

Prevalence of Marital Conflict and Coping Strategies Employed By Married Adults in Kwara State, Nigeria: Implications for Counselling

DOI: 10.22098/JPC.2026.17058.1308

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Abstract

Aim: The study investigated the prevalence of marital conflict and coping strategies employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was a descriptive survey.

Method: The population for this study was all married adults in Kwara State which was estimated at 935,686 as at January, 2025, while 403 literate married adults were sampled for this study. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled “Prevalence of Marital Conflicts and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (PMCCSQ)” was used to collect data for this study. The data collected were analysed with percentage, mean and ranking for demographic and research questions while the Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tool was used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Findings: The findings revealed that married adults in Kwara State experienced a high prevalence of marital conflict with a rate of 55%. Findings also revealed that married adults in Kwara State employed behavioural, social, cognitive, avoidance and spiritual coping strategies.

Conclusion: It was concluded that married adults in Kwara State experienced a high prevalence of marital conflict. Based on these findings, it was recommended that the State Government should establish community-based marital counselling centres in all local government areas to provide accessible professional support for couples to reduce the rate of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State.

Keywords: Prevalence, Marital Conflict, Coping Strategies, Married Adults, Kwara State

Introduction

Marital conflict is a significant social and psychological issue that affects the stability and well-being of families globally. Marital conflict may 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 (Olugbenga, 2018). Marital conflict can be defined as the state of tension or stress between marital partners as the couple tries to carry out their marital roles (Nyeche & Maclean, 2023; Pathan, 2018). Joseph and Inbanathan (2024) 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 interests are elementary aspects of couples' everyday lives although they do not necessarily become spelt out in an open conflict.

Marital conflict manifests in various forms, including but not limited to physical abuse, emotional and psychological abuse, sexual abuse, and marital irresponsibility. These forms of conflict are often exacerbated by factors such as childlessness, forced marriages, incompatibility, communication gaps, interference by in-laws, financial strains, infidelity, issues surrounding the sex of children, and a lack of appreciation within the relationship (Yildirim & Demir, 2020). The complexity of marital conflict is further highlighted by subtle struggles for control within the marriage, which may not be overtly abusive but can still lead to significant relational tension (Adegboye, Lawrence & Ogun, 2018).

Tiruwork (2018) highlighted that violent behaviours of husbands, a lack of cooperation within the family, an inability to spend quality time together, issues related to children, and poor communication are significant contributors to marital strife. Commitment to the relationship and the influence of family background, including upbringing and previous family dynamics, play crucial roles in shaping marital interactions and conflicts (Thorsen, 2017). Financial strain remains a consistent source of marital conflict across different contexts, as highlighted by a study conducted by Adegboye, Lawrence and Ogun (2018), which found that financial disagreements are often a precursor to broader relational issues. The role of external family members, particularly in-laws, continues to be a significant source of conflict, especially in societies where extended family involvement in marital affairs is normative. This interference can exacerbate existing conflicts or introduce new tensions, particularly when there are differing expectations or cultural practices at play (Kumar & Srinivasan, 2019). The pressure of societal expectations, particularly regarding childbearing and the sex of children, also continues to be a significant stressor in many marriages, leading to conflicts that can sometimes escalate into more severe forms of abuse (Mukherjee & Roy, 2023).

Studies carried out in various parts of Nigeria revealed that the prevalence of marital instability or conflict ranged from 42% in the North, 29% in the South-West, 78.8% in the South-East, and 41% in the South-South (Okemgbo, Omidéyi & Odimegwu, 2018; Tanimu, Yohanna & Omeiza, 2016; Dienye, Gbeneol & Itimi, 2014). According to Dada and Idowu (2016), the prevalence of divorce in Nigerian marriages is concerning and has a negative impact on the kids, the couples, and society as a whole. Omole (2016) reported

divorce rates of 32% and 57% between 1991 and 2000 and 2001 and 2010, respectively. Research conducted among university staff in Southwest Nigeria found that 67.1% of participants reported experiencing withdrawal patterns in marital conflicts, while 26.8% experienced constructive conflicts, and 6.1% dealt with destructive conflicts (Makinde & Adeyinka, 2018).

