

## **Effects of Marital Conflict Management Counselling on Marital Instability Among Married Persons in Lafia Metropolis, Nassarawa State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of the study was to examine the effects of marital conflict management counselling on marital instability among married persons in Lafia metropolis, Nassarawa State, Nigeria. The population consists of 250 married persons with reported cases of marital instability in Lafia metropolis, from which 80 respondents were selected with the aid of a marital screening test as a sample for the study. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 40 respondents tested with high levels on the marital screening test scale and were divided into two groups: one group for treatment and one for the control group. The instrument (the questionnaire) was validated and its reliability established using Cronbach's alpha method. The data was analyzed using the ANCOVA statistical method. Two research questions and two null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. A non-equivalent group pretest and post-test quasi-experimental design was adopted for the study. The result revealed that conflict management counselling has significant effects on marital adjustment among married persons in Lafia metropolis. The findings also revealed that conflict management counselling can help improve mental health issues such as anger, depression, and anxiety. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made: conflict management counselling should be applied when dealing with conflicting issues among couples. Secondly, counsellors and social workers should introduce seminars, conferences, workshops, or programmes aimed at discouraging conflict among married persons.*

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**Keywords:** *Marital Instability, Married Persons, Conflict Management Counselling*

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## INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a social contract between two married individuals of the opposite sex to become husband and wife. According to Abdullahi (2019), marriage is the union of two consenting adults who are socially mature, psychologically stable, and emotionally stable and who gain the religious, legal, and social recognition of their parents to become husband and wife. Adeboye (2020) defined marriage as a union that brings people of different sexes from different ethnic groups, different belief systems, values, socio-economic backgrounds, and sometimes different races and interests together to form and start a new family, which makes marital instability inevitable. Therefore, marital instability can be described as a situation whereby a couple is going through difficulties in a marital relationship. It implies a marital crisis or problems that could lead to breakdown through separation, desertion, or divorce.

According to Alika and Edosa (2012), whether a marriage or family is structurally stable or unstable, a marriage that is unstable is not always intact, resulting in quarrels, fights, separation, and, at times, divorce. Marital instability is a social problem, and it is worrisome because most homes witness one form of marital instability or another. Marital instability is a disagreement through which couples involved perceive a threat to their needs, interests, or concerns, and it is also a struggle between couples with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, and goals (Katzenback & Smith, 1992).

Instability in marriage is associated with separation, divorce, widowhood, and divorce. These are social phenomena created by husband and wife or both, but widowhood is beyond the control of a human being; it is universal as it is related to death (Anima 2008). Instability in marriages has a tremendous impact on the behaviours of Nassarawa people because it leads to several problems, which mostly end in divorce if not handled properly. Despite abundant research in this area, many scholars have pointed out some issues that need elaboration and discussion. Such issues include conflict management counselling and its influence on marital stability, which varies with different tribes, cultures, and religions. It is important to appreciate the fact that marriage is made up of a combination of different personalities with different socio-economic, educational, and upbringing factors. Therefore, it is impossible to have it always smooth and perfect. There is a proverb that says, "All that glitters is not gold." However, no amount of control an individual has over issues, no matter the situation, often determines the success or failure of such situations. Most married persons lack or have no experience in communication with their spouse, while some express themselves without studying the other partner's temperament, not knowing that marriage is about studying each other behaviour's and adjusting to some personal issues.

According to Tolorunleke (2013), marriage should be an exciting and beautiful adventure, and the relationship between husband and wife is intended to get better with every passing day and year. In Nigeria, marriages are weighed down by certain pressures, which cannot be controlled by couples. Some of the factors responsible for marital instability are social, economic, cultural, emotional, personal, psychological, religious, spiritual, and physical. Social instability is an issue concerning individual differences in the social status of couples, such as different lifestyles, bad habits, and substance abuse, among others. Social instability is expressed through anger, anxiety, and neglect of the tasks and responsibilities of taking care of the home. The difficulty in balancing individual and couple expectations always results in divorce, separation, or breakup. Economic instability is an issue involving family expenses for food, medical bills, and shelter, among others. Financial instability can come from

a lack of employment, a poor job, job loss, or a change of occupation. Financial issues are the leading cause of divorce in Lafia metropolis, as they affect the quality of marital relationships.

Also, cultural instability is an issue for couples coming from different cultural backgrounds, cultural norms, and different cultural values, beliefs, and practices, which can be a source of instability in a marriage because interracial couples mistake cultural influence for personality flaws or weaknesses in character. The solution to dealing with these challenges is to make a sincere effort to understand and respect each person's cultural differences. Emotional instability is the expression of emotions, which could be evidenced through neglect, anger, hostility, and anxiety, among others. These frustrate married people and their children. It could always lead to mood swings, misunderstandings, impulsivity, and difficulty coping with stress and conflict. Personal and psychological instability are issues concerning either the husband or wife. These could be issues of bareness, impotence, sexual incompatibility, sex-related issues, or mental health issues, among others. Persons with mental health problems always experienced guilt, frustration, insecurity, depression, stress, and aggression. Marital counselling helps the married person gain knowledge and counselling skills to increase their chances of engaging in a healthy and stable relationship.

