

# MARITAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AS KEYS TO MENTAL WELLBEING: IMPLICATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** *The study investigated the effects marital conflict, conflict resolution strategies and the extent to which conflict resolution strategies are employed among married couples in Ekiti State. The study is descriptive survey research. A total of 650 married people were selected from ten local government areas in Ekiti State through multistage random sampling. Two research questions were raised and one hypothesis was generated for this study. A self-designed questionnaire titled "Marital Conflict Resolution Questionnaire" was used for the study. The items were, subjected to face and content validity procedures and the accuracy and suitability of the items were ensured. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings of this study revealed that there is significant difference in the conflict resolution of male and female married people; marital conflict resolution strategies employed by couples include intimacy, discussion/dialogue, accommodation, compromise, avoidance and mediation. Intimacy is the most employed strategy of conflict resolution while the least employed method is separation. The study recommends the need for more intimacy in resolving conflict marriage, among others.*

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, mental health, well-being, conflict, conflict resolution

## INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is about improving the lives of people. It is directed at the need to achieve higher standard of living without disposing nature of its beauty, freshness and purity so essential to man's living and its main aim is to balance economic, social and environmental needs. Sustainable development is believed to be a holistic approach to improving the quality of life through judicious use of available natural resources. The United Nations development program (2015) outlined 17 sustainable development goals which are meant to transform the world by year 2030. The sustainable development goal number three (SDG3) is to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages. The target of this goal is to reduce by one-third premature mortality from non-communicable disease through prevention and treatment and promote mental health and wellbeing. This means that promoting mental health and wellbeing is a way of reducing premature mortality and thus

ensuring the achievement of sustainable development.

Well-being, an important part of the sustainable development goals, is about how we are doing as individuals, communities and as a nation and how sustainable this is for the future. According to Narayan (2000), wellbeing is noted as leading to peace of mind, happiness and harmony. Psychologically, well-being is experienced by feelings of happiness, contentment, peace of mind, and living in harmony with others. Whereas ill-being is indicated by feelings of humiliation, shame, stigma, anguish, loss and grief. These negative feelings constitute a negation to well-being. To achieve a state of wellbeing it is important that affective needs of people are met. If people do not have such affective needs met, emotional, intellectual, physical, and social growth will be stunted.

Marriage, according to Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (2007), have been thought to be an arrangement to meet the emotional needs of the partners such as affection, companionship, approval, encouragement, and reinforcement for achievements. Marriage also correlates to good health. This is attested to by Papalia (2004), who found out that married people live longer; particularly that married men may live longer than unmarried men and that married people may lead safer, healthier lives than single people.

Nevertheless, it has been observed that as important as marriage is, it also involves conflicts. Whenever people are in close relationship conflict is bound to occur. This is because people are different from each other and therefore view things in different ways. Conflict is a normal part of relationship and is inevitable. However, it can cause problems for couples if not handled properly. Therefore, it is very important to learn to handle conflict in a healthy way as handling it in an unhealthy way can cause a lot of headaches. Conflict can lead to the breakdown of family and the society. It can also lead to psychological problems and impede the wellbeing of people.

It has been observed that marital difficulties are one of the leading reason people seek psychological help from counsellors, social workers and other human services professionals. The deterioration of the nation socially, culturally, morally and economically can also be traced to the deterioration of family ties and of slack attitudes to family responsibilities that characterized many marriages today. This is so because the society emanates from the family and so if something is wrong with the family setting it has adverse effect on the society as a whole. Stress arising from marital difficulties has been linked with behavioural rigidity or disorganisation and self-destructive behaviours such as substance abuse and alcoholism. (Passer, Smith, Atkinson, Mitchell and Muir: 2003). Also, personality disorders such as anti-social behaviour shown by some people may

reflect disordered relationship within the family. According to Passer et al. (2003), people with anti-social personality disorder seem to lack a conscience, they tend to be impulsive and unable to delay gratification of their needs. They also exhibit a lack of emotional attachment to other people. Their lack of the capacity to care about others can make them to constitute danger to the society.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Meaning of Conflict*

Conflict, according to Hornby (2006), is defined as a situation in which there are opposing ideas, opinions, feelings or wishes. It also means disagreement or quarrel. This means that when people have differing ideas or opinions, wishes or needs or when they disagree, they are in conflict. According to Froyd (2010), conflict may be defined as a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. Conflict in the marriage and family context should be taken to refer to dissension between marital partners over values, beliefs, norms and behaviours, which make up the structure of the nuclear unit.

