

CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF MARITAL CONFLICT IN AGBADO OKE ODO AND IFAKO IJAYE LOCAL COUNCIL DEVELOPMENT AREAS IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT: *Marital conflict is a serious issue in many families across the world. Many families have disintegrated and some couples live as if they are strangers because of persistent and unresolved conflicts. Nevertheless conflict and how they are responded to determine whether it will have positive outcome which will give couples marital fulfillment and satisfaction or negative outcome. This study attempts to explore causes and consequence of spousal conflict as well as conflict response styles employed by married male and female in Agbado Oke-Odo and Ifako Ijaiye Local Council Development Area in Lagos State. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used in collection and analyses of data. Convenience sampling was also used. The results showed that marital conflict is common to all families. The sources of marital conflict as evident in this study include but not limited to infidelity, sex, and distribution of house chores as well as spouse's unemployment. It was also discovered that most husbands and wives minimize or stop communicating to each other when they are in conflict. In addition children's need also suffers. The study recommends that couples seek the help of a counselor when they have issues they cannot by themselves resolve and managing conflict in a way that benefits both partners.*

KEYWORDS: conflict, spousal conflict, conflict response style,

INTRODUCTION

Conflict has been established as a product of interaction between or among people. Hence conflict is an integral part of an ongoing relationship and it is inevitable in every family (Obelenienė and Gabševičienė, 2015; Dillon et al, 2015; Bammeké and Eshiet, 2018). The fact remains that conflict can either be productive or destructive. It is productive when it shapes and sharpens relationship. Traditionally conflict is believed to be bad and should be avoided but it is foolhardy to think of a world without conflict because no two persons are the same. Conflict is therefore something that should be expected. A number of homes have been enmeshed in escalated conflicts that most of the time has left either of the spouse or both wounded. More so the rate of marital conflict and its attendant problems has become alarming. Many marriages have ended in divorce leaving some children to wander about on the street. This paper is intended to explore the causes of marital conflict, the response style adopted by couples as well as the effects of conflict on the home.

Statement of the Problem

Marital conflict is a common occurrence among couples. It cuts across upper, middle and lower class. Quite a number of families have been thrown apart as a result of spousal conflicts. Spousal conflict no matter the cause is a source of stress not only partners but also to the children. If conflicts go unresolved it could bring about total dissolution of the union. The social media is flood with cases of partners beating themselves to the extent of it resulting to lethal outcomes. The increasing rate of marital conflicts and its attendant challenges has prompted this study.

Objectives of the study

The objective are of this study is to explore the following:

1. To explore the causes of spousal conflict in Agbado Oke Odo and Ifako Ijaiye Local Council Development Area in Lagos State
2. To know the effects of marital conflict on couples in Agbado Oke Odo and Ifako Ijaiye Local Council Development Area in Lagos State
3. To know the conflict response style adopted by married male and female in Agbado Oke Odo and Ifako Ijaiye Local Council Development Area in Lagos State

The study is guided by this research questions:

1. What are the causes of spousal conflict in Agbado Oke Odo and Ifako Ijaiye Development area in Lagos?
2. What are the effects of marital conflict on couples in Agbado Oke Odo and Ijaiye Development area in Lagos?
3. What are the conflict handling styles by couples in Agbado Oke Odo and Ijaiye Development Area in Lagos?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriage is the oldest institution in which a man and a woman live their lives together (Afu and Nteh, 2020). It is a union that brings people from different background, personalities, walk of life, ethnic group and discipline together. These differences provide opportunity for conflict. In fact Moji, Ijoyah and Ijoyah.(2015) specifically mentioned that the differences among individuals make conflict inevitable. Conflict is therefore not avoidable between couples because as couples express their needs and desires to each other it might lead to disagreement. Byadgi et al (2014) sees conflict as an inevitable process in marital relationship and at the core of conflict in marriage is opposing needs and interest of couples. Most couples who visit counseling centres emphasize that their major problem is conflict (Boostanipoor and Zaker, 2016). Marital conflict occurs when a husband and wife struggle or have a clash as a result of the pursuant of different goals or needs (Agboola, et al 2018). Fincham, (2003) noted that marital conflict can have negative effect on well-being of couples. Byadgi citing the work of (Thomas, 1976) stated that what usually precedes conflict is when a partner perceives that the other has frustrated some of his or her concerns. Interestingly, Dildar et al, (2013) posit that conflict is necessary for continuous running of marriage. Navindia, (2014) opined that when people get into marriage, it is with the intention of “till death do us part” but circumstances such