Research indicates that conflicts are prevalent in a majority of marriages, with studies estimating that approximately 45-55% of marriages experience significant conflict which has a significant on health (World Health Organization WHO, 2023). The increasing rate of marriage and family conflict such as the incidence of divorce in the society today justifies the fact that there are conflicts in marital homes (Olaitan, 2017). Research has shown that the prevalence of marital conflict varies across different demographic factors such as age, length of marriage, and educational qualification (Williams & Umberson, 2019; Amato & James, 2018; Birditt, Wan, Orbuch & Antonucci, 2017). Birditt, Wan, Orbuch and Antonucci (2017) stated that younger couples tend to experience higher levels of conflict compared to older couples. This is often attributed to the challenges associated with the early stages of marriage, where couples are still adjusting to their new roles and responsibilities. Older couples, on the other hand, may have developed better conflict resolution strategies over time, leading to lower levels of conflict. However, Animasahun (2019) indicated that marital conflict increased in later years, particularly as couples face issues such as retirement, health problems, or empty nest syndrome.

The duration of marriage also plays a critical role in the prevalence of marital conflict (Uzdil & Özgüç, 2024). Marital satisfaction often follows a U-shaped curve, with higher satisfaction in the early years, a decline during the middle years, and an increase again in later years. The middle years, often referred to as the "midlife crisis" period, can be particularly challenging due to increased responsibilities such as child-rearing and career pressures, which can lead to higher levels of conflict (Amato & James, 2018). Conversely, as couples grow older together, they may experience a resurgence in marital satisfaction, with fewer conflicts, particularly if they have developed effective communication and conflict resolution skills over the years (Amato & James, 2018).

Agboola and Oluwatosin (2018) reported that couples' educational attainment significantly influences marital conflict. Couples with higher levels of education tend to report lower levels of marital conflict. This is often linked to better communication skills, higher levels of mutual respect, and more effective problem-solving strategies. Education also correlates with economic stability, which can reduce financial stress, a common source of marital conflict. In contrast, couples with lower educational qualifications may experience higher levels of conflict due to various stressors, including financial strain, lack of effective communication, and limited conflict resolution skills (Williams & Umberson, 2019).

Animashaun (2019) posited that marital conflict is a phenomenon that destabilizes the couple, disrupts their joy and is mostly felt by women yet, is the least recognized human rights abuse in the world. It is also a profound social problem, sapping women's energy, compromising their physical health and eroding their self-esteem. Marital conflict can have profound consequences that extend beyond the relationship itself, impacting individuals, families, and even broader societal dynamics. Marital conflicts have far-

reaching consequences, impacting not only the marital relationship but also individual mental health, children's well-being, and overall family functioning. Chronic and unresolved conflicts can lead to increased stress, decreased marital satisfaction, and a higher likelihood of separation or divorce (Bodenmann, 2020).

One of the primary consequences of marital conflict is its detrimental impact on mental and emotional well-being. Studies by Bodenmann (2020); Fincham and Beach (2021) have shown that frequent and unresolved conflicts can lead to increased stress, anxiety, depression, and overall dissatisfaction with life. Individuals experiencing chronic marital conflict may also suffer from reduced self-esteem, feelings of loneliness, and a diminished sense of emotional security within the relationship. Conflict in marriage can significantly affect physical health. Research by Amato and James (2022); Papp (2020) has linked marital discord to a range of health issues such as cardiovascular problems, immune system dysregulation, sleep disturbances, and overall poorer health outcomes. The stress and emotional strain resulting from ongoing conflicts can contribute to the development or exacerbation of physical health conditions, highlighting the interconnectedness of mental and physical well-being in the context of marital dynamics.

The consequences of marital conflict extend beyond the individual to impact the quality of family relationships and parenting dynamics. Children growing up in households marked by frequent conflict may experience emotional distress, behavioural problems, academic difficulties, and a higher risk of developing mental health issues later in life (Amato & James, 2022). Marital conflicts can disrupt family cohesion, communication patterns, and parenting strategies, leading to negative outcomes for children's well-being and development. Moreover, marital conflict can have economic ramifications for couples and families. Financial disagreements, separation, or divorce resulting from unresolved conflicts can lead to financial instability, decreased household income, and challenges in meeting financial obligations (Bodenmann, 2020). Despite the prevalence and consequences of marital conflict among couples, many of them have developed coping strategies to manage the situation.

Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts, both behavioural and psychological, that individuals employ to master, tolerate, reduce, or minimize stressful events (Stanisławski, 2019). According to Isanejad, Amani, Azizi and Azimifar (2016), coping strategies are the thoughts and behaviours used to manage the internal and external demands of a stressful situation. These strategies can be broadly categorized into two main types: problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping (Stanisławski, 2019). Problem-focused coping strategies involve direct attempts to address the source of stress. These strategies aim to change or eliminate the stressor itself. Examples include time management, seeking information, and problem-solving techniques. On the other hand, emotion-focused coping strategies are directed at managing the emotional distress associated with the stressor, rather than changing the stressor itself. These may include techniques such as relaxation, seeking social support, or cognitive reappraisal (Stanisławski, 2019).

In 2018, Folkman introduced additional categories of coping strategies such as meaning-focused coping which involves drawing on one's beliefs, values, and existential goals to motivate and sustain coping efforts. This type of coping is particularly relevant in

situations where the stressor is chronic or uncontrollable (Folkman, 2018). Another category is proactive coping, which involves anticipating potential stressors and taking steps to prevent them or minimize their impact before they occur (Schwarzer & Taubert, 2022).

In marital conflict, coping strategies are vital for managing and resolving marital conflict, helping couples navigate challenges, improving communication, and maintaining relationship satisfaction (Adeoye & Olaoluwa, 2021). Couples who can effectively manage their emotions during disagreements are more likely to employ constructive coping strategies and experience higher relationship satisfaction. This includes techniques such as reappraisal, where partners reframe negative situations in a more positive light, and mindfulness, which involves staying present and non-judgmental during conflicts (Kuster, Bernecker, Backes, Brandstätter, Nussbeck, Bradbury, Martin, Sutter-Stickel & Bodenmann, 2017).

Coping strategies are crucial in shaping the experiences and outcomes of married adults in marital conflict across different age groups. For younger married adults, coping strategies can significantly influence their ability to manage marital conflict and maintain relationship satisfaction. Studies by Johnson (2020); Smith and Jones (2022) suggested that younger adults may employ coping strategies such as active communication, problem-solving, and seeking social support from peers or family members. These strategies can help them address conflicts effectively, learn valuable conflict resolution skills, and strengthen their marital bond early in their relationship journey. Middle-aged married adults often face a myriad of responsibilities related to career, parenting, and caregiving, which can impact their coping strategies during marital conflicts.

Research by Brown and Wilson (2021); Lee (2023) indicated that middle-aged adults may rely on coping strategies such as time management, prioritization of issues, and seeking professional support through counselling or therapy. These strategies can help them balance multiple demands while addressing conflicts constructively, reducing stress, and preserving relationship quality. Adejuwon and Lawal (2021) found that older married couples in Nigeria utilized problem-solving and collaborative strategies compared to their younger counterparts, who were more inclined toward avoidant or confrontational strategies.

Coping strategies can significantly impact married adults' educational aspirations and goals. Research by Johnson (2020) indicated that individuals who effectively manage marital conflicts through constructive coping strategies, such as active communication, problem-solving, and seeking support, are more likely to maintain focus on their educational aspirations and are better equipped to balance the demands of their relationships with their academic goals, leading to enhanced motivation and commitment to furthering their education. Also, Couples in the early years of marriage often experience more frequent and intense conflicts as they navigate the transition to married life and establish marital norms (Lavner & Bradbury, 2017). Over time, as couples adapt to each other's habits and communication styles, the intensity of conflicts typically decreases. Longitudinal studies indicate that couples who have been married for many years are more likely to have developed a repertoire of coping strategies that reduce the impact of conflicts, leading to greater marital satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 2017). In

line with the above view of the previous researchers, this study investigated the prevalence of marital conflict and coping strategies among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria.

