	2.4	0.347	19
10	Openly shares my feelings	438	40.4	375	34.6	138	12.7	106	9.8	28	2.6	0.771	4
11	Sexually denies me	52	4.8	201	18.5	263	24.2	534	49.2	35	3.2	0.445	15
12	Does everything to avoid conflict with me	527	48.6	348	32.1	127	11.7	62	5.7	21	1.9	0.815	3
13	Decides how to resolve our differences	33	3.0	411	37.9	418	38.5	152	14.0	33	3.0	0.580	10
14	Insults me	40	3.7	134	12.4	241	22.2	649	59.8	21	1.9	0.398	16
15	Does not communicate with me	67	6.2	204	18.8	312	28.8	468	43.1	34	3.1	0.469	13
16	Believes in give and take in our discussions	328	30.2	292	26.8	206	19.0	134	12.4	24	2.2	0.712	7
17	Ignores my feelings	59	5.4	213	19.6	277	25.5	513	47.3	23	2.1	0.457	14
18	Listens respectfully to my opinions	591	54.5	291	26.8	122	11.2	60	5.5	21	1.9	0.832	1
19	Beats me	21	1.9	78	7.2	99	9.1	865	79.7	22	2.0	0.325	20
20	Leaves scene of our arguments	202	18.6	417	38.4	289	26.6	147	13.5	30	2.8	0.660	9

Table 1 presents the research participants' responses in terms of the interactions they undertake during marital crises. It can be seen from the table that the prevalent kind of interaction identified by the participants is that the spouse "listens respectfully to my opinions" which possess the highest RSI value of 0.832 and was said to occur always by 54.5% of the respondents, sometimes by 26.8% and rarely by 11.2% while only 5.5% of the respondents claimed it never occurred. The next popular view of the respondents was that the spouse "is good at resolving our differences" and "does everything to avoid conflict with me" with other very high values of the RSI (0.830 and 0.815 respectively). The least popular interactions the staff members reported experienced during crises was that the spouse "beats me" with the least RSI value of 0.325.

In the second approach, the participants' responses to each item were scored in such a way that an "always" response was coded 3 while a "sometimes" response was coded 2 and a "rarely" response was coded 1. Also a "Never" response was coded zero. The individuals' scores



on each of the crisis interaction was obtained by adding up the individual scores on each corresponding items as presented in table 2 in line with Gottman (1999).

**Table 2: Items representing different patterns during marital conflicts**

Pattern	Items	Description
A	1, 3, 5, 7, 9, 14, 19	Destructive pattern
B	6, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18	Constructive Pattern
C	2, 4, 8, 11, 15, 17 & 20	Withdrawal Pattern

Table 2 presents items describing occurrences during different patterns of marital conflict. In order to determine the prevalent pattern of marital conflict the respondents were experiencing, the scores of the participants on all the different patterns were subjected to a k-means cluster analysis, saving the cluster membership and final cluster centres. The results are presented in 3.

**Table 3: Final Cluster Centres**

	Cluster		
	1	2	3
PatAa	2.11	9.71	2.05
PatBb	5.64	10.06	14.32
PatCc	4.15	11.75	9.84

Table 3 shows the final cluster centres of the three clusters obtained from the cluster analysis. In k-mean cluster analysis, a cluster is identified by its nearness to a cluster centre while other clusters are located with their closeness to other cluster centres. It can be seen that Pattern A is the closest to cluster 1 other patterns in cluster 2 Pattern A is still closer but it has been identified as cluster one. However, pattern B is closer than Pattern C and therefore identified as cluster 2 while Pattern C is closer to cluster 3 and is so identified. The cluster membership which represents the prevalent marital conflict pattern reportedly experienced by each of the participants was saved and was analysed descriptively to obtain the prevalent marital conflict pattern among the research participants under study. The result is presented in Table 4

**Table 4: Prevalent Marital conflict patterns experienced by staff of Universities in Southwest Nigeria**

Marital Conflict pattern	Frequency	Percent
Pattern A: Destructive	66	6.1
Pattern B: Constructive	291	26.8
Pattern C: Withdrawal	728	67.1
Total	1085	100.0

Table 4 shows the patterns of marital conflicts experienced by staff of selected universities in southwest Nigeria. It can be seen from the table that most of the respondents (67.1%) indicated that they experienced withdrawal marital conflict pattern while only 26.8% experienced constructive pattern. In fact, 6.1% indicated that they experience destructive marital conflict.

