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Relationship Failure and Divorce Among Nigerian Couples: A Case of Poor Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

This study aims to find out the causes of poor conflict resolution which can determine the rate of marriage failure and divorce. It is a descriptive research that lays emphasis on survey method. Purposive sampling procedure has been employed to cover the area of study with data obtained from 386 married respondents. Findings reveal that relationship failure and divorce is high. The study identifies that the absence of positive and supportive communication, lack of close interpersonal communication, absence of interest, affection, gratitude and apologies communication, lack of dialogic communication and lack of communality of differences are causes of poor conflict resolution in relationships. The results of the two hypotheses tested reveal that there is a significant relationship between poor conflict resolution with relationship failure and divorce. Also, effective interpersonal communication is significantly related to conflict resolution. In conclusion, the inevitability of conflicts in any form of marriage has been established. Thus, the factors to determine effective conflict resolution among couples are; active use of communication to build a constructive relationship, acceptance and confirming partner's view, affirming and asserting yourself as a partner in a relationship, respect for diversity in relationship and reason rationally then adoption of constructive criticism; embracing dialogic communication, positive and supportive communication, interpersonal communication, and then upholding interest, affection, gratitude and apologies communication are means to amicably resolve conflict in an intimate relationship.

Keywords: Relationship Failure, Divorce, Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Resolution Constructive Communication

Introduction

Marriage did not just come to be, it is as old as the creation of man and woman. Marriage is a union of man and woman, basically on an agreement to plan and live together. Munroe (2013) opines that marriage is a religious duty and is consequently a moral safeguard as well as social necessity. It is as a result of an individual needs actualization that prompts the couple's agreement for marriage. Marriage is a sacred bond, based on

communication, trust, understanding, commitment, sacrifice, togetherness, oneness, sincerity and the likes. It is considered an important event in the life of every man. Societies all over the world recognize that a man and a woman can be regarded as a couple only when they are in an institution called marriage.

Nigeria is a country with a diverse ethnic and cultural differences; traditions differ, so are the people with different principles, views opinions, expectations, values and needs being joined together as couples. Relationship in Nigeria cannot be compared to other parts of the world, because of the difference in tradition, views, religion, and society. Irrespective of different socio-cultural, political views and make-up in Nigerian society, many factors could be responsible for relationship failure and divorce, the world at large. According to Esere and Idowo (2002), a good marriage does not just happen; it is deliberately built. In other words, the parties involved in marriage need to make their marriage work (it is a dual role). Different personality traits and background inherent in individuals may play a little or major role in the success and the failure of a happy marital relationship, but lack of understanding between both parties will pave way for poor communication gap capable of bridging a wider gap that lead could to divorce. Looking at the world at large, the percentages of divorced couples are predominantly high, which is obviously not good for a healthy society (Munroe, 2014; Tulorunleke, 2014; Wood, 2010).

Marriage should be viewed like travelers on a tour, guided by a tour guard; the communication between the traveler and the travel tour guard will cost the traveler an easy and fun-filled journey. Hence, communication is very vital among couples. It is through interaction; people come to understand their differences and similarities and foster personal growth (Wood 2010). The relationship between couples needs to be strengthened by bridging the communication gap between them; couples who do not engage in constant dialogue and interaction have great chances of experiencing marital conflict. Although, a marriage isn't a smooth ride, the argument may ensure, remarks, irritation, etc, while things are not properly managed, they cause friction and tension between couples that widens over the years.

In an interpersonal communication, people attach meanings to spoken words; hence couples need to understand their partners and flow in line with the feeling and level of communication. Most couples fail to keep their relationship on bay, when they lack communication skills; these lacks, breeds lies, malice, cheating, gossip, etc capable of inducing marital conflict. Communication play a key role in the cause of divorce, so are some vices such as cheat, jealousy, childlessness, and third parties involvement that all come to be as a result of poor communication among couples, which breads disdain.