as dispute over money, expectations, sexual intimacy, children as well as dealing with in laws create conditions for conflict and this may have negative consequence on the quality of the relationship when conflicts are not properly managed. It is therefore important to explore the dynamics of marital conflict as it affects s couples' satisfaction (Dilon et al. 2015).

A number of issues can result into conflict between couples. Afu and Nteh (2020) stated that families are faced with lots of conflict inducing challenges like the dwindling financial capacity thrown up by socioeconomic factors like poverty, unemployment and pressure from family and friends. Tolorunke, (2013) discovered from her study in Ijumu that marital conflict were as a result of socio-economic issues, lack of partners ability to fulfil each other's sexual needs and inability to meet basic needs of the family. Papp et al (2011) discovered that conflicts over money were more likely to be a continuous source of conflict. Amadi and Amadi (2014) in their work itemized the following as the causes of marital conflict: Social incompatibility of spouses, sexual Incompatibility, extreme sexual orientation, dealing with relations-in law, Lack of respect for each other, dishonesty and moral decadence, negligent behaviour of spouses, poor communication and unwholesome social behavior. These authors stated that about 80% of their respondent agreed that sex was a major source of conflict and that the problem is that one spouse is not getting enough sex or not satisfied because couples have different sexual desires. Particularly, Dilon et al (2015), suggest that initiation of sex by husband and rejection of this gesture could be a source of conflict. Afu and Nteh (2020) found from their study that upbringing of children, childlessness, lack of financial stability and differences in religions were factors causing conflict between spouses in Benue. However the results from the research by Asadi et al (2016) showed that when husbands in their sample were in unfavourable conditions they use derogatory words on their wives especially wives who request for a better life. Hence these authors found out that the use of negative words is a source of conflict. This is also consistent with the findings of Dilon et al (2015) who found out that negative communication, which is characterized by aggression and contention increased couples dissatisfaction and is as well a predictor of divorce. They therefore suggest that spouses should exhibit kindness in all communications and interactions for them to have positive conflict outcome.

Apart from these Asadi, et al (2016) also found that different opinions and perception about issues, dealing with in-laws was a potential source of marital conflict. Pap et al (2009) found out from their study that one of the topics mostly discussed that causes marital conflict is issues about children. Obelenienė and Gabšėvičienė (2015) emphatically stated that money, sex, relations, religion and children's education are most pervasive sources of spousal conflict. These authors found out from their study that major causes of conflict among spouses were disparity in opinion, interests, lack of material needs, immaturity of spouses, and lack of good communication, respect and attention. It is pertinent to note however that one of the most agreed factor in literature about causes of spousal conflict is money and sex. Unresolved conflict impact negatively on family life. It can lead to dissolution of the union. Children suffer in the process. Afu and Nteh (2020), found out from their study the effect of conflict include infidelity, stress, not being able to control children, drug intake and divorce.

