

Marital Disharmony: Causes and resolution strategies in Enugu State of Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the causes of marital disharmony and resolution strategies for resolving marital disharmony among couples in Enugu State. Two research questions and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. Descriptive survey design was used. The sample for this study comprises 300 (150 literate and 150 non-literate) couples drawn through multi-stage random sampling from a population of 646,311 married people. Structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The research questions were analyzed using mean scores and hypothesis tested with t-test statistics. The findings revealed among others, infertility, lack of trust, sexual deprivation, early marriage, finance, communication gap, infidelity as the causes of marital disharmony. Avoiding the idle mind by engaging in hard work, use of family counsellors, listening carefully to spouse, developing a positive attitude towards disharmony, communicating feelings of love, admiration, likes and dislikes, are resolution strategies for resolving marital disharmony. However, there is no significant difference in the perception of literate and non-literate couples about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony. Based on the findings, recommendations were made.

Key words: Marital disharmony, causes, resolution strategies, literacy.

1.1.0 Introduction

Marriage is a basic institution in every society. In every complete society governed by law, marriage exists as a public legal and not merely a private romantic declaration or religious rite (David and Marzio, 2001). According to Nukunya (1992), marriage is a social union or legal contract between people that creates kinship. It is the recognized social institution, not only for establishing and maintaining the family, but also for creating and sustaining the ties of kinship. According to Gbenda and Akume (2002), marriage is a divine situation which should be a special relationship for life and harmously integrate the husband and wife into becoming one 'flesh'.

Marriage as dynamic association engaged in by adults represents an important lifetime commitment. According to Denga (1990) in Yahaya, Esere, Ogunanmi and Oniye (2008), marriage is a partnership contract without escape clause. The implication here is that marriage connotes a life-long arrangement where the couple should permanently survive a multitude of demanding situations such as illness, financial constraints and so on. Nwobi (1997), opines that marriage is a union between at least one man and one woman. It is a relation which is culturally approved, there is endorsement of sexual intercourse and sexual commitment between spouses, exclusive of other males and females, there is the expectation that children will be born and there are prescribed modes of behaviour. In the opinion of Nwoye (1991), marriage is sacred a permanent contract which is assumed to be enacted when two people (usually man and woman) decide of their own volition and in the presence of at least two witnesses to exchange the formal consent to live a life of vocation of love and sharing for each other for the purpose of promoting their mutual growth and welfare as partners in their journey together through life.

Marriage in this study can therefore be seen as the legalizing of a special relationship between a man and a woman to which the society gives its approval. It places each partner under legal and social obligations to the other and to the society. As life-long agreement between the couples, marriage is supposed to be a sacred and permanent contract which is assumed to outlive the couples. The social recognition of mating accorded to marriage gives children produced by the couple legal recognition in the society.

The terms marriage and family, though difficult to separate, are not exactly the same. Brookes (2006) defines family as a household or those who live in one house, (example parents, children and servants). To Nwoye (1997), a family is a bio-social group, a network of persons intimately held together by a bond of social and kinship or blood relationship. In the Nigeria context because of the phenomenon of the extended family system, the family is made up of the married couple, their off-springs and immediate kith and kin and other dependants (Onwuasoanya, 2006). To the researchers, family can be seen as a group of people who live together, have blood ties and have two members of opposite sex who have sexually approved relationship. In the family, it is expected that there should be co-operation, which entails order, regulations and ideas (Nwobi, 1997).

The importance of family where there is no disharmony but stability in promoting sustainable family growth and development has been established (George, 2002). A family where there is no marital disharmony is one where the rate of mutually exchange punishment is low.