### *Effects of Marital Conflict on Mental Health and Well-being*

Couple conflicts have a negative impact on health. According to Fincham (2001), marital conflict has harmful effects on mental, physical and family health. Conflict in marriage can cause emotional breakdown, and other psychological problems such as anxiety disorders, generalized anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorders, obsessive-compulsive disorders and psychosis. According to Owuamanam and Owuamanam (2002), These psychological disorders could be characterized by feelings of tension, apprehension, fear, avoidance behaviour, chronic tendency to experience irrational feelings, worry, uneasiness, excessive perspiration, diarrhoea, high blood pressure, dry mouth, sexual dysfunction, headaches,

restlessness, helplessness, loss of appetite, sleeplessness, feelings of inadequacy, distress, obsession centering on inflicting harm on others, immoral sexual acts, hallucination, delusion, profound depression or total apathy to life and suicide. Conflict in marital relationship can have negative effects on the couples involved, the entire family and the society in general. Such effects could be social dysfunction, misbehaviour in children, low self-esteem, mental health problems, physical health problems among others.

Marital conflict can result to declining mental health which is the well-being of a person's mind. as marital conflict happens between married couples who are disagreeing, fighting and exhibiting increasingly negative interactions towards each other and when signs of hostilities appear, especially aggression, mental health can begin to plummet. This typically frustrating behaviour causes extreme emotional turmoil and builds discord in both people's psychological states. Marital problems can lead to even personality disorder. Low self-esteem is another problem that has been indicated as one of the effects of marital conflict. According to Cox (2007), people begin losing confidence in themselves on many levels when there is conflict. As the state of mental health declines, spouses in turn show more weaknesses.

#### *Marital Conflict Resolution*

When conflict is properly managed it can strengthen the relationship and make people to be more matured. Successful management of conflict solves problems and helps a good relationship evolve into an even better one but unresolved conflict is the rust of marriage.

#### *Conflict Resolution Strategies*

Conflict resolution strategies as identified are: Dialogue/Discussion, Collaboration, Compromise, Accommodation, avoidance, mediation, intimacy and separation. The dialogue approach is resolving conflict

through rational discussion which, according to Nwoye (1991) is to iron out differences, making effort to weigh the pros and cons in each other's view which lead to mutual agreement, the spouses arriving at a common ground of acceptance or rather, compromise. collaboration has been described as trying to meet the needs of all people involved in order to achieve the best solution to a conflict (Froyd, 2010). Compromise is useful when the cost of conflict is higher than the cost of losing ground, when equal strength opponents are at a standstill and when there is a deadline looming. According to Algert (2002), people who prefer a compromising style try to find a solution that will at least partially satisfy everyone. Everyone is expected to give up something and the compromiser him-or herself also expects to relinquish something. The accommodation style indicates a willingness to meet the needs of others at the expense of the person's own needs (Johnson and Johnson, 2009). The accommodating approach is low assertiveness and high cooperation. Times when the accommodating mode is appropriate are to show reasonableness, develop performance, create good will, or keep peace. Some people use the accommodating mode when the issue or outcome is of low importance to them. The accommodator often knows when to give in to others, but can be persuaded to surrender a position even when it is not warranted. Such a person is not assertive but is highly cooperative. People tending towards this style seek to evade the conflict entirely. This style is typified by delegating controversial decisions, accepting default decisions, and not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. Mediation is negotiation facilitated by a neutral third party (International Mediation Institute (2020b). When mere discussion of spouses by themselves cannot yield the desired result, the service of a third party might be required. According to Esere (2008), mediation is using outside intervention to resolve marital conflict. Mediation might involve friends of the couple, neighbours or the relatives of either of the couple or a marriage counsellor.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to:

1. investigate the effects of conflict among married people

2. examine the strategies married people use in conflict resolution and to what extent they employ such strategies.

*Research Questions*

1. What are the effects of conflict in marriage?
2. In what ways do married people resolve conflict in their marriages?

*Research Hypotheses*

- There is no significant difference between the conflict resolution of male and female married people.

**METHODOLOGY**

The study is descriptive research of the survey type. A total of 650 married people were selected from ten local government areas in Ekiti State through multistage random sampling techniques. Two research questions were raised and one hypothesis generated for this study and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A self-designed questionnaire titled “Marital Conflict Resolution Questionnaire” was used to measure the conflict resolution of the respondents. The items were subjected to face and content validity procedures and the accuracy and suitability of the items were ensured. The reliability coefficient was 0.73 at 0.05 level of significance. Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

**Research Question 1:** What are the effects of marital conflict?

**Table 1: Frequency count and percentage of effects of marital conflict**

S/N	EFFECTS OF MARITAL CONFLICT	AGREE		DISAGREE	
		N	%	N	%
33	Low self esteem	420	64.6	230	35.4
34	High stress levels	565	86.9	85	13.1
35	Emotional disturbances	570	87.7	80	12.3
36	High blood pressure	582	89.6	68	10.4
37	Inability to socialize normally with friends or family	530	81.5	120	18.5
38	Delinquency in children	570	87.7	80	12.3
39	Children can develop depression and Anxiety	585	90	65	10
40	Separation	595	91.6	55	8.4
41	Divorce	589	90.6	61	9.4
42	Poor health	589	90.6	61	9.4
43	Poor parenting	587	90.3	63	9.7