**Research Question 2: What are the causes of marital conflict among staff of selected universities in southwest Nigeria?**

To answer this research question, two approaches were adopted. In the first approach, the causes reported by the respondents to be responsible for marital crisis were analysed descriptively and the result is presented in Table 5

**Table 5:**

SN		SA		A		D		SD		NR		RSI	Rank
		F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	f	%		
1	Poor handling of family finances	531	48.9	304	28.0	114	10.5	92	8.5	44	4.1	0.806	1
2	Communication gap	452	41.7	427	39.4	96	8.8	65	6.0	45	4.1	0.804	2
3	Time devoted to children	403	37.1	453	41.8	136	12.5	44	4.1	48	4.4	0.793	3
4	Money devoted to children	326	30.0	467	43.0	184	17.0	54	5.0	54	5.0	0.758	10
5	Religious differences	307	28.3	416	38.3	216	19.9	94	8.7	52	4.8	0.727	16
6	Sharing of household tasks	245	22.6	473	43.6	239	22.0	80	7.4	48	4.4	0.713	18
7	In-laws' interference	415	38.2	405	37.3	146	13.5	62	5.7	57	5.3	0.785	7
8	Feeling unloved or uncared for	407	37.5	444	40.9	101	9.3	76	7.0	57	5.3	0.787	6
9	Sexual incompatibility	391	36.0	434	40.0	131	12.1	77	7.1	52	4.8	0.776	8
10	Differences in personalities	290	26.7	481	44.3	181	16.7	71	6.5	62	5.7	0.742	11
11	Infidelity (extra-marital affairs)	466	42.9	354	32.6	110	10.1	97	8.9	58	5.3	0.789	4
12	Lack of appreciation	333	30.7	493	45.4	131	12.1	76	7.0	52	4.8	0.762	9
13	Childlessness	327	30.1	418	38.5	154	15.1	126	11.6	50	4.6	0.731	13
14	Alcoholism	351	32.4	406	37.4	141	13.0	132	12.2	55	5.1	0.737	12
15	Opposing needs and interests	256	23.6	521	48.0	168	15.5	85	7.8	55	5.1	0.730	14
16	Difference in income level	234	21.6	387	35.7	291	26.8	112	10.3	61	5.6	0.681	20
17	Conflict between career and domestic duties	244	22.5	481	44.3	222	20.5	84	7.7	54	5.0	0.715	17
18	Parenting style	264	24.3	495	45.6	202	18.6	73	6.7	51	4.7	0.730	15
19	Work related stress	216	19.9	511	47.1	234	21.6	76	7.0	48	4.4	0.709	19
20	Lack of quality time together	433	39.9	405	37.3	118	10.9	79	7.3	50	4.6	0.788	5

Table 5 presents the factors the research participants perceived to be the causes of marital conflicts. Among the perceived causes, "poor handling of family finances" appears to be the most popular with the Highest RSI value of 0.806 and was strongly agreed to by 48.9% of the respondents and another 28.9% merely agreed. Only 10.5% disagreed that this factor causes marital conflict while 8.5% strongly disagreed. Other important causes as identified by the respondents were "Communication gap" and "Time devoted to children" with other very high values of RSI (0.804 and 0.793 respectively). The least popular cause of marital conflict indicated by the respondents was "Difference in income level" with the least RSI value of 0.681.

## DISCUSSION

One of the major findings of this study is that members of staff of universities in southwest Nigeria who are married, regardless of their academic attainment, levels of exposure, enlightenment and socio-economic status are not insulated from marital conflict. A possible explanation for this finding could be that when a man and a woman come together in marriage, each partner comes into the union with his or her individualised personal characteristics, needs, attitude, values and peculiarities that may be at variance. Hence, this finding confirms the findings reported by Siffert and Schwarz (2010); Pash and Bradbury (1998); Croban (1996); Kuder (1995) and Veroff & Leber (1993) that disagreement is a natural part of every marital relationship.

Another major find of this study is that the demand-withdraw pattern was the most prominent, followed by the constructive pattern while the destructive pattern was the least popular. Couples employ the demand-withdraw pattern of behaviour when one partner is seeking change, discussion and resolution of an issue, while the other partner seeks to end or avoid the discussion of the issue altogether. A possible explanation for this pattern of behaviour as shown by this study is that one of the couple is probably less emotionally mature while the other partner is more mature emotionally. The partner with low level of emotional maturity most likely floods the other partner, all of the time, with complaints, demands and criticisms. The partner with moderate or high level of emotional maturity would as much as possible want to avoid conflict hence; he assumes the role of a stonewaller.