There is no relationship free of conflict, but the manner or attitude which it's being resolved determines the success of every marital relationship. Most conflicts arise from attitudes and manners being communicated to their spouses; common among couples are verbal; abuses, insults, irritation, languages, third party interference, gossiping, vulgar languages, etc. All these can be resolved through understanding and dialogue. When a marital relationship is on the edge of collapse, the couple could possibly seek the help of the counselor, who is vast in the affairs and knowledge of marriage. When relationship in marriage suffers from poor conflict resolution, it degenerates to divorce, in returns affects the whole family; in a situation where kids are involved they suffer; both psychologically and social wise. A failed marriage and a broken home is a fragment of a broken society.

Marital conflicts in Nigeria are most times poorly handled, going by the prevalence of marital conflicts which sometimes degenerate to marriage failure or even divorce, this study seeks to investigate the implications of poor conflict resolution on the aforementioned marital problems among Nigerian couples.

Research Questions

    i.   What is the rate of relationship failure in Nigeria?
    ii.   What are the causes of poor conflict resolution among couples in Nigeria?
    iii.   What are the factors to consider for effective conflict resolution among couples in Nigeria?

Research Hypothesis

H$_1$- Effective interpersonal communication is significantly related to conflict resolution among Nigerian couples.
H$_2$ – Poor conflict resolution is related to relationship failure and divorce among Nigerian couples

Literature Review

Relationship Failure and Divorce

Failed marriage and divorce is gradually becoming a phenomenon, deeply rooted in the Nigerian society. It is obvious that the rate of divorce in the society is becoming alarming and basically will have an obvious effect in the community. Adegoke (2015) explains that the divorce rate has been increased dramatically during the past several decades globally and in Nigeria in particular, and resulting in crisis for family members.

Marriage is considered a sacred bond between a man and a woman signified by a contract signed by the state. Encyclopaedia Britannica (2019) defines marriage as a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs and attitudes that prescribe the rights and duties of the partners and accord status to their offspring (if any). Despite the availability of knowledge, conflicts still arise. Tolorunleke (2014), asserts that conflicts in marriage are inevitable but can be managed; why they occur or prevented in resulting in a partial or total collapse of homes, which largely depend on couples' mutual understanding. Thus couples need effective communication to overcome marital challenges that threaten the relationship.

According to Diehl (2012), marriages fail because of the stress of life from the outer side overwhelms the weakness on the inside. Adding that marriages fail for predictable reasons: selfishness, brokenness, and ignorance. When individuals hide things from their partners, they find it hard to interact and as such create a crisis.

Couples need to maintain close interpersonal communication which brings about openness, the sincerity that helps to resolve conflict. Just as Esere (2008) explains, sincere communication, open and sympathetic relationship, conveying one's feelings and needs serves as solution to marital relationship problems. The ability to communicate effectively is regarded as central to the establishment of good marital relationship (Esere, 2000).

Couple's inability to maintain a healthy relationship cannot be farfetched from the following: inability to communicate effectively, difference in belief, lack of openness, childlessness and infertility, unfulfilled expectations, unfaithfulness in marriage, age differences, when such crisis cripes in, certain factors such as lack of intimacy, lack of communication, marital infidelity, incompatibility, sexual incompatibility, all give way to relationship failure, separation then divorce.

Divorce seems to be gaining acceptance in the society. This increased tolerance has resulted from relaxation of negative attitude towards divorce among various religious dominations (Adeniran, 2015) this seen as unfortunate, and no longer treated as sin by most religious leaders (Gerstel, 1987 cited in Adeniran, 2015).

Conflict Resolution in Marriage

No marriage is free of misunderstandings and conflicts; every married couple has more experience to share and how their ability to resolve conflict, and prevent divorce made possible. Conflict happens between two people when their views, opinions and goals differ, and inability to find a common ground as well. According to wood (2010), conflict exists only if disagreement or tensions are expressed. There is no conflict when a feeling is suppressed or anger and disagreement are not identified. In marriage, couples opinions about issues may differ, and reactions showing anger; these might ignite to a level that such issues cannot be resolved, but this doesn't mean that it cannot be resolved completely.