The findings indicate that effects of conflict in marriage include poor parenting, low self esteem, high blood pressure, poor health, separation, depression and anxiety in children, emotional disturbances, high stress levels;

delinquency in children, inability to socialize normally with friends or families and divorce

**Research 2:** To what extent do married people make use of conflict resolution strategies:

**Table 2: Conflict Resolution Strategies**

S/N	CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES	AGREE		DISAGREE		RANK
		N	%	N	%	
1	Dialogue/Discussion	564	86.8	86	13.2	2 <sup>nd</sup>
2	Mediation	314	48.4	336	51.6	6 <sup>th</sup>
3	Compromise	511	78.6	139	21.4	4 <sup>th</sup>
4	Avoidance	498	76.6	152	23.4	5 <sup>th</sup>
5	Accommodation	525	80.8	125	19.2	3 <sup>rd</sup>
6	Intimacy	568	87.4	82	12.6	1 <sup>st</sup>
7	Separation	42	6.4	609	93.6	7 <sup>th</sup>

The findings of this study show the conflict resolution strategies employed by married couples in resolving their conflicts and the extent to which they make use of these strategies. Such strategies include dialogue/discussion, mediation, compromise, avoidance, accommodation, intimacy and separation. From the table, intimacy is the most employed strategy of conflict resolution, followed by discussion/dialogue, followed by accommodation, followed by compromise which is followed by avoidance

then mediation. The least employed method is separation. Separation in marriage appears to be the beginning of the end of the marriage.

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference between the conflict resolution of male and female married people.

**Table 3: t-test of Gender and Conflict Resolution**

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t table
Male	327	85.31	9.85	648	4.474	1.960
Female	323	80.44	17.00			

**P < 0.05**

Table 12 above reveals that t cal (4.474) is greater than t table (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance (t - 4.474, P < 0.05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant difference between the conflict t resolution of male and female married people.

*Discussion of Findings*

The study also shows the effects of marital conflict resolution. The findings indicate that effects of conflict in marriage include poor parenting, low self-esteem, high blood pressure, poor health, separation, depression and anxiety in children, emotional disturbances, high stress levels; delinquency in children, inability to socialize normally with friends or families and divorce. People in a marital conflict can begin to exhibit social

dysfunctions. This can happen when they get depressed and insomnia can arise. Psychological effects of conflict can lead to a spouse's inability to socialize normally with their friends of family. When conflict is more frequent in the presence of the children, it can lead to distress, aggression as well as long-term difficulties including behavioural, emotional, social and academic problems in the children. This finding is in agreement with that of Fincham (2001), who reported that marital conflict has deleterious effects on mental, physical and family health and that marital conflict can result to declining mental health which is the well-being of a person's mind. Marital conflict can lead to a decline in mental health and psychological wellbeing of those involved and this have negative implication for sustainable development.

This study also revealed that there is significant difference between the conflict resolution of male and female married people. It was ascertained that male respondents are favourably disposed to resolving conflict than their female counterparts. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Delatoire et al (2017) who found out that there are differences in the way men and women solve conflicts. They found out that men use mainly constructive strategies and women use destructive strategies.

The findings of this study also show the conflict resolution strategies employed by married couples in resolving their conflicts and the extent to which they make use of these strategies. Such strategies include dialogue/discussion, mediation, compromise, avoidance, accommodation, intimacy and separation. From the table, intimacy is the most employed strategy of conflict resolution while the least employed is separation. Couples with intimacy goals are more likely to engage in open discussion and are more likely to resolve their conflicts constructively. Separation in marriage appears to be the beginning of the end of the marriage. It may become difficult for the couple to resolve conflict while they are separated. This is in agreement with Nwoye (1991) who contended that the process of separation as a way out of marital conflict is applied only as a last resort. This may mean that the couple resorts to separation only because they have tried their best at resolving the conflict but it seems that the only option for them to be at peace is to separate. Making use of intimacy in resolving conflict may open door for the couples to understand themselves better, live together peacefully and experience good mental health and wellbeing. Consequently, they will be able to live healthier lives and become more productive.

## CONCLUSION

It is concluded that marital conflict has negative effects on the mental health and wellbeing of couples,

members of the family and the society at large. It is concluded that intimacy is a very important strategy of conflict resolution in marriage. The least employed method is separation.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Marriage Counselors should emphasize to their clients the need for more intimacy in resolving conflict in their marriages.
2. Married couples should employ more of intimacy, discussion/dialogue, accommodation and compromise approaches in resolving their conflicts.
3. Marital conflict strategies should be recognized as tools for achieving good mental health among married people in order to achieve sustainable development

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