Navinda (2014) stated that the inability of several families to be able to manage family disputes is the reason why most families are at war. Though conflicts are the ways in which couples express their differences, either or both partners can be mean and cruel at a little provocation (Amadi and Amadi, 2014). Dildar, (2013) opined that when conflicts are not properly handled, it can lead to unfulfilled desires, lack of satisfaction, emotional problems like depression, aggression, and worry-hence family satisfaction has been seen to have a direct link to couples' conflict handling styles. How be it, a constructively managed conflict will bring about growth and satisfaction but conflict will bring about unsatisfactory relationship if otherwise managed (Amadi and Amadi 2014). On the other hand Agboola and Oluwatosin (2018) discovered from their respondents that poor handling of family finances was a major cause of conflict between partners. However while wives in the study by Papp et al (2015) stated that conflicts over money are more prolonged while the husbands reported that it is most recurrent. The respondents in this study reported that issues on management of money contributed to stressful moment in their homes and husbands exhibited more anger when conflict is money related

Asadi et al (2016) in their study on the causes and resolution of conflict by Iranian women, classified conflict handling style into four which are interactive behaviours, indifference and avoidance, dominance, and accepting the situation. Bolze and Schimdt (2017) described two strategies of responding to marital conflict. These are destructive and constructive strategies. They described constructive strategies as methods which include communication between couples, assessment of possible alternatives to the issues of conflict (collaborating), apologizing when wrong. While destructive strategies include the deliberate attempt not to talk about the problem (avoidance) and withdrawal, confrontation (aggression, competing), and accommodation). Egan, (2007) noted that accommodation is destructive when it is the primary style used. Bolze and Schimdt (2017) reported that some women in their sample who were satisfied with their relationship employed interactive (collaborative) method. Some other respondents used indifference and avoidance to handle their conflict where their husbands were not collaborative while acceptance was discovered to be most widely used either between 0-5 years of marriage or later stage of marriage. These authors found out that because of stigmatization most couples in Iranian society used the accommodation style in other to protect their family. Asadi et al (2016) also found out in their study that couples who were not satisfied with their relationship used the avoidance method. This is in tandem with the findings of Dildar, et al (2013)

METHODOLOGY

Analysis was done based on the responses from the respondents. A questionnaire was developed from literature (Conflict Management Style Assessment) to meet the specific objectives of the study. 100 copies of a questionnaire was administered to 100 married in Agbado Oke Odo and Ijaye Development Areas in Lagos State but 81 was only retrieved due to Covid 19 protocols. The study areas are both local council development areas in Alimosho and Ifako Ijaiye local Government areas respectively. Quantitative and qualitative method of data collection and analysis was used for the study.

RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

Table i

Distribution of respondents by Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	40	49.4	49.4	49.4
	Female	41	50.6	50.6	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field Survey, (2021)

Table i above shows the age distribution of respondent. In this table male (husbands) were 40 (49.4%) while females were 41 (50.6%)

Table ii

Distribution or respondents by religion					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Christian	62	76.5	76.5	76.5
	Muslim	12	14.8	14.8	91.4
	Traditional	7	8.6	8.6	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's field work, (2021)

Table ii above shows the distribution of respondents by religion in which Christians were about 62 (76.5%) while Muslims were 12 (14.8%) and those who practice traditional religion were 7(8.6%)

Table iii

Distribution by level of education					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Primary	5	6.2	6.2	6.2
	Secondary	22	27.2	27.2	33.3
	Tertiary	53	65.4	65.4	98.8
	Master	1	1.2	1.2	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's field work, (2021)

The educational distribution of respondents is as shown in the table above. Those with primary school were 5(6.2%), secondary school holders were 22 (27.2%), while those who had completed tertiary education were 53 (65.4%). Other respondent who had master was just 1(1.2%). This table shows that most of the respondents (65.4%) were educated

Table iv

Distribution by years marriage					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	1-5	24	29.6	29.6	29.6
	6-10	22	27.2	27.2	56.8
	11-15	14	17.3	17.3	74.1
	16-20	11	13.6	13.6	87.7
	21-Above	10	12.3	12.3	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Source: Author's field work, (2021)

From the above table it is obvious that those whose marriage is between 1-5 years were 24(29.6%), those whose marriage is between 6-10years were 22(27.2%). Respondents whose marriage is between 11-15years are 14(17.3%) and those who had been married for between 16-20 years were 11(13.6%) while 10(12.3%) had been married for 21years and above.

