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Solutions for Marital Instability among Married Adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. Respondents were stratified by gender, age, and educational qualification, and two hundred married adults, 149 males and 51 females were selected using a simple random sampling technique. Data were collected using the self-developed "Solutions for Marital Instability among Married Adults Questionnaire" (SMIMAQ). The study employed t-tests and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) to test three null hypotheses, with Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) used to identify specific group differences where ANOVA results were significant. All hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 alpha level of significance. Findings revealed that conflict resolution was ranked as the most important solution, while gratitude was ranked lowest. Furthermore, there were no significant differences in perceptions of solutions based on gender, age, or educational qualification, indicating broad consensus among respondents. Based on these results, it is recommended that professional counselors organize seminars and educational programs to guide married adults in adopting effective strategies to manage marital challenges, improve communication, and foster relationship stability, thereby preventing the negative consequences of marital instability, including potential deterioration of partners' health and well-being.

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Introduction

Marital instability refers to the decline or deterioration of a marital relationship and is commonly characterized by emotional disengagement, persistent conflict, and a reduction in overall relationship satisfaction (Amato, 2001). It is a multifaceted phenomenon shaped by both individual and environmental factors. According to Amato (2001), marital instability often manifests as marital dissatisfaction, conflict, or disengagement and may ultimately culminate in separation or divorce. Key indicators include frequent conflict, emotional withdrawal, and diminished marital satisfaction. Empirical studies have identified several contributing factors, such as financial stress, ineffective communication, lack of intimacy, substance abuse, and related stressors. As a pervasive and complex issue, marital instability has far-reaching implications not only for couples but also for families and society at large. Scholars have documented its adverse consequences, which include increased psychological distress, physical health challenges, and negative developmental outcomes for children within unstable family environments (Amato, 2001).

In response to the widespread nature and consequences of marital instability, researchers have proposed a range of interventions aimed at strengthening marital relationships. Prominent among these are couples therapy (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002) and relationship education programmes (Hawkins et al., 2008), both of which focus on enhancing communication, improving conflict resolution skills, and fostering emotional intimacy. Such interventions are designed to promote healthier interaction patterns and reinforce the marital bond. Relationship education programmes, in particular, have been shown to improve marital stability and satisfaction by equipping couples with practical skills for managing conflict and nurturing intimacy (Hawkins et al., 2008). Consequently, this study seeks to synthesize and highlight solutions to marital instability identified in previous research, including effective communication, conflict resolution, commitment, forgiveness, financial management, trust building, love and affection, emotional and sexual intimacy, apologizing, and the practice of gratitude within marriage.

Statement of the Problem

Marital instability has emerged as a critical concern in contemporary society, with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and communities. The rising rates of divorce, separation, and marital dissatisfaction have intensified scholarly interest in understanding not only the causes and effects of marital instability but also the strategies required to foster healthy and stable marriages. Despite the growing body of research in this area, there remains a need for a more comprehensive understanding of effective solutions capable of addressing the complexity of marital instability. Existing studies have proposed several interventions, including couples' therapy (Gurman & Fraenkel, 2002), communication skills training and relationship education programmes (Hawkins et al., 2008), as well as addressing substance abuse issues that undermine marital relationships (Marshall, 2003). Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to propose context-specific solutions to marital instability among married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria, focusing on conflict resolution, effective communication, marital commitment, forgiveness, financial management, trust building, love and affection, intimacy, apologizing, and the practice of gratitude within marriage. The purpose of this study is to examine the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study also investigated the influence of variables of gender, age and educational qualification.

Research Question

1. What are the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were raised to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria based on age.
3. There is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which involves the systematic collection of data from a defined population in order to describe existing conditions, opinions, or characteristics using specific variables under investigation. The descriptive survey method was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to obtain relevant information from a relatively large population and make valid inferences based on the data collected. In this study, the design facilitated the examination of proposed solutions to marital instability as perceived by married adults within a natural setting, without manipulating any variables. The target population comprised married adults residing in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. From this population, a total of two hundred (200) respondents were selected for participation in the study. The sample consisted of one hundred and forty-nine (149) males and fifty-one (51) females. To ensure adequate representation, the respondents were stratified based on key demographic variables such as gender, age, and educational qualification, after which a simple random sampling technique was employed to select participants from each stratum.

The instrument used for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire titled "Solutions for Marital Instability among Married Adults Questionnaire" (SMIMAQ). The items in the questionnaire were generated based on insights obtained from an extensive review of related literature on marital instability and its solutions. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section A elicited information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while Section B contained items designed to assess respondents' perceptions of various solutions to marital instability among married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. A four-point Likert-type response format was adopted for Section B, comprising Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). All items were positively worded, ensuring that higher scores reflected stronger agreement with the proposed solutions, and therefore, no reverse scoring was required.

To establish the psychometric soundness of the instrument, both validity and reliability procedures were undertaken. Content and face validity were ensured through expert review, as the questionnaire was scrutinized by five specialists in the Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling at Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo. Their input helped to ascertain the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the items in measuring the intended constructs. The reliability of the instrument was determined using the test–retest method, conducted over a four-week interval. The data obtained were analyzed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.78, which indicated that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for the study. For data analysis, inferential statistical techniques were employed. Specifically, the t-test, Analysis of Variance

(ANOVA), and Duncan Multiple Range Test (DMRT) were used to test the null hypotheses formulated for the study. All hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Table 1: Analysis of socio-demographic characteristics

S/N	Items	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	149	74.5
		Female	51	25.5
		Total	200	100.0
2	Age	25-30 years	27	13.5
		31-35 years	75	37.5
		36-40 years	77	38.5
		41 years and above	21	10.5
		Total	200	100.0
3	Educational Qualification	NCE/OND	118	59.0
		HND / First Degree	77	38.5
		Postgraduate	5	2.5
		Total	200	100.0

Table 1 indicated that 149 (74.5%) of the respondents were males while 51 (25.5%) were females. Between the ages of 25-30 years, we have 27 (13.5%) respondents, between 31-35 years we have 75 (37.5%) respondents, between ages 36-40years we have 77 (38.5%), while between ages 41 years and above, we have 21 (10.5%). For educational qualification, 118 (59.0%) of the respondents were NCE/OND holder, 77 (38.5%) were HND/First Degree holder while 5 (2.5%) were Postgraduate holder.

