



Emotional Intelligence, Marital Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills as Correlates of Marital Stability Among Couples in Lagos State

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between emotional intelligence, marital communication, conflict resolution skill and marital stability among married persons in Lagos State. Three research questions and three null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all married persons in Lagos State. A sample of 100 respondents (married persons) was selected across four orthodox churches in Lagos State, using simple random sampling technique. Three research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of Significance. Emotional intelligence, marital communication, conflict resolution skill and marital stability questionnaire (EICCRSMS) was used to collect relevant data. The data was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics. Findings of the study showed that emotional intelligence does not necessarily relate to marital stability while marital communication and conflict resolution skills correlate to marital stability. The study recommended that there is need for couples to develop communication and conflict resolution skills, learn to feel closer to each other, be open and sincere in all dealings, more so, confide and trust each other, and that married persons should learn to tolerate each other often, appreciate and encourage one another and stop criticisms which bring discord.

Key words: *Emotional intelligence, marital communication, conflict resolution, marital stability*

Introduction

Revitalizing marriage should be a priority worldwide. Every community or nation stands to benefit from healthy marriage, passing on to the next generation a happier, healthier and successful marriage culture. Because of the role marriage play to individual and society it is imperative to have a stable marriage. When marriages are stable, a healthy society evolves. According to Makinde (2001), Marriage is the relationship that unites a man and a woman. It is the contract requiring an agreement between the two persons involved. The institution of marriage is as old as the creation of man. It dates back to the time of Adam and Eve. It is an essential phenomenon in human life irrespective of tribe, society and religious affiliations.

In the opinion of Munroe (2003), marriage is a religious duty and is consequently a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity. It has been observed that marriage serves as a moral safeguard because it acts as an outlet for sexual needs and regulates man's sexual desire/expression so that man does not become a slave to it. The assumption for its social necessity is rested on the premise that through it, families are established and the family is the fundamental unit of human society. When people make choices to marry, they want to live happily ever after. They want a loving, happy, successful marriage.

Marriage takes effort from both spouses to stay. Angel (2008) noted that marriage is the most difficult maze one will ever get lost in. Marriage depends on different factors for it to be successful, trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty and sincerity. According to Makinde (2004), there are some hints to keep marriages stable. Amongst them are love, accommodation, finance, compatibility, communication and fidelity. Marital stability is the likelihood that marriage will stay intact without dissolution or divorce. A healthy and stable marriage provides benefit to a person physically, mentally, financially and sexually (Berger, 2001), which may be why healthy marriages are holding attention of policy makers. To achieve stability in marriage, couples should avoid those negative factors that can disrupt marriage, which Oluwatunbi (2013), identified as mistrust, intolerance, lack of communication, unfruitfulness in marriage and interference in husband and wife lives. Having stability in marriage differs from marital satisfaction even though it can serve as a moderator for marital stability.

However, in recent years, it has been observed that most marriages all over the world have been witnessing an increase wave of conflicts (Idowu & Esere, 2001). Similarly, in Africa the figures are overwhelming and rising. Tilson and Larson (2000) reported that in Ethiopia, a country where divorce rate is considered to be high, 40% of marriages do not last longer than 20 years. In Nigeria, it is difficult to provide accurate statistics on the rate of divorce due to the fact that not all cases of divorce are reported and recorded but literature and media reports indicate a high rate of divorce (Yahaya, 2008). Similarly, Esere (2000) noted that about forty percent (40%) of marriages contracted every year in Nigeria end up in divorce or separation. Marriage carries with it a high degree of responsibility and rights (Makinde, 2004). The married couples have the duty to love and care for each other as well as lay strong foundation upon which successful marriage can be built. Such foundations are essential to marital stability of individuals, amongst them are emotional intelligence, effective communication and conflict resolution skill. These predictors tend to play dominant role in success and failure of any relationship.