In many communities, problems such as drunkenness, mismanagement of money, poor communication among spouses, domestic violence, infertility etc.; among others have caused serious breakdown of a marital relationship. Spouses have lost their love, patience, and respect for one another and what it takes to build up a strong and lasting marital commitment to each other; the rate at which these problems break down God's ordinance calls for quick attention. From a wider perspective, these factors create instabilities and disharmony in marriages, thus subjecting spouses to serious emotional trauma. Ironically, most spouses are unaware of these situations. They feel these problems are insignificant and not worth tackling, as they tend to live with it or remain indifferent to it. In addition, most marriages experience stressful emotional conflicts when there are situations within the family that give rise to a lot of pressure leading to disagreement and eventually resulting in deep hatred, grief and fear (Josiah & Nteh, 2022). As this incidence occurs in most marriages and its prevalence is getting higher it might result in a high rate of single parenting in Kwara State and this has greater consequences on the life of the children.

Several studies have been carried out on marital conflict and coping strategies. For instance, Odu and Ayodele (2020) worked on marital satisfaction and conflicts among Nigerian couples by examining the roles of age, communication, and finances. It was found that younger couples in Nigeria reported higher levels of conflict compared to older couples due to financial instability and communication challenges. Oladele and Adewale (2021) investigated the gender differences in coping strategies for marital conflict among married adults in Nigeria. The findings revealed gender variations in coping strategies, with women more inclined towards seeking social support and emotional expression, while men tended to utilize problem-solving and avoidance strategies. However, the prevalence of marital conflict was similar among genders. Despite the critical nature of this issue, there is limited research specifically addressing the prevalence and coping strategies of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the prevalence rate of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. What are the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria?

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on age.
2. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on age.
3. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on length of years in marriage.

4. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of years in marriage.
5. There is no significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on educational qualification.
6. There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification.

Methodology

The research design employed for this study was a descriptive survey research method. The population for this study was all married adults in Kwara State which was estimated at 935,686 (National Population Commission, Kwara State, 2024). The target population for this study consisted of literate married adults in Kwara State. A sample of 403 married adults was used in this study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for this study. At stage one, simple random technique was used to select three (3) local government areas from each of the three senatorial districts; Kwara Central (Asa, Ilorin East, Ilorin South & Ilorin West Local Government Areas), Kwara North (Baruten, Edu, Pategi, Kaiama & Moro Local Government Areas) and Kwara South (Ekiti, Oke-Oro, Offa, Ifelodun, Irepodun, Isin & Oyun Local Government Areas). Thus, a total of (9) local government areas were selected from the sixteen (16) local government areas of the state. This was done using a dip hat. The dip-hat sampling method is a method where the researcher writes the names of all the local government areas in Kwara State on different sheets of paper, puts them in a bag, shakes them and then dips his/her hand into the bag to pick a sample. This method was used to select 3 local government areas from each of the 3 Senatorial Districts in Kwara State for the study. At stage two, purposive sampling technique was used to select places like schools, Mosques, Churches and ministries in which a large number of literate married adults could be found. At stage three, simple random sampling was used to select married adults from the places selected. Therefore, a total of 403 respondents were sampled in this study.

A researcher-designed questionnaire titled “Prevalence of Marital Conflicts and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (PMCCSQ)”. The psychometric indexes of the questionnaire were ascertained through validity and reliability. The instrument was validated by five experts and later subjected to test re-rest reliability and reliability coefficients of 0.71 and 0.76 were obtained which made the instrument suitable for this study. The PCSMCQ consisted of three sections A, B and C. Section A contained the demographic data of the respondents, sections B and C contained items to elicit responses from the respondents on the prevalence of marital conflict and coping strategies respectively. The statements in sections B and C were obtained from the review of related literature. For section B, the four-point Likert-type scale of Always - 4 points, Sometimes - 3 points, Rarely - 2 points, Never - 1 point while for section C, the four-point Likert-type scale of Very True of Me (VTM) = 4 points, True of Me (TM) = 3 points, Somehow True of Me (STM) = 2 points, Never True of Me (NTM) = 1 point were used. The instrument was validated by five experts and later subjected to test re-rest reliability and reliability coefficients of 0.71 and 0.76 were obtained which made the instrument suitable for this study.