Furthermore, religious and spiritual instability are issues with the different religious and spiritual beliefs of spouses. Different beliefs can become a threat to either of the partners if care is not taken. Differences in spirituality can harm a marital relationship because most spouses may not understand the purpose of marriage life, while the same religious faith improves an individual's wellbeing and strengthens marital relationships. Physical instability is an issue that involves the environment. Lack of a conducive, safe, and supportive environment for the family, lack of water supply, electricity, and even sewage disposal can cause conflict among spouses. These factors are regarded as cankerworms in the foundation of most marriages in Nigeria (Lafia and Nassarawa State, inclusive).

In Lafia metropolis, where the study was carried out, there is much evidence of marital instability issues among married persons that have resulted in single parenting, separation, and divorce, which have caused a lot of irrational behaviours, social vices, prostitution, armed robbery, cultism, drug and substance abuse, kidnapping, and banditry leading to psychotic and neurotic conditions, all of which have a negative impact on the peaceful coexistence in the community and the society as a whole. The increase in instability in marriage raises a number of important issues, such as social unrest, delinquency, crimes, and marital health issues. These are always associated with broken homes or an unstable family background. This makes it possible to carry out research on marital conflict management counselling to help stabilize the marriage institution and provide the tools needed to build healthy relationships in the family system. Ogunsanya (2000) opined that conflict management skills are a special method usually introduced by counsellors to people who are experiencing trouble in their marriages or preventing measures for couples generally to achieve a resolute approach to cordiality.

Marital conflict management counselling is designed for spouses who are victims of marital instability to make their psychological and emotional adjustments to an improved state of affairs because frequent conflicts always have adverse effects on the psycho-social adjustment of adolescents, who are the victims of such marital relationships. According to Abdullahi (2022), marital conflict management counselling is referred to as a preventive measure that helps stabilize marital relationships and provides the tools needed to build a healthy relationship in the family system. The need for conflict management counselling has become necessary in Nigeria. Looking at the present wave of marriage and family breakdown in contemporary society today, one would say “prevention is better than cure.” counselling is

necessary in order to expose the couples to the complexities involved in marriage union and to equip them with skills and relevant information to cope with during conflict situations. The aim of marital conflict management counselling is to present information to the couples that will encourage them to build up an acceptable and positive attitude for an ideal, intact family. Nassarawa indigenes had their traditional ways of managing and resolving marital issues among married persons, and the people responsible for resolving marital conflicts were the family heads, elderly men, pastors, imams, chiefs, kings, and elderly women. But due to modernization and migration, there have been tremendous changes in our society, which is why the society is witnessing an increase in cases of marital instability, marital violence, separation and divorce, and physical assaults among these few. Therefore, a more effective approach is needed in the area of family counselling. This study focused on the effects of conflict management counselling on marital instability among married persons in Lafia metropolis, Nassarawa State, Nigeria. The objective is to help married persons understand the dynamics of marriage, properly adjust, and build a satisfying marital relationship.

Marital counselling helps to increase or improve the quality, value, and attractiveness of marriage relationships. It has been observed by the researcher that divorce has affected most families in Lafia. Married persons are faced with different challenges that affect their marital life, and to balance the situation, counselling needs to be put in place for those who are still in the marriage system to be committed to their marriage.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Incidences of divorce and separation are common among couples, and the consequences are obvious in society. The national daily newspapers, radio stations, and the internet give news on a daily basis with reports of drug abuse, cultism, banditry, armed robbery, prostitution, rape, and killings of spouses by either the husband or wife, just to mention a few. The youth have been the pioneers; the failure of a marriage is a failure in parenting, and society cannot be good if the homes are bad. Marital conflict has consequential effects on the social, educational, political, personal, and psychological adjustment of the adolescents, families, and people of Nassarawa State. Family crises disunite the families and create frustration and anxiety in the lives of the children, leading to sadness, a lack of self-esteem, or low self-esteem in the developing personality traits of the adolescent, which may adversely affect them in later life.

### **AIM AND OBJECTIVES**

The aim of the study is to examine the effects of conflict management counselling on marital instability among married persons in Lafia metropolis, Nassarawa State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study is designed to achieve the following:

1. find out the difference in marital instability of married persons in Lafia metropolis before or after intervention.
2. Find out the difference in posttest marital instability between male and female married persons in the experimental and control groups based on gender.