Marital disharmony is defined as a disagreement through which the parties involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests or concern and it is also seen as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals (Katzenback and Smith, 1992). Marital disharmony is a form of association or interaction and is an indication that the couples care enough about the relationship to fight. As long as conflict exists, the two parities at least have relationship, no matter how bad it is (Esere, Yahaya, Ogunsanmi and Oniye, 2008). The increasing rate of family disharmony such as the incidence of divorce in the society today justifies the fact that there are disharmony in marital homes (Olaitan, 2003). Disharmony arise as an attempt to match the behaviour and expectations of one with the behaviour and expectations of the other. This threatens the family system because it entails disharmony when husband and wife disagree on certain goals to pursue, it usually result to disharmony and confusion between them unless they come to agreement on the goal to pursue.

Marital disharmony is normal part of married life. When two people come together in marriage, each partner comes into the union with his/her individualized personal characteristics, needs, attitudes, values and idiosyncrasies (Uwe, 2006). Therefore, each one is going to react differently to life challenges. Marital disharmony in this study, can be seen as a strain in marriage interaction between a couple who are living together.

Many factors are associated with marital disharmony. Idialu (2003), opines that finance is one of the major causes. According to Idialu, financial problems put erroneous strain on family relationship. Idialu argued that contemporary marriages experiences more strain because of financial matters than any other factor. Variables such as changes in growth and development, individual differences, home conditions, family size, human needs, parental attitudes and child training methods are associated with marital disharmony (Idialu, 2003).

There are major factors that may be associated with marital disharmony. According to the studies of Aina (2004), Tenuche (2004), Aderinto (2004) and Alumanah (2004), the major causes of marital disharmony include refusal of wives to submit to the husband's authority, sexual misconduct by wives, interference by in-laws, conflicts between career and domestic duties by wives, religious conflict between couples, flirtation by male couples, and husbands' inability to live up to their domestic responsibility due to poverty.

Some studies (Onwuasoanya, 2006; Oyedepo, 2001; Awok, 2003; Meyer, 2011) have been carried out on the causes of marital disharmony among couples. Onwuasoanya (2006) state that age at marriage, educational level of couples, religious affiliation, income, types of marriage contracts, fertility status, types of family practiced, communication, cultural background, lack of trust, sexual incompatibility and problems of in-laws, have direct bearing on marital disharmony. The studies carried by Oyedepo (2001) and Awok (2003) maintained that the seeming unresolved marital disharmony is caused by marital expectation of couples.

Causes of marital disharmony identified by Meyer (2011) include:

Finance: According to her, most couples argue over bills, debt, spending and other financial issues.

Children: Here, discipline, diet and other parenting issues can be sources of disagreement between couples.

Sex: To her, frequency, quantity, quality and infidelity are all common sources of stress and disharmony.

Time apart (Schedules): According to her, time apart and lack of quality time together serves to get people out of harmony.

Household responsibilities (Chores): According to her, many couples argue over equitable distribution of household work, and how to do it.

Friends: She stated that not all friends are helpful to relationships and some of them are poisonous.

Habits (Irritating habits): Many people, she argued, are married to someone who has one or more habits they find undesirable.

Expectations: People go into marriage with certain expectations. Judgement and unmet expectations are source of marital disharmony.

Personality Conflicts: There are personality traits that can predispose a marriage to failure. If you do not like some thing about your partner, one of you must change.

Family in-laws, siblings, children and step children, to her, can all create disharmony within a marriage.

Each of the above is a very common problem dealt with in marriages. Although they are problems, they can also be opportunities for growth, learning and accord.

The level of exposure by couples could also become a crucial issue. Academic and social exposure of couples can make or mar a marriage. 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 (Iheagwam, 2001). Wrong influence of models has also become an issue. It is often the case where couples associate with people who teach them wrong approach towards marriage conflicts.

Other causes of marital disharmony include breach of trust, age of marriage, sexual deprivation, conflicts in marital roles and finances, fertility and infidelity. In-laws and external influence exert a lot of negatively or positively influence on marriage. If the in-laws show some authoritative influence on the marriage, the family of either of the couples may not take it kindly thus causing marital disharmony. The gossips, criticisms and blames from the in-laws or other external factors lead to frictions between the couples.