One of the hallmarks of a mature mind is the ability to control emotions to be able to achieve success in any relationship. According to Egbule (2009), emotional intelligence is the ability to validly reason with emotions and use emotions to enhance thoughts. It involves the ability to utilize emotional knowledge to accurately perceive, understand, generate, access and assist feelings or emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. People that are emotionally intelligent possess a clear understanding of the feelings and can restore their moods more quickly before damage can ensue than those individuals with low levels of emotional intelligence. (Ciarrochi, Chan & Caputi, 2000).

Mishrap and Mohapatra (2011) assert that there are three parameters of emotional intelligence which are emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity. Emotional competence indicates one's ability to effectively respond to emotional stimuli elicited by various situations, having high-self-esteem and optimism. Emotional maturity is reflected in the behavioural pattern exhibited by individuals while dealing with oneself and others, balancing and adopting the state of heart and mind flexibly. Emotional sensitivity indicates ones capability to effectively understand intensity of emotional arousal, manage the immediate environment. It is the ability to have regard and respect to other people's emotions rather than ignoring them. According to Goleman (2004), the most important of emotional intelligence is empathy which is the ability to accurately perceive emotions in others and sense what they are feeling. The ability of couples at all times to show emotional maturity and understanding towards the

other tends to nourish the relationship and absence of it in any relationship tends to create gaps, bring unnecessary quarrels, rivalry and instability in marriages

Marital instability was defined by Usoroh, Ekot and Inyang (2010) as a marriage with a high propensity to divorce, which is determined by the presence of thoughts or actions capable of precipitating separation. It is a situation in which disagreement and quarrel is a common occurrence and where one spouse or both spouses are dissatisfied with the marriage, while some marriages are blessed with peace, unity of purpose, oneness and mutualism. Such marriages witness happiness of spouses and their children and are described as stable marriage. It is a relationship between husband and wife such that the chance of separation or divorce is slim. According to Usorho, Ekot and Inyang et al (2010), spouses witnessing marital stability have reduced sources of friction, disagreement and quarrels. It is expected that emotional intelligence by couples would produce understanding, reduce an unending arguments and create mutual relationship which would promote marital stability. A study conducted by Mayer (2014) found that emotional intelligence of couples in marriage union influences marital satisfaction. Similarly, Kenot (2012) investigated the relationship between empathy and marital stability and found that marital stability related positively with empathic measures.

Communication therefore can be seen as a life wire of marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship (Esere, 2006). A marriage without effective communication is likely to crumble (Olagunju & Eweniyi, 2002). With so many marriages ending tragically in divorce, it is more important now to work on the communication between husband and wife. So many problems escalate when there is no communication, and many problems are resolved when there is effective communication. Communication is the key to successful marriage, and without communication no marriage can survive in this divorce - filled world we live in (Jolin, 2007). Communication is very essential in stabilizing a marriage. Communicating effectively takes practice and a great deal of effort. Without communication, it is nearly impossible to resolve conflicts or grow a partnership. Communication is seen by Hybels and Weaver (2001) as any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings which involve not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and style.

Communication plays a central role in marriage and communication skills are the predictors of relationship satisfaction between couples (Lavner, Karney & Bradbury, 2016). Communication skill leads to improvement of relationship, better handling of difficult situations, mental and physical health and better social performance (Lundblad & Hansson, 2006). When the couple communication is of better quality, they can feel closer to each other, can share thoughts, feel more intimate, and prevention of any possible misunderstanding which may lead to couple's conflict, the couple can enjoy each other. Communication is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship (Esere, 2008). Communication is the key to a strong, healthy relationship. It allows partners to feel love and caring.

Effective communication requires practice of the skills of listening and expressing thoughts and feelings. According to Idowu and Esere (2007), more than half of the failed relationships are due to the fact that there was a severe lack of communication between couples. In order to have a long and lasting relationship with someone, one must have excellent communication skills. One must be able to convey one's emotions and thoughts, as well as being able to absorb one's partner's emotions and thoughts. The art of listening is probably even more important than the art of talking. Couples will learn and grow far more in their relationships if they sit down and listen to their partners, instead of talking and voicing all of their opinions at once. This is not to say that one will not voice ones opinions. But one must listen to the other's opinions as well, and take them into consideration. Some people do not communicate with words, they communicate through actions. If one pays close attention, one will get what he/she wants from his/her partner. But the problem is, most couples do not pay close attention to each other, thereby causing marital disharmony.