Objective 1: Causes of marital conflict

Table: v

	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Unsure	Total Respondents
Sharing of house chores	22(27.2%)	48(59.3%)	6(7.4%)	2(2.5%)	3(3.7%)	81(100%)
spouse's unemployment	28(34.6%)	37(45.7%)	11(13.6%)	3(3.7%)	2(2.5%)	81(100%)
spouse lateness in coming home	30(37.0%)	39(48.1%)	5(6.2%)	4(4.9%)	3(3.7%)	81(100%)
lack of adequate income and its distribution	25(30.9%)	48(59.3%)	2(2.5)	4(4.9%)	2(2.5)	81(100%)
Disagreement over children's upbringing	27(33.3%)	43(53.1%)	7(8.6%)	2(2.5%)	2(2.5%)	81(100%)
Spouse's controlling behavior	31(38.3%)	39(48.1%)	5(6.2%)	5(6.2%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)
Differences in upbringing	27(33.3%)	46(56.8%)	5(6.2%)	2(2.5%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
spouse's anger during disagreement	29(35.8%)	45(55.6%)	5(6.2%)	2(2.5%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Drunkenness	31(38.3%)	44(54.3%)	1(1.2%)	5(6.2%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Disrespect	27(33.3%)	48(59.3%)	6(7.4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Managing relation-in-laws	27(33.3%)	51(63.0%)	1(1.2%)	1(1.2%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)
Disparity in income	30(37.0%)	46(56.8%)	3(3.7%)	1(1.2%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)
Neglect of children's needs	36(44.4%)	39(48.1%)	6(7.4%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Refusal to say sorry when wrong	30(37.0%)	47(58.0%)	3(3.7%)	0(0%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)
Decision making especially over money	32(39.5%)	44(54.3%)	5(6.2%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Not spending enough time together	40(49.4%)	35(43.2%)	2(2.5%)	3(3.7%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)

Perceived neglect and not caring enough	28(34.6%)	48(59.3%)	4(4.9%)	1(1.2%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Selfishness	39(48.1%)	38(46.9%)	3(3.7%)	0(0%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)
Lack of attention	41(50.6%)	33(40.7%)	6(7.4%)	1(1.2%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Sex	43(53.1%)	34(42.0%)	1(1.2%)	3(3.7%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
Infidelity	49(60.5%)	25(30.9%)	7(8.6%)	0(0%)	0(0%)	81(100%)

Source: author's field survey, (2021)

The table above shows that marital conflict is caused by many factors. The result of this study showed that infidelity and lack of attention by either spouse are sources of conflict. The result showed that 91.4% agreed (strongly agree or agree) that infidelity is source of marital conflict and a total of 91.3% respondents agreed (strongly agree/agree) that lack of attention is a source of spousal conflict. Other factors agreed (strongly agree/agree) on as causes of conflict were sex (91.5%), coercive control (86.4%), unemployment (80.2%), disagreement over children's and upbringing (86.4%), coming home late (85.2%), house chores (86.4%), spouse anger during disagreement (91.4%), differences in upbringing (90.1%), not spending enough time together (92.6%), distribution of household income (90.1%), drunkenness (92.6%), disparity in income (93.8%), managing relations in-laws (96.3%), perceived neglect not caring enough (93.8%), selfishness (95.1%), refusing to say sorry when wrong (95.1%), neglect of children's needs (92.6%), disrespect (92.6%) and decision making about money (93.8%).

Objective 2: Effects of marital conflict

Table vi

	Respondents (81)	Yes	No
Don't Talk to each other for sometime	N(81)	69(85.2)	12(14.8%)
Children suffer care	N(81)	50(61.7%)	31(38.3%)
Money for housekeep is withdrawn	N(81)	35(43.2%)	46(56.8%)
We deny each other sex	N(81)	37(45.7%)	44(54.3%)
We stop eating together	N(81)	37(45.7%)	44(54.3%)
We stop praying together	N(81)	43(53.1%)	38(46.9%)
Keeps to self/keeping a distance from spouse	N(81)	43(53.1%)	38(46.9%)
keep away from the house or stay out late	N(81)	40(49.4%)	41(50.6%)