Literate is able to read and write while literacy is ability to read and write (Brookes, 2006). The term 'literate person' connotes one who can read and write. It can also be used interchangeable with 'educated person' (Aniashe, 1999). In the context of the study, literate couples are those who are able to read, write and have attended educational institutions with educational certificates. Brookes (2006), defines non-literate as having little or no education, especially unable to read and write, while non-literacy is the quality or state of being non-literate, especially inability to read and write. According to Marcus (2006), limited function bar non-literate people different ways, depending on their ability to adopt, their life experience, and their daily need to read. In the context of the study, non-literate couples are those who are unable to read, write and have not attended educational institutions and possess no educational certificate. Both literate and non-literate couples may have discrepancies in their views concerning marital disharmony, especially, as it concerns their values and marriage expectations (Ibeh, 2013). In other words, both literacy and non-literacy may cause marital disharmony.

Most marriages among the literate couples have been undergoing trying times as stated by Carew (1995) and Obe (1997) who in separate studies found that educated couples, despite the educational qualifications and ethnic affiliation have discrepancies in their views concerning marital disharmony, especially, as it concerns their values and marriage expectations. The person who takes decisions or dominates the decision making process in marriage is capable of creating disharmony in the union. This is prevalent among literate couples, who both contribute substantially to the family income and would want to take part equally in decision making in the family. When the man takes up this role, as it is common in most societies, the wife rebels, thus, creating situations of disharmony and in some cases, a break or separation.

Education and level of its attainment affect the effectiveness in handling marital disharmony.

Undiyaundeye and Ugal (2006) opine that education and the level of its attainment affect the effectiveness in handling marital issues or disharmony.

Marital disharmony is associated with communication gap. Rosenberg (2005), opined that the toll for non-expression of feelings in families is severe when members are unable to communicate their emotions. Communication is impaired when husband-wife relationship is disturbed. With non-communication, there is tension, mistrust, doubt, less feeling of closeness, less sharing, less intimacy and sense of isolation (Ezeilo, 1995). The negative experiences (spouses get embroiled in disagreement, quarrel, discord, friction, antagonism or open-clash are common features of most marriages (Omorogbe, Obetoh and Odion, 2010). They agitate the mind, portend dangers and shake the fabric of people's collective existence. The researchers, wonder which of the above listed causes are true of couples in Enugu State.

For every marital disharmony, there are strategies employed to tackle it. John and Fox (1992) define strategy as a plan on how to achieve something. In another vein, strategy is plan, method or series of manoeuvre for obtaining a specific goal or result (Joseph and Linfield, 1994). Resolution strategies refers to the use of different techniques aimed at helping couples understand each other overcome disharmony in their relationship (Gilbert, 2005).

Gilbert (2005) asserts that some of the disharmony resolution strategies used today like teaching couples to listen to each other, communicate better and behave in more positive ways could help couples resolve some of their marital difference.

A number of strategies can be employed in marital disharmony resolution. Emmert and Emmert (1994), suggest the following methods: Developing a positive and healthy attitude towards disharmony. Maintaining open communication lines. Working for accuracy in your communication. Using a rational, problem-solving approach to the disharmony. Turning to a counsellor.

Misunderstandings need to be discussed. According to D'Souza, (2011), healthy arguments are good but it should not end up in calling the neighbours. If husband turns up late one day, it may be for his pressing duty schedule, needs patience to tackle such problems. If coming home late becomes routine, there is need to be questioned in the right way and right time. If any doubt lingers in one's mind, it should be brought to each other's notice and rectified with new dimensions. To D'Souza, old mistakes or doubts should not be repeated for unworthy reasons. If nothing works out, the couple needs to seek a qualified family counsellor. Couples should not bring small day to day marital matters to the notice of parents, neighbours or friends. They should try to

solve any big problems with love and understanding. Abdul and Yusuf (2013) in their study, identified effective communication, resourcefulness of family members and marital counselling as most appropriate strategies for resolution of marital disharmony and marital stability. Also, Ibeh, Obidoa and Okere (2013) in their study, identified use of family counsellors, listening carefully and speaking tactfully to spouse and funds management among others are resolution strategies for resolving marital disharmony.