Conflict in marriage might be inevitable, during conflicts; distressed couples make more negative statements and fewer positive statements. They are also more likely to respond with negative behaviours when their partner behaves negatively. Indeed, the negative reciprocating as it is called is more consistent across different types of situation than the amount of negative behaviour making it most reliable overt signature of marital stress. However, when crisis or conflict occur, strain and disorientation sets in. This can be hard to manage but with understanding, support and encouragement, one can go through the crisis successfully (Melgosa & Melgosa, 2004).

Many conflicts can be avoided if the couples ask themselves if the concern is worth quarrelling about. Some spouse know quite a bit of what the other person dislikes, being able to stay away from doing what the other person dislikes will go a long way in avoiding unnecessary conflict. A good way to handle matters is to start with praise or empathy before criticism. When deciding to handle conflict in marriage, know when and where to bring up the concerns, be clear about what the problem is, handle one problem at a time, be respectful at all times, look for appropriate solutions and work with one both spouse can agree on (Pelt, 2009)

However, resolving conflict in marriage is possible. This starts by knowing why the conflict has arisen in the first place and handling it amicably. Conflict can be handled by understanding the concern at hand, focusing on it and not the people portraying it, evaluating possible actions to help deal with the concern, understanding and acknowledging each person's contribution and working out a mutual agreement. Couples may have conflict because of not having enough quality time, strains when dealing with children, differing desire to be met in marriage, lack of being able to set and implement workable decisions in the home, and lack of personal values altogether. When the couples try to come up with different ideas to help with the conflict they have, it is important for them to be able to negotiate, communicate well with each other and show emotions towards each other so that there is mutual satisfaction. The decisions then should be looked over to ensure that they are meaningful to concerns that came up (Melgosa & Melgosa, 2004). With all these human adjustments, relationships and marriages would witness a healthy and stable union.

Statement of the Problem

Some marriages are besieged with a lot of problems. Sometimes, these problems may become so enormous that the marriage is threatened. In a situation like this, we say that the marriage is witnessing instability. Marital instability is a common phenomenon in Nigeria and all over the world. Marital instability has affected the growth and development of many homes. Several factors could be responsible for this ugly situation. These factors which most times threaten the foundation of the marriage may lead to separation, divorce and remarriage.

It is generally observed that many couples started at the level of attraction, courtship and then marriage. During courtship they identified their likes, dislikes, temperament, areas of compatibility (physical, educational, social and economic), interest and love. This is to pave way for an apparently stable and conflict free marriage at least in earliest years even though human nature is complex. Of particular reference is the word "Love" which binds them together and motivates them to enter into marriage. But once problems rear its ugly head, the pressure overwhelms them, manifesting to quarrels, unhappiness even separation and divorce. In marriage, partners exhibit some shortcomings. When this surface, they must be accommodated for marriages to keep going, Expectedly, when there is love, (the romantic and the unselfish kind), emotional understanding and communication between the couples, it is easy to tolerate the spouse's unpleasant habits. Therefore, the study sets to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence, marital communication and conflict resolution and marital stability.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of the study is to examine the relationship between emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution skill and marital stability. Specifically, the study determined

- (1) The relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability.
- (2) The relationship between communication and marital stability.
- (3) The relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability.

Research Questions

- (1) Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability?
- (2) Is there any relationship between communication and marital stability?
- (3) Is there any relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability?

Hypotheses

- (1) There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability
- (2) There is no significant relationship between communication and marital stability.
- (3) There is no significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all married people in Lagos. The sample for this study consist of 100 respondents (Married persons) selected using a simple random sampling technique from four orthodox churches. (two in Ikeja, one in Maryland and one in Egbeda), all in Lagos State. Questionnaire was used to collect relevant information from the respondents of the study. The questionnaire was divided into five segments with each of the segments tapping information based on identified variables of interest.