The collected data were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The results obtained from the demographic data and section B were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency and percentage while mean and rank order were used to answer section C. Inferential statistics of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the formulated research hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

Results

Participants

The analysis of demographic data of the respondents revealed that 35 (8.7%) of the respondents were between 18-25 years of age, 148 (36.7%) of the respondents were between 26-33 years of age, while 220 (54.6%) of the respondents were 34 years of age and above. This means that respondents aged 34 years and above participated more in the study. Based on the length of years in marriage, a total of 71 (17.6%) of the respondents spent less than 5 years in marriage, 205 (50.9%) spent between 5-10 years in marriage, and 127 (31.5%) spent 11 years in marriage and above. This shows that respondents who spent between 5-10 years in marriage participated more in this study. Based on educational qualification, a total of 142 (35.2%) of the respondents had NCE/OND, 225 (55.8%) of the respondents had HND/first degree while 36 (8.9%) of the respondents had postgraduate degree. This implies that there are more respondents with HND/first degree in this study.

Research Question 1: What is the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of the Prevalence of Marital Conflict among the Respondents

S/N	As far as I am concerned, I and my spouse:	Always High	Often	Sometimes Low	Rarely
1	argue about finances	302	74.9%	101	25.1%
2	disagree about how to raise our children	323	80.10%	80	19.90%
3	struggle to balance household responsibilities	112	27.8%	291	72.2%
4	argue about how to spend our free time	238	59.1%	165	40.9%
5	disagree about our extended families cause tension	217	53.8%	186	46.2%
6	argue about our social life and friends	233	57.8%	170	42.2%
7	experience conflicts over our sexual relationship	222	55.1%	181	44.9%
8	disagree on how to manage stress	249	61.8%	154	38.2%
9	argue about religious or spiritual beliefs	68	16.9%	335	83.1%
10	have conflicts about our career aspirations	180	44.7%	223	55.3%
11	have conflicts about trust and jealousy	270	67.0%	133	33.0%
12	argue about division of household chores	254	63.0%	149	37.0%
13	have disagreements over time spent on hobbies or interests	201	49.9%	202	50.1%
14	argue on how to arise and discipline our children	249	61.8%	154	38.2%
15	argue about spending habits	206	51.1%	197	48.9%
Grand Percentage			55.0%		45.0%

Table 1 shows the mean and rank order of the prevalence of marital conflict among the respondents. The Table shows a high prevalence rate of 55% and a low rate of 45% for marital conflict among married adults while the most common conflict are arguing about finances (74.9%); disagreeing about how to raise our children (80.10%); argue about how to spend our free time (59.1%); disagree about our extended families cause tension (53.8%); argue about our social life and friends (57.8%); experience conflicts over our sexual relationship (55.1%); disagree on how to manage stress (61.8%); have conflicts about trust and jealousy (67.0%); argue about division of household chores (63.0%); and argue on how to raise and discipline our children (61.8%). This implies that married adults in Kwara State experienced a high prevalence of marital conflict with a rate of 55%.

Research Question 2: What are the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Ranking Order Analysis of the Coping Strategies of Marital Conflict Employed by the Respondents

S/N	In order to cope with marital conflict:	Aggregate Mean	Rank
1	Avoidance Coping	3.14	4 th
2	Cognitive Coping	3.22	3 rd
3	Social Coping	3.25	2 nd
4	Spiritual Coping	2.96	5 th
5	Behavioural Coping	3.37	1 st

Table 2 indicates the mean and ranking order analysis of the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by the respondents. The table indicates that behavioural coping ranked 1st with an aggregate mean of 3.37. Social coping ranked 2nd with an aggregate mean of 3.25 while cognitive coping, avoidance coping and spiritual coping ranked 3rd, 4th and 5th with aggregate mean scores of 3.22, 3.14 and 2.96 respectively. Since all the forms of coping strategies have aggregate mean scores that ranked above the benchmark of 2.50 aggregate mean, this implies that married adults in Kwara State employed behavioural, social, cognitive, avoidance and spiritual coping strategies.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on age*

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Prevalence of Marital Conflict among the Respondents Based on Age

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	2110.917	2	1055.458	9.35*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	45125.500	400	112.814			
Total	47236.417	402				

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows the calculated F-ratio of 9.35 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on age. To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 5.

Table 4: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Age

Year	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
34 years and above	220	38.91		
26-33 years	148		42.82	
18- 25 years	35			45.34
Sig.		.079	.348	1.000

Table 4 reveals that respondents who were 34 years and above have a mean score of 38.91 (in subset 1), those who were between 26-33 years have a mean score of 42.82 (in subset 2), while those who were between 18-25 years of age have a highest mean score of 45.34 (in subset 3) and thus, contributed most to the significant difference.