Marriage counselling could be utilized as a strategy for resolving marital disharmony. Agbe (1998) stated that counselling for marriage and in marriage should be given to couples to avoid marital problems such as love, genotype, sex and communication among others. In fact, couples have to be helped to maintain the love with which they were married to avoid disharmony. Sanni and Eneh (1998) recommended marriage counselling typifying structural approaches which is treating marital problems based on early childhood experience, the co joint family therapeutic approach (bringing family's communication network into play) behavioural family therapeutic approach where particular problems, are likened and resolved in marriage.

On financial issue, Taiwo, Okon and Eze (2006) recommended funds management technique that would be taught to the couples to help them develop positive trust towards each other in terms of how to manage funds without disharmony. Makinde (2004) had earlier advocated for adequate planning and budgeting of family finance by the couples.

In Enugu State, Social Welfare Department, Nsukka Local Government Area, revealed that marriage in Enugu State are besieged by numerous constraints that lead to increase in divorce and marital disharmony. They report that cases of marital disharmony they have treated so far, are characterized by great magnitude of hatred and rancour, uncertainty and hostility, acrimony and antagonism, lovelessness and vilification, atrocity and lack of trust, lack of respect and high-handedness among others. The office, also observed that any attempt to encourage continuity of the already soured marriages under the circumstances, appear like forcing a square peg into a round hole and vice-versa and may also be suicidal as loss of life may eventually be involved. Social Welfare Department pointed out that childlessness, culture and tradition, economy depression, infidelity, lack of respect and trust have direct bearing on marital disharmony. They further reported the number of broken and unsuccessful marriages treated in the under listed years: 141 in 2008, 144 in 2009, 135 in 2010, 164 in 2011 and 139 in 2012. The total number of cases treated within these five years (2008-2012) were 888 which most led to divorce/separation (Source: Social Welfare Department, Nsukka L.G.A. Enugu State, 2012). Although several techniques exist, can they be useful to couples in Enugu State?

1.1.1 Statement of the Problem

Strains in marriage interaction between couples living together are becoming common. In Nigeria, particularly in Enugu State, marital disharmony are on the rise because of childlessness, culture and tradition, infidelity, lack of trust, economic depression among others, among couples. As a result, anger, resentment, dissatisfaction, frustration and hopelessness take control of relationship and at times break down the marriage irretrievably. These could threaten societal values, children and their community where they co-habit in spite of the various attempts made to find lasting solutions to the issue of marital disharmony.

It is, therefore, necessary that the causes of marital disharmony and resolution strategies among couples be investigated. Hence, the problem of this study is: what are the causes of marital disharmony and resolution strategies among couples in Enugu State of Nigeria?

1.1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were integrated to guide the study:

1. What are the causes of marital disharmony among couples in Enugu state?
2. What are the resolution strategies adopted in resolving marital disharmony among couples in Enugu state?

1.1.3 Research Hypothesis

One null hypothesis was formulated to guide this study and was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

H₀: There is no significant mean difference in the perception of literate and non-literate couples about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony.

2.0 Methodology

The design of this study is descriptive survey. According to Nworgu (2006), descriptive survey research design is the plan of study which aims at collecting data on a topic from a sample and describing in a systematic way, the characteristics and features of facts about a given population. The study was carried out in Nsukka Education zone of Enugu State. Enugu State is one the five South Eastern States of Nigeria. Nsukka Education zone is made up of three Local Government Areas (L. G.As) namely Nsukka L.G.A, Igbo-Etiti L.G.A. and Uzo-Uwani L.G.A.

The sample for the study comprised 300 (150 literate and 150 non-literate) respondents drawn through multi-stage random sampling technique from population of 646,311 married people in the area. This was used to give each element in the population equal and independent chance of being included in the sample. 100 respondents were selected from each of the three Local Government Areas in the zone.