Table 2: Mean and Rank order analysis of the solutions for marital instability among married adults

Item No.	Items	Mean score	Rank
5	Conflict resolution	3.04	1st
7	Effective communication	2.90	2nd
8	Commitment	2.84	3rd
1	Forgiveness	2.83	4th
4	Financial management	2.79	5th
10	Trust building	2.78	6th
2	Love and affection	2.73	7th
3	Intimacy	2.59	8th
6	Apologizing	2.57	9th
9	Gratitude	2.53	10th

From Table 2 above, item 5 which states "conflict resolution" with a mean score of 3.04 ranked 1st, while item 9 which states " gratitude" with a mean score of 2.53 ranked 10th.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria based on gender.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value of respondents' view on the basis of gender

Gender	No.	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-val.	Crit. t-val.	p-value	Decision
Male	149	27.7047	2.6111					
				198	0.68	1.96	0.01	Accepted
Female	51	27.3922	3.3231					

* Significant; p<0.05 alpha level

Table 3 above shows the mean, standard deviation and t-value of respondents on the basis of gender. The result on the above table revealed that the calculated t-value of 0.68 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 with 198 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is accepted. Thus, there is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State on the basis of gender.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria based on age.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) comparing respondents on significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults

Sources	SS	df	MS	Cal. F-val.	Crit. F-val.	p-value	Decision
Between Group	15.084	3	5.028	.64	2.60	0.59	Accepted
Within Group	1549.791	196	7.907				
Total	1564.875	199					

* Significant; p<0.05 alpha level

Table 4 above presents the calculated F-value of .64 which is less than the critical F-value of 2.60 at 0.05 alpha level. Thus the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria on the basis of age.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria based on educational qualification.

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) comparing respondents on significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults

Sources	SS	df	MS	Cal. F-val.	Crit. F-val.	p-value	Decision
Between Group	1.596	2	.798	.10	3.00	0.90	Accepted
Within Group	1563.279	197	7.935				
Total	1564.875	199					

* Significant; p<0.05 alpha level

Table 5 above presents the calculated F-value of .10 which is less than the critical F-value of 3.00 at 0.05 alpha level. Thus the hypothesis is accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the solutions for marital instability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria on the basis of educational qualification.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study revealed that married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria, share similar perceptions regarding solutions to marital instability, irrespective of gender, age, and educational qualification. This indicates a general consensus among

respondents on strategies considered effective in addressing marital instability. Analysis of the mean rank order further showed variations in the perceived importance of specific solutions. Conflict resolution emerged as the most highly rated solution, ranking first with a mean score of 3.04, while gratitude was ranked lowest, occupying the tenth position with a mean score of 2.53. These results suggest that practical skills for managing disagreements are perceived as more critical than expressive or affective practices in stabilizing marriages among the study population.

Hypothesis testing further supported these findings, as all three null hypotheses were accepted. The first null hypothesis revealed no significant difference in perceptions of solutions to marital instability based on gender, a finding that aligns with the study by Gottman and Silver (2015) but contrasts with the results reported by Hawkins et al. (2008). Similarly, the second null hypothesis showed no significant difference in respondents' perceptions based on age, corroborating the findings of Lebow, Chambers, Christensen, and Johnson (2012), though it contradicts the study by Bradbury and Karney (2010), which reported divergent views among respondents. The third null hypothesis indicated no significant difference in perceptions based on educational qualification, a result consistent with Gurman and Fraenkel (2002). A plausible explanation for this outcome is that respondents, regardless of their background, interpreted the questionnaire items from a shared perspective shaped by common marital experiences. However, this finding is inconsistent with Marshall (2003), whose study reported significant differences in perceptions, suggesting contextual variations in marital dynamics.

Conclusion

The findings of this study lead to the conclusion that married adults in Ilorin Metropolis generally share common views on the strategies required to address marital instability, regardless of their gender, age, or educational background. Participants demonstrated broad agreement on a range of solutions, with greater emphasis placed on practical and interactional approaches such as managing conflicts constructively, maintaining open and effective communication, and sustaining commitment within marriage. Other relational practices, including forgiveness, sound financial management, trust building, love and affection, intimacy, apologizing, and gratitude, were also acknowledged as relevant to marital stability, though they were perceived as comparatively less central. Overall, the results suggest that marital instability is viewed as a shared relational challenge that can be mitigated through universally applicable skills and values, rather than approaches tailored to specific demographic groups. This underscores the importance of holistic and inclusive marital interventions that focus on strengthening interpersonal dynamics and mutual understanding among couples.

Recommendations

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

1. Professional counsellors should organize seminars to educate the married adults on how to avoid marital problems and its negative consequences which can lead to the death of the partner.
2. The government at various levels, Federal, State, and Local Government should formulate policies on how marital instability can be avoided.

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