Source: Field Survey, (2021)

Note: percentage of respondents are shown in the brackets

Table v shows the consequence of spousal conflict. From the table it can be seen that the percentage of spouses: who do not talk to each other because of conflict is the highest (85%); the percentage of spouse whose children suffer when there is conflict is also high with 61.7%; those who withdraw feeding money(43.2%); those who deny each other sex (45.7%); stop

eating together (45.7%); stop observing prayers together (53.1%); those who keep to self/keep spouse at a distance (53.1%); Stay away from the house or stay out late (49.4%).

Objective 3: Response styles of respondents

Table vii

Conflict response styles	Yes	No	don't know	
I make my voice loud and sometimes force to start a fight	20(24.7%)	61(75.3%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
when I am in dispute I am afraid and anxious	38(46.9%)	43(53.1%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I often get into heated argument with my partner as I insist to make my spouse do things m own way	40(49.4%)	41(50.6%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I always know what best approach at all times and insist on my opinion	43(53.1%)	38(46.9%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
avoid talking about issues	46(56.8%)	35(43.2%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I always give in to make my spouse content	50(61.7%)	31(38.3%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I do not talk about issues I am not happy about with my spouse	54(66.7%)	27(33.3%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
when in conflict with my spouse I don't want to say much and prefer to walk away from the situation as fast as possible	57(70.4%)	24(29.6%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
most times my needs are not met but I think it is the best thing to do to keep my relationship	64(79.0%)	17(21.0%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I usually share what I feel about issues with my spouse so we can resolve any issue	65(80.2%)	15(18.5%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I often try to seek a middle ground when conflict with my spouse	64(79.0%)	17(21.0%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
sit with my spouse to find a lasting solution	66(81.5%)	15(18.5%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
when we are in conflict I adopt to give a little and I take a little disposition	67(82.7%)	14(17.3%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I usually reach a compromise with my spouse for life to continue	69(85.2%)	11(13.6%)	0(0%)	81(100%)
I look various for means for us to have solution that will make us happy	72(88.9%)	8(9.9%)	1(1.2%)	81(100%)

Source: Field Survey, (2021)

This study explored the conflict response styles of respondents using conflict response styles scale generated from literature. Those who use avoidance style answered “yes” to these questions; avoid talking about issues (56.8%), not saying much and walk away as soon as possible (70.4%), when I am in dispute I am afraid and anxious (46.7%) , those who use competition/ confrontation answered “yes” to: I make my voice loud and sometimes force to start a fight (24%), I always know what best approach at all times and insist on my opinion (53.1%) , I often get into heated argument with my partner as I insist to make my spouse do things my own way (49.4%). I make my voice loud and sometimes force to start a fight (24.7%) Others who use accommodation answered “yes” to: I do not talk about issues I am not happy about with my spouse (56.8%); most times my needs are not met but I think it is the best thing to do to keep my relationship (79.0%); I always give in to make my spouse content (61.7%). Respondents who use compromising answered ‘yes’ to these: I often try to seek a middle ground when conflict with my spouse 79.0%; I usually reach a compromise with my wife for life to continue ‘Yes’: 85.2%; when we are in conflict I adopt give a little and I take a little disposition ‘Yes’:82.7%. Others who also adopt the problem solving style answered Yes to these questions: I usually share what I feel about issues with my spouse so we can resolve any issue (80.2%), I look various for means for us to have solution that will make us happy (88.9%) sit with my spouse to find a lasting solution (81.5%)

The in-depth interviews revealed that a number of women use avoidance especially when they don’t want to get into trouble with their partners. A respondent in an interview said “I usually keep quiet because he will turn a simple thing into big issue. I make most of the income while he does virtually nothing yet he will want me to leave my work to attend to his sexual needs. This makes me very angry but there is nothing I can do about it”

Another respondent also stated that “My quarrel is always with my husband not attending to our needs. He is not appreciative at all even when I wash his clothes or borrow money to do something for the family; he does as if it is not his business. I don’t care about him anymore” she continued “there was a Sunday we came back from church and there was no food at home. We were all hungry. I mean myself, my husband and our three children. I had to lie down because I was weak and did not have any money on me. To my surprise I realized that he had some money in the wardrobe which he kept. ... all these behaviours makes me to be aggressive towards him so I usually confront him.