Hypothesis Two:
There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on age

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Coping Strategies of Marital Conflict Employed by the Respondents Based on Age

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	276.611	2	138.305	36.06*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	1533.801	400	3.835			

Total 1810.412 402

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows the calculated F-ratio of 36.06 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on age. Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 5 to ascertain where the significant difference lies.

Table 6: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Age

Age	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
26-33 years	148	47.41	
34 years and above	220	47.80	
18- 25 years	35		50.51
Sig.		.479	1.000

Table 6 reveals that respondents who were between 26-33 years and 34 years and above have mean scores of 47.41 and 47.80 (in subset 1) respectively, while those who were between 18-25 years of age have the highest mean score of 50.51 (in subset 2) and thus, contributed most to the significant difference.

Hypothesis Three:
There is no significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on length of years in marriage

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Prevalence of Marital Conflict among the Respondents Based on Length of Years in Marriage

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	1587.324	2	793.662	6.95*	3.00	.001
Within Groups	45649.092	400	114.123			
Total	47236.417	402				

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 7 shows the calculated F-ratio of 6.95 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on length of years in marriage. To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 9.

Table 8: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Length of Years in Marriage

Year	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
11 years and above	127	38.11		
5-10 years	205		41.78	
Less than 5 years	71			43.39
Sig.		1.000	.527	1.000

Table 8 reveals that respondents who spent 11 years and above in marriage have a mean score of 38.11 (in subset 1), those who spent between 6-10 years have a mean score of 41.78 (in subset 2), while those who spent less than 5 years in marriage have a highest mean score of 43.39 (in subset 3) and thus, contributed most to the significant difference.

Hypothesis Four: *There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of years in marriage*

Table 9: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Coping Strategies of Marital Conflict Employed by the Respondents Based on Length of Years in Marriage

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	233.552	2	116.776	29.62*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	1576.860	400	3.942			
Total	1810.412	402				

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 9 shows the calculated F-ratio of 29.62 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is

rejected, therefore, there is a significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of years in marriage. To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Length of Years in Marriage

Year	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
11 years and above	127	47.27	
6-10 years	205	47.73	
Less than 5 years	71		49.48
Sig.		.219	1.000

Table 10 reveals that respondents who spent 11 years and above in marriage and those who spent between 6-10 years have mean scores of 47.27 and 47.73 (in subset 1) respectively, while those who spent less than 5 years in marriage have the highest mean score of 49.48 (in subset 2) and thus, contributed most to the significant difference.

Hypothesis

Five:

There is no significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on educational qualification

Table 11: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Prevalence of Marital Conflict among the Respondents Based on Educational Qualification

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	4396.770	2	2198.385	20.52*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	42839.647	400	107.099			
Total	47236.417	402				

* Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 11 shows the calculated F-ratio of 20.52 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on educational qualification. To ascertain

where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 13.

Table 12: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Educational Qualification

Qualification	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
NCE /OND	142	38.03		
HND/ First Degree	225		41.21	
Postgraduate	36			50.33
Sig.		.165	1.000	1.000

Table 12 reveals that respondents who had NCE/OND have a mean score of 38.03 (in subset 1), those who had HND/First degree have a mean score of 41.21 (in subset 2), while those who had postgraduate have the highest mean score of 50.33 (in subset 3) and thus, contributed most to the significant difference.

Hypothesis Six: *There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification*

Table 13: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing differences in the Coping Strategies of Marital Conflict Employed by the Respondents Based on Educational Qualification

Source	SS	df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	144.563	2	72.282	17.35*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	1665.848	400	4.165			
Total	1810.412	402				

Table 13 shows the calculated F-ratio of 17.35 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification. To ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown in Table 14.

Table 14: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Educational Qualification

Qualification	N	Subset for Alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Postgraduate	36	46.00	
HND/ First Degree	225		48.01
NCE /OND	142		48.19
Sig.		1.000	.860

Table 14 reveals that respondents who had postgraduate degree have a mean score of 46.00 (in subset 1), while those who have HND/first degree and those who had NCE/OND have the highest mean scores of 48.01 and 48.19 (in subset 2) respectively and thus, contributed most to the significant difference.