Some couples repeat their mistakes over and over again; this can be annoying and irritating. Conflict is good in a marital relationship, but must always be resolved in a peaceful manner. It is obvious that some couples who are doing well engage in conflict differently than those who eventually are separated. This is because they have learned to understand and respond to their conflicts in a positive manner.

Couples must learn to imbibe the habit of communication in their relationship; there should be a dialogue between couples, these will reduce the level of conflicts in their home. Communication is very important in marriage, while ineffective communication in marriages has affected the growth and development of many homes (Esere, Yeyeodu & Oladun, 2014). When couples interact properly and regularly they build a good and healthy relationship. These are some of the attitudes used to maintain positive and effective relation:

- i. Interest: Couples must be interested in each other's affairs. Give a listening ear to their partner, makes signals, eye contacts and signs to show you are paying attention and accept one another's perspectives.
- ii. Affection: Always show affection in what you do. Most partners like their spouse to express affection like, holding hands, kisses, embrace. During conflict displaying physical or verbal affection reduces the tension or friction between couples.
- iii. Show Gratitude: always be appreciative of your partners, little things do matter in a relationship. Show your gratitude either verbally or with gestures, so that when your relationship is in conflict, it will be easy to engage him/her in positive interactions.
- iv. Apologies: learning to say sorry when need arises, is not much of a big deal. Accept you are wrong, settle the conflict without a fuss.

According to Berscheid and Peplau (1983) effective communication in marriage relationship can be hindered by ineffective interaction. For communication to be complete there must be the willingness to exchange ideas in an open and loving manner. These are a major challenge capable of hindrance resolution.

 Adeniran (2015) explains that, the most factors in the increase in divorce throughout the twentieth century have been the greater social acceptance of divorce. The society has accepted divorce as the last resort and so couples do not try to resolve conflict through understanding, rather they embrace divorce.

Not every couple is matured enough to resolve their differences, while some third parties engaged in settling conflict in relationships end up making the issue irresolvable. Also, there are professionally trained both mentally and otherwise, who knows how to resolve conflicts in relationships, especially among couples such as the guidance and counseling officer or a psychologist. According to Esere, Yeyeodu and Olaolu (2014), counselors need to enlighten communities especially the parents about relationship with their children on communication styles in order to bring about a desirable relationship.

Theoretical framework

This study adopts the Relational Dialectics Theory (RDT), propounded by Leslie Baxter and Babara Montgomery in 1988. RDT is an interpersonal communication theory; which posits communication and dialogue as the central components of relational and cultural identity and how speakers express opposing, irresolvable tensions in relationship. The theory focuses on tension and struggles between individuals in a relationship.
This theory is of two types: internal and external- the one that concerns this study is the external; it is the tension between couples and societies.

RDT explains that couples with different cultural identity and background are prone to have different views, opinions, belief about life and as such have opposing ideas of an issue, which possibly develops into or create tensions and struggles between couples.

In a relationship, couples need to maintain a good interpersonal communication, this will help them understand each other better, and be able to reason with one another when there is an opposing view, this, helps to resolve the conflict in their relationship.

Methodology

This study is on poor conflict resolution and marriage failure among couples in Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja Nigeria. The descriptive survey design was used to establish the relationship between poor conflict resolution and marriage failure and also consider the rate of divorce among couples in the study area. The participants for the study were drawn from married couples in the area of study, a sample size of 386 respondents were selected; using purposive sampling method. Structured questionnaire divided into five sections (A-E) was used for data collection. The instrument was found to be valid and had reliability co-efficient of 0.86. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 21.0) was used in analysing the data collected in this study. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were utilised in analysing the data collected.

Data Analysis and Results

A total of 386 questionnaires were filled by respondents out of which 380 were valid. Gender of respondents were almost evenly distributed as male (53.7%) and female (46.3%). The bulk of the respondents' age range from 20 to 45 (73.1%) and 46 to 70 (16.3%). 7.7% and 2.9% of the respondents were less than 20 years and 71 years and above respectively. About half of the respondents (57.8%) are graduates, 21% of respondents possess NCE/OND or its equivalent, 11.5% have only SSC/GII education and those with CPE and below or without any formal education constitutes 9.7%. The implication here is that most of the couples sampled are well educated and qualified to respond to the researchers' enquiries.