Furthermore, the length of marriage seems not to have had an impact on the patterns of interaction. Even though only a few of the respondents indicated that they engaged in destructive pattern, yet when the length of marriage is taken into cognisance, this researcher wonders while a preponderant number still engaged in demand-withdraw. Majority of the staff have been married for as long as between 5 and 30 years. It is assumed that couples in marriage relationship will become mature in their patterns of interaction with the passage of time. However, the length of marriage appeared not to have reflected this. When compared with the number of respondents experiencing constructive pattern, it may be concluded that majority of the staff are maritally distressed. This finding may be a further confirmation of finding reported by Fincham (2003) that behaviour sequence in which the husband withdraws and the wife responds with hostility (and vice versa ) are more common in distressed than satisfied couples.

Therefore, this researcher is of the opinion that flooding and stonewalling could be injurious to the health of a marriage because they create unhealthy communication pattern. This in turn could lead to couples becoming emotionally detached. The detachment, if not properly handled, could lead to divorce. In addition, children raised in an atmosphere of constant emotional detachment may be at the risk of developing adjustment problems such as aggression, delinquency and conduct disorders. To avoid this, couples who engage in the demand-withdraw pattern of marital interaction will require the services of a professional counsellor as being recommended for the participants of this study.

Poor handling of family finances was found to be the major cause of marital conflict between the staff and their partners. Management of money as a topic was considered by the respondents as particularly stressful to marital functioning in comparison to other sources of marital conflict. This finding is suggestive of how sensitive and short-tempered couples could be when money matter comes up for discussion. A look at the approximate monthly income of the participants showed that majority of them earn above one hundred thousand naira (#100,000). Even though the monthly earnings of their partners are unknown but the possible inference to be drawn is that, even if families are well-off or have ample funds to meet most everyday needs, it does not exclude money as a serious source of conflict. The evident conflict over money could be explained from three perspectives. First, an explanation may be offered from the perspective of Conger's family stress theory, which posits that economic pressure due to insufficient financial resources creates stresses linked to heightened marital conflict (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). Second, is the prevailing harsh economic situation in Nigeria which is negatively impacting on the economic wellbeing of the average citizen. The attendant effects found expression in high cost of goods and services. Prices of foodstuffs, transport fares, school fees, medical bills, to mention but a few have skyrocketed, almost beyond the reach of the average man on the street. Money no doubt is always to some extent limited while the desires of family members with regard to the expenditure of money can

easily exceed the available funds. This could be a possible explanation while money was rated as the most contentious among causes of conflict. Third, the exercise of power or control over the disbursement of available funds could generate conflict. It is a known fact that before marriage, couples are financially independent. However, they become financially interdependent after marriage. Also, partners possibly may not know each other's attitude towards money before marriage. It is therefore possible for a miser to marry a profligate. This attitude may manifest after marriage, a situation which may come too late in the day. At this stage, setting priorities of financial matters may be dependent on each partner's values and disposition or temperament. Issues like how to budget, what to spend money on, who makes the decisions about what is spent, how to save money and whether the couple is making enough money are therefore capable of generating disagreement between couples. This leads to communication gap which was also indicated as one of the findings of this study. It thus implies that the couples, most of the time, found it difficult to sit together and harmonise their expenditure profile vis-à-vis available funds. The dominant pattern of marital conflict which showed that majority of the participants engaged in flooding and stonewalling in addition to the priority setting of the couple could explain this scenario. The finding of this study is therefore in agreement with the findings of Marshall and Skogrand (2004); Benjamin and Irving (2001), Storaasli and Markman (1990). They confirmed that money is a crucial issue to couple interactions, from the initial years of partnerships through the process of divorce (Benjamin & Irving, 2001).