A man stated thus:” my wife does not respect me, she talks to me anyhow before people and that makes me very angry”. Another respondent speaking about his wife stated that: “my wife does not trust me at all. When I say I don’t have money she thinks I am lying so she picks up a quarrel” Another man also referring to his wife stated that: I promise my wife I will give her two thousand naira. I am an Okada rider and could not make the money in time. By evening when I got back to the house she held my clothes not even waiting for explanation for the delay in bringing the money she started beating me and that was how she started the fight...look at the wounds on me”. A respondent also point blankly stated that: “My wife does not know how to say sorry when she is wrong. This attitude makes me angry and it is sometimes the cause of our

quarrel such that we forget what started the argument and focus on the quarrel about not apologizing”

On response style used a respondent also stated that: “each time I try to tell my husband about things I am not satisfied with he gets angry or sometimes walks out” Another respondent said that “when we have conflict my husband will stop talking to me for about a week , he will even withdraw feeding money for the house” Also on how partners respond to conflict, a wife stated that “when I tell my husband my mind and we iron things out I am happy and most time my husband is happy too because the tense atmosphere become free”

Another respondent speaking about her husband narrated thus: “when we are in disagreement over little thing , he shouts and this intensifies our dispute that it may get out of hands”

DISCUSSION

This study explored the causes, the effects and the conflict handling style of couples in Agbado Oke Odo and Ifako Ijaye Local Council Development Area in Lagos State. The study showed that causes of conflict ranged from infidelity, not giving enough attention, sex, cohesive control, money related matters, distribution of household income neglecting children needs by husbands, and disrespect. The study also found out that issues related to money or unavailability of resources to meet the needs of the family is a source of serious conflict. These findings also agree with the work of Agboola and Oluwatosin, (2018); Afu and Nteh, (2020). The research also showed that appreciation is paramount for a happy family life. Some wives stated that their husbands do not appreciate them and that is why they are unhappy with their husbands. Another interesting discovery from the research is the role respect play in men. Some men were found to feel belittled when their wives do not respect them or if she talks about what there are not doing right in the public or to someone who is not a member of the family. The interview session also revealed that men are also victim of physical violence from their wives. From the interviews it was discovered that men preferred to avoid talking about issues with their wives and any attempt for wives to enforce talking about issues will be meant with serious anger and disagreement. Some wives also adopt the accommodation style in other to please their husbands while leaving their needs unmet. The data gathered from the questionnaire revealed that some adopt give and take strategy (compromise). Though some respondents stated that they try to talk about issues with their spouses quiet a number prefer not to talk about issues at all (avoidance). Those who were able to talk to their husbands about bordering issues felt happier. It was also evident from the study that spouse who shouts (destructive conflict response style) when there is a disagreement over simple issue only gives opportunity for the conflict to escalate. This style was found to be unhealthy for marital satisfaction of partners in the sample. The study revealed that communication is hindered when couples are in conflict. This research shows that conflict has negative impact on family life as couple will no longer do together what they used to do together happily. Children’s care also suffers. This explains why some children become stubborn and disobedient in the homes where their emotional needs are neglected.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results from this research show that couple conflict are caused by many factors such as money, denial of sex, unmet needs and expectations. Inability to resolve conflict between couples can lead to lack of satisfaction. Apart from these children's socio-economic needs also suffers. It is therefore necessary for couples to talk about issues as they happen in other for them to have a happy and satisfying marital life. Couples also need to be appreciative and kind to each other. The study recommends that couples should seek the help of counselors for issues they are finding difficult to resolve by themselves

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