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions are answered in this study:

1. What is the difference in the pre-test and post-test marital instability scores of married persons in the experimental and control groups in Lafia metropolis?
2. What is the post- test marital instability mean scores of male and female married person in the experimental group in Lafia metropolis?.

## **HYPOTHESES**

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. There is no significant difference between the pretest and posttest marital instability mean scores of married persons in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference between the posttest marital instability mean scores of married persons in experimental group based on gender.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The design for this study was a quasi-experimental design, specifically a pretest and posttest. This design is widely used in behavioural research, basically for the purpose of comparing groups and/or measuring changes resulting from experimental treatment (Gay, 2009). The sample of participants was screened using the marital spouse screening test (MSST) scale to identify distressed married persons. The group was pretested and scored before the treatment session began, recorded after the treatment, and the participants were post-tested. The choice behind the selection of this design was based on the fact that it has the advantages of observing the changes and testing the results obtained from the test and analysis in order to observe the effect of the treatment when compared with the records before and after treatment (Gay, 2009).

The population of the study consisted of all married persons in Lafia metropolis with reported cases of marital instability, and they are 250 in number. This includes all married persons with marital conflicts, irrespective of the kind of marriage contracted, which could be either traditional, religious, court marriage, or registered marriage. The local government under study through the statistic office of social welfare and marriage registry provided data which numbered 500 unstable marriages between 2014 and 2022, the population was limited to married persons with reported cases of marital instability in the study area, statistics from customary court, magistrate courts and social welfare centres and self-reported cases in religious centres make the total population of married person to be 250 which includes all married persons from all religious groups, indigenes and non-indigenes, both educated persons of all grade level, married person were chosen for this study because they are the first social institution for training children and family to become responsible citizen of the nation. Secondly, they serve as mentors, role models, and guides for their families. Thus, a good parent produces good future leaders in society. The sample of the study consists of 80 distressed married persons selected with the aid of the marital spouse screening test scale (MSST), and 40 participants scored higher in the marital screening test scale. The participants were grouped into 2 groups: 20 for treatment and 20 for control.

The instrument used was developed by the researcher, the marital conflict management counselling questionnaire (MCMCQ). It is a 45-item questionnaire with two sections (A and B). Section A seeks relevant demographic information about the respondent, such as age, gender, marital status, and educational qualification, among others. While Section B consists of a 45-item statement of open-ended questions meant to illicit responses on the effects of conflict management counselling or marital instability, the questionnaire was administered prior to the experiment. Married persons who scored very high on the marital spouse screening test scale (MSSTS) were used for the experiment. While those who scored low in the screening test were not included in the study, all variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale that ranges from strongly agree (SA) = 5, agree (A) = 4, undecided (UD) = 3, strongly disagree (SD) = 2, and disagree (D) = 1. The highest attributes are 5, 4, and 3, and the lowest are 1 and 2, which indicate a negative reaction in the statements..

The content and face validity of the instrument were established by three experts, one in guidance and counselling, one in research measurement and evaluation, and one in psychology, all in the Department of Educational Foundation, Faculty of Education, University of Jos. The purpose of the study instrument was to determine its clarity and comprehensiveness. The researcher made all the corrections pointed out, and the instrument was used for the intervention. The construct validity of the instrument was also determined with the Cronbach's alpha method. In order to establish the reliability of the instrument, pilot testing was done with married persons in government secondary schools in the Jos North local government area. Plateau State is not part of the sample for the study. This was retrieved and given to experts for factor analysis; the reliability was established using the Cronbach alpha method, and a coefficient of 0.82 was obtained. In answering the research questions and testing the hypotheses presented for the study, the data collected from the respondents were analyzed using t-test statistics and the mean and standard deviation. In reaching a decision, a t-test was used to test hypotheses 1 and 2, while statistical tools of mean and standard deviation were used to answer questions raised for the study.

## RESULTS

The analysis of the data was presented in tables one, two, three, and four, followed by the interpretation based on the research questions and null hypotheses.

### Research Question One

What is the difference in the pre-test and post-test marital instability scores of married persons in the experimental and control groups in Lafia metropolis?

Table 1

**Marital Instability of Married Persons in the experimental and Control Groups**

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		Mean Gain	$\bar{x}$ - difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Experimental	20	17.95	3.80	35.55	2.63	17.6	15.85
Control	20	20.85	4.69	22.60	3.07	1.75	

Table 1 reveals the pre-test and post-test marital instability mean scores of married persons in the experimental and control groups. From the result, the experimental group had a post-test mean score of 35.55 and a standard deviation of 2.63 higher than the pre-test mean score of 17.95 and a standard deviation of 3.80 with a mean gain of 17.6, indicating that the teachers improved after treatment using conflict management counselling. Also, for the control group, the mean score was 20.85 and a standard deviation of 4.69 at the pretest, but in the post-test, the mean score of students was 22.60 and a standard deviation of 3.07. The findings show that married persons in the experimental group had a higher mean score after treatment using conflict management counselling than those in the control group who were not given treatment, with a mean difference of 15.85. This means that at the pre-test, the married persons in both groups were not committed to their spouses, but after the intervention, the married persons in the experimental group became more committed and stable in their marriages, as shown in their ratings, than those in the control group.