In addition, communication gap was identified as another prominent cause of marital conflict. The importance of communication to the sustainability of any relationship as intimate as that of a man and his wife cannot be over-emphasised. Effective communication is the primary vehicle of intimacy. Thus, inability by couple to communicate effectively with each other could be harmful to the union. The communication gap reported by the participants could be attributed to the fact that majority of them do not enjoy quality time together as revealed by another finding of this study. The participants' typical pattern of interaction does not encourage much of intimate and emotional attachment. One possible outcome of demand-withdraw pattern is that it allows communication gap to develop between partners. Stonewallers, for instance, generally display silence, inhibit verbal and non-verbal feedback and try to display a complete lack of expressiveness. Currently, however, we live in the information age where we are connected through different kinds of communication platforms such as chat, tweet, text and post. Although the withdrawal behaviour routinely entails disengaging from the conflict or person and may include leaving the situation or keeping quiet, yet this researcher wonders why the participants could probably not avail themselves of the modern platforms of communication to bridge the reported gap. This finding is therefore in agreement with that of Afifi and Guerrero (2000) which showed that communication is the primary vehicle of intimacy, but it remains the number one absent portion of relationship quota missed by both sexes nowadays. The present finding also corroborated that of Sevier, Simpson and Christensen (2004) which showed that the demand-withdraw pattern ranks among the most destructive and least effective interaction patterns in couples' problem-solving repertoires. Also, the findings of Sadeghi et al. (2011) revealed that problematic couples, demand man/withdraw woman and demand woman/withdraw man came to solutions in which one of them was a victor and the other a loser. This they asserted was not a constructive communication pattern.

Another finding of this study revealed that time devoted to children was a major cause of friction between the participants and their partners. From the demographic information supplied it was evident that close to three-quarters of the staff have between three and four children. More than a half of this number has between three and four children. Similarly, close

to three-quarters have been married between one and twenty-one years. This possibly implies that majority of the participants' children are in the adolescence age bracket. The parenting challenges of this period are likely to be daunting for either of the parents, depending on their level of commitment and emotional attachment to the children, a situation which may explain why more time is devoted to the children by either of the couple. Another explanation for this finding may possibly be offered from the perspective of Bowen (1996) Family System Theory which describes how children respond anxiously to the tension in their parents' relationship. A child may develop symptoms which will necessitate attention and protectiveness being shifted to him or her. The child consequently becomes more demanding or more impaired. This in turn distracts one parent from the pursuit of closeness in the marriage. Anyone, no doubt, needs attention from his or her partner. However, when one of the partners do not have a common time to be together, the relationship may be strained, as shown by the finding of this study.

Two other factors with high Relative Significant Index as revealed by the findings of this study are infidelity and lack of quality time together. When viewed as the two sides of a coin, they could have reciprocity effect on each other. For instance, lack of quality time together may possibly encourage infidelity and vice versa. Infidelity is cheating on one's spouse, while lack of quality time together could arise if one of the partners spends ample time with other people or gets involved in activities other than his or her partner. Infidelity may be promoted if there is poor sexual satisfaction on the part of a marital partner. The finding of this study showed that majority of the participants practised monogamy. It is possible that one partner has excessive sexual appetite, which the other partner loathes. A situation like this may encourage extra-marital affairs especially on the part of the partner with the high appetite for sex. Another possible explanation why infidelity was a cause of marital conflict among the participants is probably because they or their partners are suffering from one form of sexual disorder or the other. Sexual disorders such as erectile dysfunction, frigidity, premature ejaculation, orgasm disorder and sexual pain disorder, among others, may possibly lead to sexual dissatisfaction between couple, thus leading to extra-marital affairs. These are challenges that may lead to disaffection and lack of trust where not properly managed by the couple. Couple therefore would require the services of a professional sex therapist or counsellor to assuage the negative impact this development may have on the relationship. It is in this wise that a counselling framework has been developed by this researcher with a view to helping couples overcome these challenges.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that married staff of universities in southwest Nigeria are not insulated from marital conflict. It is also evident that all the three patterns of marital conflicts investigated are being experienced by the staff of universities in southwest Nigeria. The demand-withdraw pattern appeared to be the dominant or typical pattern among the staff. The study has also highlighted the main causes of marital conflict among the staff. Unresolved marital conflict may negatively affect interpersonal relationships among staff members and with the students. It may also affect the work output of the staff which may manifest in lateness to work and outright absenteeism from duty.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

From the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are suggested:

1. More professionals, like marriage counsellors, psychologists and social workers should be recruited to attend to various needs of couples and intending couples.
2. The Directorate of Online Counselling in collaboration with the Directorate of Information Communication and Technology in the universities should organise regular

seminars and workshops for staff members where the necessary skills to communicate and resolve marital conflicts are adequately imparted.

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