Table 1: Rates of Relationship Failure and Divorce in Nigeria

Relationship Failure and Divorce	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very Low	21	5.5
Low	56	14.7
Neutral	48	12.6
High	203	53.4
Very High	52	13.7
Total	**380**	**100%**

Source: Researchers fieldwork 2019

*Scale: 1=Very low,   2= Low,   3=Slightly High,   4=High,   5=Very High
(1-20%)   (21-40%)   (41-60%)   (61-80%)   (81-100%)

Table 1 clearly showed that relationship failure and divorce in Nigeria contemporary society is alarming as over half of the respondents (53.4%) agreed that the rate of marriage failure and divorce in the country is high. This finding corroborates Adegoke (2015) postulations that the divorce rate has increased dramatically during the past several decades in Nigeria. That divorce results in a crisis for family members. For adults, divorce signifies the loss of an intimate relationship that also brought security and support. It also signifies a loss of hopes and dreams as well as feelings of failure.

Table 2: Causes of Poor Conflict Resolution among Nigerian Couples

Perceived Causes of Poor Conflict Resolution	Level of Agreement							Over all %
	1	2	3	4	5	M	SD	
Lack of close interpersonal communication	5.6	10.8	23.1	36.2	24.3	3.63	1.92	72.6
Lack of dialogic communication	7.5	11.6	22.0	44.8	14.2	3.47	1.10	69.4
Lack of communality of differences	5.6	10.5	22.9	39.1	21.8	3.61	1.11	72.2
Absence of positive and supportive communication	4.9	6.0	12.3	54.5	22.4	3.84	1.00	76.8
Absence of interest, affection, gratitude and apologies communication	6.3	6.7	27.3	39.0	20.6	3.61	1.08	72.2

Openness relationship	27.5	42.5	10.4	9.2	10.5	1.83	2.37	36.6
Total						**3.29**	**1.43**	**66.6**

Source: Researchers fieldwork 2019

*Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree
      (1-20%) (21-40%) (41-60%) (61-80%) (81-100%)

Table 2 shows that marital conflict resolution in Nigeria is faced with a couple of challenges amongst which are; absence of positive and supportive communication(M=3.84, SD=1.00), lack of close interpersonal communication (M=3.63, SD=1.92), absence of interest, affection, gratitude and apologies communication (M=3.61, SD=1.08), lack of dialogic communication (M=3.47, SD=1.10) and lack of communality of differences (M=3.61, SD=1.11). The study equally found that openness relationship does not affect poor conflict resolution (M= 1.83, SD=2.37). It, therefore, means that poor conflict resolution is a major challenge to relationship failure and divorce among Nigerian couples.

As Tolorunleke (2014), notes in her conclusion on the causes of marriage conflicts in Nigeria, the inevitability of conflicts in any form of marriage was established. To prevent or manage crisis, therefore, will depend largely on the mutual understanding of couples involved. Who recommended that adequate provision be made for both preventive, remedial and rehabilitative counselling, interventions through different bodies such as government and non-governmental organizations (NGO's) for the married and prospective couples to enhance marital stability in our societies. However, this study noticed the important of effective communication among couples in conflict resolution.

Table 3: Factors for Effective Conflict Resolution among Nigerian Couples

Factors for Poor Conflict Resolution	Level of Agreement							Over
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**M**	**SD**	**all %**
Active use of communication to build confirming relationship	5.7	9.4	34.0	35.8	15.1	3.45	1.04	69.0
Acceptance and confirming partner's view	4.1	6.4	25.1	50.2	14.2	3.64	0.95	72.8
Affirming and asserting yourself as partner in relationship	14.9	13.8	29.1	34.3	7.8	3.06	1.18	61.2
Respect for diversity in relationship	8.6	14.2	34.1	31.8	11.2	3.23	1.10	64.6
Reason rationally and constructively to criticism	9.3	11.2	27.2	34.0	18.3	3.41	1.18	68.2
Practicing close and disconfirming relationship	30.6	30.4	21.5	9.4	8.1	2.34	1.23	46.8
Total						**3.19**	**1.11**	**63.77**