Three wards were randomly selected from each of the three (3) Local Government Areas (L.G.As) in Nsukka Education zone. The researchers proceeded thereafter to pick five (5) Enumeration Areas (EAs) from each of the selected Wards. Data on EAs were obtained from the National Population Commission (NPC) offices in the three (3) L.G.As, based on revised and up-dated map of the all the EAs in the area preparatory to the 2006 National Population headcount. On the basis of household identification and house-numbering allotted to individual household in the selected EAs, ten couples were randomly selected from each EA. This gave a total of hundred (100) respondents from each of the three (3) L.G.As.

A 20-itemed structured questionnaire was developed and used for the study. The items were derived principally from literature. It had a four point response scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strong Disagree (SD). The questionnaire was face validated by two lecturers in guidance and counselling, one in measurement and evaluation all in Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. It yielded an alpha value of 0.970.

Data collection was done with the help of trained research assistants who administered directly and collected 300 copies of the questionnaire. Explanation was offered to non-literate couples.

The data collected were analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation for the research questions. A mean of 2.50 and above was accepted while any mean less than 2.50 was rejected. The research hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistics.

3.0 Results

3.1 Research Question I

What are the causes of marital disharmony among couples in Enugu state?

Table 1: Causes of marital disharmony among couples in Enugu State: Mean ratings, standard deviation and rankings.

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Rank	Decision
3	Infertility.	3.93	0.27	1 st	Strongly Agree
8	Lack of trust.	3.90	0.31	2 nd	Strongly Agree
10	Sexual deprivation.	3.90	0.31	3 rd	Strongly Agree
7	Early marriage.	3.89	0.33	4 th	Strongly Agree
1	Finance	3.88	0.33	5 th	Strongly Agree
2	Communication gap.	3.87	0.34	6 th	Strongly Agree
4	Infidelity.	3.85	0.37	7 th	Strongly Agree
9	Refusal of wives to submit to the husband.	3.57	0.50	8 th	Strong Agree
6	Poor academic exposure.	3.46	0.31	9 th	Agree
5	Unmet expectations.	3.28	0.39	10 th	Agree

Table 1 shows that there is no item scored below the cut-off point of 2.50. All the items scored above 2.50 showing agreement that the items are the causes of marital disharmony among couples in Enugu state. Therefore, the causes of marital disharmony among couples are: infertility, lack of trust, sexual deprivation, early marriage, finance, communication gap, infidelity, refusal of wives to submit to the husband's authority, poor academic exposure of couples and marital expectations and unmet expectation. Items 3,8,10,7,1,2,4, and 9 are more popular as the causes of marital disharmony than other items.

3.2 Research Question 2

What are the resolution strategies to be adopted in resolving marital disharmony among couples in Enugu State?

Table 2: Resolution strategies to be adopted in resolving marital disharmony among couples in Enugu State: Mean ratings, standard deviation and rankings.

S/N	Items	\bar{x}	SD	Rank	Decision
14	Avoiding idle mind by engaging in hand work.	3.80	0.40	1 st	Strongly Agree
15	Use of family counsellor.	3.77	0.41	2 nd	Strongly Agree
19	Listening carefully	3.73	0.45	3 rd	Strongly Agree
16	Developing a positive attitude towards disharmony.	3.71	0.45	4 th	Strongly Agree
20	Communicating their feelings of love, admiration, likes and dislikes to each other.	3.58	0.50	5 th	Strongly Agree
11	Funds management techniques taught to the couples.	2.77	0.41	6 th	Agree
13	Joint family and in-law intervention.	2.73	0.42	7 th	Agree
17	Use of others e.g., elders, friends and neighbours to mediate on the matter.	2.72	0.45	8 th	Agree
18	Learning communication skills.	2.62	0.46	9 th	Agree
12	Maintaining open communication	2.61	0.41	10 th	Agree

In table 2, there is no item score below the cut-off point of 2.50. All the items scored above 2.50 showing agreement that the items are the resolution strategies to be adopted in resolving marital disharmony among couples in Enugu State.