The structure of the questionnaire named emotional intelligence, communication, conflict resolution skill and marital stability (EICCRSMS) is outlined below: In section A of the questionnaire, socio-demographic information of the respondents was captured ranging from name, sex, ethnic origin, educational qualification and years of marriage. Section B focused on the multifactor emotional intelligence test of Mayer-Salovey-Caruso (1999), this was used to measure four branch models of emotional intelligence namely perceiving emotion, use of emotions to facilitate thoughts, understanding emotions and management of emotion. The questionnaire consists of 10 items. The scale was anchored on 4 point Likert response option ranging from Not at all to very often. Section C captured Communication scale (personal Report of Spouse Communication (PRSCA) developed by Powers & Hutchinson (1979), this was used to measure spouses communication. The scale consists of 10 items and all items answered using 4 point Likert scale format ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Section D, focused on Enrich-(enriching and nurturing relationship issues, communication and happiness) developed by Olson, Fournier and Druckman (1985),this was used to measure conflict resolution skill. The scale consists of 10 items anchored on 4 point Likert response ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. While Section E, focused on marital stability using scale adapted from Brandlomodardi counseling.com. consisting of 10 items on Likert scale format.

The samples of the instrument was shown to experts and colleagues, an expert in Guidance and Counseling and an expert in psychology from the Department of Educational Foundations in university of Lagos for face and content validity. Their comments were used to refine the instrument.

The instrument was pilot-tested on twenty respondents drawn outside the sample area, specifically in Yaba Local Government of Lagos state. After administration to the pilot group, the questionnaire was divided into two comparable halves, i.e. even numbered items as one set, and odd numbered items as the other set. Each person's scores on each of the two halves were computed and the two sets of scores correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation formula. The reliability of the scores as a whole was estimated using the Spearman-Brown Prophecy formula. The overall reliability of the scale was found to be 0.67. This index was greater than 0.5 and closer to +1. This means that there was a positive correlation between the even numbered statements and the odd numbered ones. In this case the questionnaire can be said to be reliable. The instrument was administered in four churches by the researcher to married persons during various church meetings. The collection was done immediately with the assistance of the church workers before the end of each meeting. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistical tool was adopted for the testing of hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

The personal data of the respondents are first presented, followed by the results of the tested research hypotheses.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Table 1: Showing gender distribution

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	45	50.6
	Female	44	49.4
	Total	89	100.0
Length of Marriage	1-5 years	20	22.5
	6-10 years	25	28.1
	11-15 years	17	19.1
	15 years and above	27	30.3
	Total	89	100.0
Educational Qualification	SSCE	8	9.0
	NCE	8	9.0
	B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A	46	51.7
	M.Sc.	19	21.3
	Ph.D	8	9.0
	Total	89	100.0

Table 1 show that majority of the respondents (50.6%), were males while the remaining 44 respondents representing 49.4% were females. This suggests that most of the respondents are dominated by male. Table 1 also shows respondents who fall into year of marriage 15 years and above has the highest percentage 30.3%; 1-5 years has 22.5%, 6-10 years has 28.1% while the remaining 19.1% of the respondents were 11-15 years.

Table 1 shows respondents with B.Sc/B.Ed/B.A. holders have the highest percentage 51.7%; SSCE holders were 9%,NCE holders were 9%; M.Sc. holders were 21.3% while the remaining 9% of the respondents were holders of Ph.D.

Testing of Hypotheses

The hypotheses postulated for the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics.

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability.

Table 2: Relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	r-cal	r-crit
Emotional Intelligence	89	24.23	3.06	86	0.166	0.205
Marital Stability	89	30.38	8.95			

$p < 0.05$, $df = 86$, $r\text{-crit} = 0.205$

Table 2 shows that the r-calculated ($r\text{-cal} = 0.166$) is less than the r-critical ($r\text{-crit} = 0.205$) given 86 degree of freedom at 0.05 levels of significance, hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability is thereby accepted while the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability was rejected. This implies that marital stability does not necessarily relate to emotional intelligence.