Source:Researchers field work 2019

*Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Slightly Agree, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree
      (1-20%) (21-40%) (41-60%) (61-80%) (81-100%)

Table 3 tested some factors that scholars such as Wood (2010) have enumerated can determine effective conflict resolution among couples. Therefore, these factors are; active use of communication to build confirming relationship (M=3.45, SD=1.04), acceptance and confirming partner's view (M=3.64, SD=0.95), affirming and asserting yourself as partner in relationship (M=3.06, SD=1.18), respect for diversity in relationship (M=3.23, SD=1.10) and reason rationally then adoption of constructive criticism. Thus, embracing dialogic communication, positive and supportive communication, interpersonal communication, and then upholding interest, affection, gratitude and apologies are means to amicably resolve conflict in intimate relationship.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H[1]- *Effective interpersonal communication is significantly related to conflict resolution among Nigerian couples.*

Table 5: Pearson correlation of the relationship between effective interpersonal communication and conflict resolution

Variables	Mean	Std.Dev	N	R	P
Effective Interpersonal Communication and Conflict Resolution	4.3091	.74219	300	.809	≤ 0.01
Relationship Conflict Resolution	4.4182	.62925			

Source: Researcher's field work 2019

The result shows that there is a significant relationship between effective interpersonal communication and organizational conflict resolution among couples (r .809, N=300, P≤ 0.01). That is, effective communication is significantly important in conflict resolution among couples in Nigeria.

H[2] – *Poor conflict resolution is related to relationship failure and divorce among Nigerian couples*

Table 4: Chi-Square Tests the relationship between poor conflict resolution with relationship failure and divorce

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	141.133[a]	120	.091
Likelihood Ratio	83.840	120	.995
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.296	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	300		

a. 143 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .03.

Data in this study showed a significant conformity (X^2 = 0.002, Alpha level α = 0.05) between poor conflict resolution with relationship failure and divorce. This shows that poor conflict resolution is very much related to relationship failure and divorce in Nigeria. Therefore, null hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion

Conclusively, this study found that the rate of relationship failure and divorce in Nigeria is high. This signals the failure in conflict resolution among couples. It is obvious there is no relationship that is free of conflict, but the manner it is being resolved determine the success of such marital relationship.

It is very important to know the barriers to a successful conflict resolution so as to have a better understanding of succeeding. The study has identified that the absence of positive and supportive communication, lack of close interpersonal communication, absence of interest, affection, gratitude and apologies communication, lack of dialogic communication and lack of communality of differences are causes of poor conflict resolution in relationships.

Constructive interpersonal communication during conflict creates a supportive, positive environment that increases the possibility of resolving differences without harming the relationship (Wood, 2010). Thus, the foundation of constructive management of relationship conflict is established long before a specific disagreement is aired. Climate should be seen is the foundation both of conflict and of the overall relationship, sets the tone for communication during conflict.

Therefore, to establish a good climate among couples, they have to confirm each other by recognizing and acknowledging each other's concerns and feelings. Agenda building is a means at which partners stay focused on issues that need to be resolved. However, when partners keep communication on target, kitchen-sinking is unlikely to derail discussion. Side issues may come up, as they do in unproductive conflict, but partners who have learned to communicate effectively control digressions and stay with their agenda. Wood (2010) identified *bracketing* as a useful technique which is noting that an issue arising in the course of conflict should be discussed later. Bracketing allows partners to confirm each other's concerns by agreeing to deal with them later. Parties in conflict continue to recognize and acknowledge each other's point of view. Rather than cross-complaining, they acknowledge each other's feelings, thoughts, and concerns. This doesn't mean they don't put their own concerns on the table. Constructive conflict includes asserting our own feelings and needs as part of an honest dialogue. Honoring both others and ourselves is central to good interpersonal communication.

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