Items 14,15, 19, 16 and 20 are more popular to be adopted as the resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony among couples than other items.

3.3 Hypothesis

There is no significant mean difference in the perception of literate and non-literate couples about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony.

Table 3: t-test analysis of mean responses of literate and non-literate respondents about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony.

Variables	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Literate	150	3.20	0.46				Not significant
Non-literate	150	3.11	0.48	298	1.35	1.96	

In table 3, the t-calculated is 1.35 while the t-critical is 1.96 at 298 degrees of freedom with 0.05 level of significance. The t-calculated is less than the t-critical indicating that the t-test is not significant. The null hypothesis is accepted as stated that there is no significant mean difference in the perception of literate and non-literate couples about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony.

4.0 Discussion

The study has revealed the causes of marital disharmony among couples which are infertility, lack of trust, sexual deprivation, early marriage, finance, communication gap, infidelity, refusal of wives to submit to the husbands' authority, poor academic exposure and unmet expectations.

The finding is in agreement with that of Onwuasoanya (2006) who opined that age of marriage, educational level of couples, income, fertility status, communication, lack of trust among others, have direct bearing on marital disharmony. In addition, in the findings of Aina (2004), Tenuche (2004), Aderinto (2004) and Alumanah (2004), they assert that the major causes of marital disharmony include refusal of wives to submit to the husbands' authority, sexual misconduct by wives, interference by in-laws, flirtation by male couples and so on. This is also in line with Meyer (2011), who identified finance, household responsibilities, family in-laws and expectations and unmet expectations as among the causes of marital disharmony.

However, the result of the analysis shows that poor academic exposure and unmet expectations are not popular among the causes of marital disharmony.

The identified resolutions strategies to be adopted in resolving marital disharmony among couples, include avoiding idle mind by engaging in hard work, use of family counsellors, developing a positive attitude towards disharmony among others. This is in conformity with assertion of Emmert and Emmert (1994) and Abdul and Yusuf (2013) who suggested that developing a positive and healthy attitude towards harmony, effective communication and turning to a counsellor be employed as resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony. This is in line with Agbe (1998) and Sanni and Eneh (1998) findings. Agbe stated that counselling for marriage and in marriage be given to couples to avoid marital problems such as love, genotype, sex, communication and so on while Sanni and Eneh recommended marriage counselling typifying structured approaches and behavioural family therapeutic approach where particular problems are likened and resolved in marriage. This is also in line with Taiwo, Okon and Ezeh (2006) who recommended funds management technique that would be taught to the couples to help them develop positive trust towards each other in terms of how to manage funds without disharmony.

The mean of literate and non-literate couples differ, in that the mean of literate couples is higher than that of non-literate couples. This is in conformity with assertion of Undiyaundeye and Ugal (2006) who opine that education and the level of its attainment affect the effectiveness in handling marital issues or disharmony.

The test of hypothesis however, showed that there was no significant mean difference in the perception of literate and non-literate couples about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony. Basically, resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony were seen by literate and non-literate couples in the same way.

5.0 Conclusion

The study has revealed the causes of marital disharmony among couples in Enugu state. Resolution strategies adopted in resolving marital disharmony among couples were also identified. Couples are encouraged to use these resolution strategies aimed at helping them understand each other and overcome disharmony in their relationship. The perception of literate and non-literate about the extent of the use of resolution strategies in resolving marital disharmony are similar.

6.0 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Family counsellor should organize workshops, seminars and conferences whereby couples would be sensitized on causes of marital disharmony and resolution strategies for resolving marital disharmony.
2. Couples should be encouraged to adopt resolution strategies in resolving their marital disharmony.
3. Couples should visit family counsellors when they need help.
4. Couples should endeavour to accentuate attitudes of co-operative, valuing partnership, demonstrating trust, general good will towards one another and positive values in their marriage. Family counsellors should help them inculcate all these.
5. The communication of forgiveness when one couple wrongs the other is important. Family counsellors and social workers to inculcate this in couples.

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