Hypotheses Two

There is no significant relationship between communication and marital stability.

Table 3: Relationship between communication and marital stability

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	r-cal	r-crit
Communication	89	23.81	3.91	86	0.875	0.205
Marital Stability	89	30.38	8.95			

$p < 0.05$, $df = 86$, $r\text{-crit} = 0.205$

Table 3 shows that the r-calculated ($r\text{-cal} = 0.875$) is greater than the r-critical ($r\text{-crit} = 0.205$) given 86 degree of freedom at 0.05 levels of significance, hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between communication and marital stability is thereby rejected while the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between communication and marital stability was accepted. This implied that, there was a significant relationship between communication and marital stability.

Hypotheses Three

There is no significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability.

Table 4: Relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability

Variable	N	X	SD	Df	r-cal	r-crit
Conflict Resolution Skill	89	25.41	2.90	86	0.502	0.205
Marital Stability	89	30.38	8.95			

$p < 0.05$, $df = 86$, $r\text{-crit} = 0.205$

Table 4 shows that the r-calculated ($r\text{-cal}=0.502$) is greater than the r-critical ($r\text{-crit}=0.205$) given 86 degree of freedom at 0.05 levels of significance, hence the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability is thereby rejected while the alternate hypothesis which states that there is significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability was accepted. This implied that, there was a significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability.

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability. The result showed that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability. This finding is in contrast to the finding of Mayer (2014) who found that emotional intelligence of couples in marriage union influences marital satisfaction. Similarly, this finding is inconsistent with the finding of Kenot (2012) who investigated the relationship between empathy and marital stability and found that marital stability related positively with empathic measures.

The second hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between communication and marital stability was rejected; this implied that, there is a significant relationship between communication and marital stability. This corroborates the finding of Olagunju and Eweniyi (2002) who argued that marriage without effective communication is likely to crumble. Also this is consistent with the finding of Jolin (2007) who opined that communication is the key to successful marriage, and without communication no marriage can survive in this divorce - filled world we live in. It is also inline with the finding of Lavner, Karney and Bradbury (2016) who argued that communication plays a central role in marriage and communication skills are the predictors of relationship satisfaction between couples. It also corroborates the finding of Lundblad and Hansson (2006) who asserted that communication skill leads to improvement of relationship, better handling of difficult situations, mental and physical health and better social performance. When the couple communication is of better quality, they can feel closer to each other, can share thoughts, feel more intimate, and prevention of any possible misunderstanding which may lead to couple's conflict, the couple can enjoy each other more. In line with this finding, Esere (2008) observed that communication is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship. Communication is the key to a strong, healthy relationship. It allows partners to feel love and caring. Idowu and Esere (2007) opined that more than half of the failed relationships are due to the fact that there was a severe lack of communication between couples.

The third hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability was rejected; this implied that, there was a significant relationship between conflict resolution skill and marital stability. This finding is consistent with the finding of Pelt (2009) who asserted that a good way to handle matters is to start with praise or empathy before criticism. Marriage being a union between two individuals from different backgrounds, misunderstanding and conflicts would likely surface, as there is no marriage made in heaven. But the capability to resolve it is key to the success of the marriage. When handling conflict in marriage, know when and where to bring up the concerns, be clear about what the problem is, handle one problem at a time, be respectful at all times, look for appropriate solutions and work with one both spouse can agree on.

Conclusion

The study has established that there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability while there is a correlation between marital communication, conflict resolution and marital stability among married persons in Lagos state. Thus stability of marriages hinges more on marital communication and conflict resolution skill. The ability to communicate with each other always, work in agreement and

also understand how to handle conflict when such situation comes up is essential to stability of marriages and relationship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion in the study, the study recommends the following.

1. There is need for couples to develop communication and conflict resolution skills, learn to feel closer to each other, be open and sincere in all dealings, more so, confide and trust each other.
2. Married persons should learn to tolerate each other often, appreciate and encourage one another and stop criticisms which bring discord.

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