### Research Question Two

What is the post- test marital instability mean scores of male and female married persons in the experimental group in Lafia metropolis?.

**Table 2**  
**Marital Instability Mean Scores of Male and Female Married Persons in the experimental Group**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	$\bar{x}$ - difference
Male	10	35.90	2.56	0.70
Female	10	35.20	2.78	

Table 2 reveals the post-test marital instability mean score of male and female married persons in the experimental group. From the result, male teachers had a post-test mean score of 35.90 and a standard deviation of 2.56, and female teachers had a post-test mean score of 35.20 and a standard deviation of 2.78 with a mean difference of 0.70, indicating that conflict management counselling does help in improving marital instability for both male and female married persons.

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the posttest marital instability mean scores of married persons in the experimental and the control group in Lafia metropolis.

**Table 3: Difference between the posttest marital instability means scores of experimental and control groups**

Group	N	X	SD	DF	t	P-value	Decision
Experimental	20	35.55	2.63	38	14.34	0.000	Significant
Control	20	22.60	3.07				

Table 3 reveals the t-test result of the post-test marital instability mean scores of married persons in the experimental and control groups. The post-test mean scores of the experimental group were 35.55 with a standard deviation of 2.63, and the control group had a mean score of 22.60. The result further yielded  $t(38) = 14.34$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . Since the p-value of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypotheses were rejected. It was concluded that there is a significant difference between the post-test marital instability mean score of married people in the experimental and control groups. It reveals that the experimental group improved better than the control group at the post-test.

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significance difference between post-test marital instability mean scores of married persons in the experimental group based on gender.

**Table 4: Difference between post-test marital instability mean scores of male and female married persons in the experimental group**

Gender	N	X	SD	DF	t	P-value	Decision
Male	10	35.90	2.56	18	.586	.565	Insignificant
Female	10	35.20	2.78				

Table 4 reveals the t-test result of the post-test marital instability mean scores of males and females in the experimental group. The post-test mean scores of male and female married persons were 35.90 with a standard deviation of 2.56, and the female had a mean score of 35.20 with a standard deviation of 2.78. The result also yielded  $t(18) = .586$  at the  $p > 0.05$  level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. It was concluded that there is no significant difference between the post-test marital instability mean score of male and female married persons in the experimental group. It implies that conflict management counseling is not affected by gender.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study on conflict management counselling on marital instability among married people indicated that the participants in the experimental group performed better than those in the control group, that is, participants in the intervention group compared with participants in the control group showed significant and overwhelming improvement in their marital instability. This shows the effectiveness of the treatment strategy as well as the treatment gained by the participants. The reason is that the treatment group was exposed to conflict management counselling, while those participants in the control group were not given any form of treatment. This finding corroborates that of Nlemadin Falaye and Okoye (2013), who found out that respondents with high friendship ability-making skills performed better in the intervention program than those with low friendship ability-making skills.

The findings on the effect of gender on marital instability showed that there was no significant difference between male and female married persons in enhancing marital instability in the same manner, regardless of their gender, which means that gender is not a factor in determining marital instability. The findings go in line with Alike and Edosa (2012), who found that marriages that are not stable are not always intact, resulting in quarrels, fighting, separation, or divorce. The finding is also in line with Tolorunleke (2013), who said marriage is an exciting and beautiful advance, and the marital relationship of couples is intended to get better with each blessed day and the years ahead. The study is in line with Okafor (2012), who posited that if these little things are not properly handled, they may cause friction and end up in separation between couples. The findings revealed that marital instability is now a global phenomenon in society, whereby married persons are always having conflicts in trying to perform their responsibilities demanded by society.

## CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The results of the findings supported previous studies, and the counselling intervention was effective in reducing anger, anxiety, frustration, aggression, and conflict among married persons. It also taught them how to cope with and handle conflicting issues in order to strengthen marital and social relationships. Conflict management counselling is an alternative intervention for conflict resolution among married persons. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Marital counsellors should organize workshops, seminars, lectures, and conferences for members of the public in order to learn how to prevent and manage marital issues, as it will also serve as a preventive measure on too many issues related to divorce or separation as they affect the adolescents or children of that family.
2. Counsellors, psychologists, civil organisations and social workers should encourage members of the public, staff, or married persons to live peacefully with their spouses in order to have a disciplined and responsible family.



3. Married persons should learn how to spend quality time together when faced with challenges and seek counselling services to help them resolve problems in order to overcome their weaknesses so as to enjoy positive marital experiences.

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