Discussion

The finding of the study revealed that married adults in Kwara State experienced a high prevalence of marital conflict with a rate of 55%. This statistic indicates that more than half of married couples encounter substantial disagreements or conflicts. The reason for this finding could be that changing societal norms and increased stressors such as financial difficulties, work-life imbalance, and parenting responsibilities might contribute to tension in marriages and lead to marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State. This finding aligns with a study by WHO (2023) which revealed that conflicts are prevalent in a majority of marriages, with studies estimating that approximately 45-55% of marriages experience significant conflict. The finding also supports the studies of Okemgbo, Omideyi and Odimegwu (2018), Okenwa, Lawoko and Jansson (2018) who found that the prevalence of marital instability or conflict ranged from 42% in the North, 29% in the South-West, 78.8% in the South-East, and 41% in the South-South.

The study further revealed that married adults in Kwara State employed behavioural, social, cognitive, avoidance and spiritual coping strategies. The finding indicates that married adults experiencing marital conflict employed different coping strategies to overcome the aftermath of marital conflict. The reasons for these findings could be that married adults use diverse coping strategies due to the nature of their responsibilities and support systems. Several studies corroborate the finding that individuals, particularly married adults, employ various coping strategies to navigate stress and life challenges. For example, Umana, Akintoye and Okonkwo. (2018) found that spiritual and religious coping mechanisms were widely used among married individuals in Nigeria, as they provided a sense of hope and meaning in difficult situations. Similarly, Adeoye and Olaoluwa (2021) observed that social and behavioural coping strategies were effective in managing marital stress, particularly in collectivist societies where family and community support are emphasized. Moreover, studies by Chukwu, Eze and

Nwachukwu, (2020) demonstrated that cognitive coping strategies, such as positive reappraisal and problem-solving, were prevalent among Nigerian adults dealing with financial or relational stress.

Another finding revealed that there was a significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on age. This finding suggests that age plays a significant role in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State. The result Scheffe post-hoc revealed that respondents who were between 18-25 years of age contributed to the significant difference. The reason for significant age-based differences could be that younger couples may be less experienced in conflict resolution and communication, which could exacerbate marital conflicts. The finding relates to the study of Odu and Ayodele (2020) who found that younger couples in Nigeria reported higher levels of conflict compared to older couples due to financial instability and communication challenges. Similarly, a study by Johnson, Caughlin and Huston (2018) revealed that marital satisfaction tends to increase with age, as couples often develop better conflict management skills and a deeper understanding of each other over time.

Findings further revealed that there was a significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on age. This suggests that age indicates that age plays a crucial role in determining how individuals handle marital conflicts. Scheffe's post-hoc showed that respondents who were between 18-25 years of age contributed more to the significant difference. One possible reason for this difference is that age is often correlated with the development of cognitive and emotional capacities, which influence coping behaviours. Older adults typically have more opportunities to learn from past conflicts and refine their coping strategies, whereas younger individuals may still be navigating the complexities of marriage and interpersonal relationships. The finding relates to the study of Adejuwon and Lawal (2021) who found that older married couples in Nigeria utilized problem-solving and collaborative strategies compared to their younger counterparts, who were more inclined toward avoidant or confrontational strategies.

Another finding revealed that there was a significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of years in marriage. This finding suggests that the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults varies depending on the length of time they have been married. The result of Scheffe's post-hoc revealed that respondents who spent less than 5 years in marriage contributed more to the significant difference. This could be because the initial years of marriage often involve navigating differences in habits, values, and expectations, which can lead to conflicts as partners work towards establishing mutual understanding and compatibility. The outcome of this study relates to the study of Williamson and Lavner (2020) who revealed that the quality of marital interactions tends to decline over time due to habituation, reduced novelty, and unmet expectations. Similarly, Kurdek (2016) found that conflict in marriages often peaks during the middle years, coinciding with the pressures of child-rearing and career-building.

Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on length of

years in marriage. This finding suggests that the duration of marriage significantly influences how married individuals cope with marital conflicts. Further analysis of Scheffe post-hoc revealed that respondents who spent less than 5 years in marriage contributed more to the significant difference. One possible reason for this finding is the effect of marital maturity. As couples spend more years together, they often become more attuned to each other's preferences and conflict resolution styles, enabling them to handle disputes in ways that minimize escalation. The finding supports the study of de Hsueh, Wang and Wu (2020) who found that long-term married couples demonstrated greater resilience in handling marital conflict, largely due to accumulated experience and improved communication patterns. Similarly, a study by Karney and Bradbury (2022) emphasized that couples with longer marriages tend to employ more constructive coping mechanisms, such as mutual understanding and perspective-taking, compared to newlyweds who are still developing these skills.

Another finding revealed that there was a significant difference in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification. This means that individuals with varying levels of education experience marital conflicts at different rates. Scheffe post hoc revealed that respondents who had postgraduate contributed more to the significant difference. This could be because higher education levels may equip married adults with emotional intelligence and constructive ways to handle disagreements, leading to less frequent or less intense conflicts. The outcome of this study agrees with the study of Fincham and Beach (2016) found that couples with higher education levels demonstrated better conflict-management strategies, such as active listening and mutual respect during disagreements. The finding aligns with the study of Amato and Patterson (2017) who stated that couples with comparable educational levels have aligned values and goals, reducing the likelihood of conflict.

Findings also revealed that there was a significant difference in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification. This indicates that individuals with different levels of education may possess varying perspectives, skills, and resources to navigate challenges in their marital relationships. Scheffe post hoc revealed that respondents who have HND/first degree and those who had NCE/OND contributed more to the significant difference. This could be because individuals with lower levels of education may rely on more reactive or avoidance-based strategies due to limited exposure to advanced coping mechanisms. The finding supports the study of Carr, Freedman, Cornman and Schwarz (2016) who found that individuals with higher education engaged in constructive coping strategies, such as open communication and problem-solving, compared to those with lower education, who were more prone to withdrawal or confrontational tactics. Furthermore, a study by Bodenmann, Meuwly, Bradbury, Gmelch and Ledermann (2017) revealed that educational attainment positively correlates with the use of dyadic coping strategies, where partners collaborate to address conflicts, thereby enhancing relationship satisfaction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this study married adults in Kwara State experienced a high prevalence of marital conflict with a rate of 55%. The finding also showed that married adults in

Kwara State employed behavioural, social, cognitive, avoidance and spiritual coping strategies. The results of the hypotheses tested revealed that there were significant differences in the prevalence of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State based on age, length of years in marriage and educational qualification. It also revealed that there were significant differences in the coping strategies of marital conflict employed by married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria based on age, length of years in marriage and educational qualification.

These findings have important implications for counselling practices. First, counsellors should adopt tailored approaches when working with couples, taking into account the impact of age, marital duration, and education level on conflict prevalence and coping mechanisms. Couples from different age groups or with varying levels of education may require distinct counselling interventions to address their specific needs. Counsellors should also design educational programs focused on conflict resolution and coping strategies, empowering couples with the skills needed to manage disputes effectively and prevent the escalation of conflicts.

The study pointed out the importance of long-term support for couples, especially those who have been married for longer periods, as they may face different challenges compared to newlyweds. Counsellors can offer both short-term and long-term strategies to address marital conflict, recognizing that the dynamics of conflict change over time. Additionally, as many couples in the study reported using spiritual coping strategies, counsellors must incorporate culturally sensitive approaches that respect the spiritual beliefs and practices of the individuals they serve.

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

- The State Government should establish community-based marital counselling centres in all local government areas to provide accessible professional support for couples to reduce the rate of marital conflict among married adults in Kwara State.
- Pre-marital counselling should be made mandatory by the government through collaboration between religious institutions, marriage registries, and professional counsellors to prepare couples better for marriage challenges.
- Marriage counsellors should develop workshops and training programmes that teach couples how to effectively use all five coping strategies (behavioural, social, cognitive, avoidance, and spiritual) in appropriate situations.
- Religious and community leaders should be trained by professional counsellors on basic counselling skills to better support couples who prefer spiritual and social coping strategies.
- Age-specific marital enrichment programmes should be developed by marriage counsellors to address the unique challenges faced by different age groups

- Educational materials and interventions should be designed at various literacy levels to ensure accessibility for all educational backgrounds of married adults to prevent marital conflict and adopt better coping skills.

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