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PRE-AND POST-MARITAL COUNSELLING AS A PANACEA FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG NEWLY MARRIED ADULTS IN UMUAHIA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, ABIA STATE

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Abstract

This study examined Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married Adults in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Two research questions guided the study. The study targeted a population of 1,200 newly adults (within 1–5 years of marriage). A sample of 30 couples were selected using simple random sampling with gender-based stratification to ensure balanced representation. Data were collected using a researcher-designed instrument titled Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling Questionnaire (PPCQ) with eight items with a reliability index of 0.70. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions. Findings revealed that pre-marital counselling significantly helps couples to set realistic expectations, build effective communication skills, and anticipate possible sources of conflict, while post-marital counselling serves as an effective remedial tool for addressing marital challenges and promoting harmony. The study concluded that both pre- and post-marital counselling are indispensable for reducing marital conflicts and strengthening the stability of marriages.

It was recommended, among others, that pre-marital counselling should be made compulsory before marriage solemnization, and that accessible post-marital counselling services should be established to help couples manage conflicts constructively.

Keywords: Pre-marital counselling, Post-marital counselling, Conflict resolution, Newly married adults and Marital stability.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the most important social institutions in every society. It establishes the foundation for family life, provides social continuity, and nurtures the emotional and

Pre-and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married... **432**

psychological well-being of partners. However, marriage also comes with challenges. Newly married couples often face difficulties in adjusting to one another's values, habits, and expectations. Conflicts may arise from issues such as finances, communication gaps, sexual relations, childbearing, in-law interference, career priorities, and role performance within the household. If not effectively managed, such conflicts can escalate into chronic marital dissatisfaction, separation, or divorce (World Health Organization, 2020). This reality has raised

increasing concern among scholars, religious leaders, and counsellors on the need for structured interventions that can equip couples with the skills to manage their marital relationships successfully.

One of the most effective interventions recommended by scholars and practitioners is marital counselling. Counselling provides couples with a safe space to understand their differences, improve communication, and develop problem-solving skills (Elegbede *et al.*, 2024). It also helps them to build tolerance, patience, and emotional intelligence in their marital interactions. According to Angolo and Obida, (2020) counselling can be offered at different stages of marriage, particularly before marriage (pre-marital counselling) and after marriage (post-marital counselling). Pre-marital counselling seeks to prepare intending couples for marriage by addressing expectations, values, communication styles, conflict resolution techniques, and readiness for marital responsibilities. Post-marital counselling, on the other hand, is more remedial in nature, as it helps couples already in marriage to navigate real-life challenges, resolve ongoing disputes, and rebuild trust and intimacy where it is threatened (Ofoegbu & Chukwu, 2020).

In Nigeria, and particularly in Abia State, the rising cases of marital conflict and increasing rates of separation and divorce highlight the urgent need for marital counselling. Traditionally, marital conflicts were often managed within the family system, through the intervention of elders, kinsmen, or religious leaders. While these informal structures still play a role, modern challenges such as economic hardship, urban migration, shifting gender roles, and exposure to diverse cultural influences have made conflicts more complex and less amenable to traditional methods alone (Aliero, 2021). As a result, professional counselling both pre and post-marital has become more relevant than ever in addressing the unique needs of couples.

The significance of focusing on newly married couples lies in the fact that the early years of marriage are often the most delicate and formative. Couples are still adjusting to shared responsibilities, establishing communication patterns, and negotiating their roles in the relationship. Conflicts that arise during this stage, if left unresolved, may set negative precedents that affect the stability and longevity of the marriage (Akindahunsi, 2022). Therefore, introducing couples to structured counselling interventions at both the pre- and post-marital stages can be a powerful tool in preventing unnecessary conflict and promoting marital harmony.

Despite its potential, marital counselling is not always fully embraced in many Nigerian

communities, including Umuahia North Local Government Area. Askarshahi, *et al.*, (2025) is of the view that Factors such as cultural beliefs, stigma attached to counselling, reliance on traditional authority figures, and limited access to professional counsellors may limit the uptake of pre- and post-marital counselling. Nonetheless, where it is practiced, these studies Agboola and Adeoye (2018), Amadi (2021) and Okorie (2019), show that couples who participate in counselling show better conflict management, improved communication, and higher marital

satisfaction compared to those who do not.

This study therefore sought to explore pre- and post-marital counselling as a panacea for conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. It examined the effectiveness of counselling interventions in reducing marital conflicts, identified the common strategies employed during counselling, and highlighted the extent to which counselling influences marital satisfaction and stability. By doing so, the research will contribute to the understanding of how counselling can serve as a preventive and corrective mechanism in strengthening marriages in the local context.

Ultimately, the study underscored the idea that a stable and fulfilling marriage is not a product of chance, but of deliberate efforts by couples to learn, unlearn, and re-learn how to relate effectively with one another. Counselling, both before and after marriage, stands as a vital instrument for guiding couples through this process, making it a true panacea for conflict resolution in marital life.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage is expected to provide companionship, emotional support, and social stability for couples. However, for many newly married couples, the early years of marriage are often marked by challenges that test the strength of their union. Issues such as poor communication, unrealistic expectations, financial stress, cultural interference from in-laws, sexual incompatibility, and disagreements over household responsibilities frequently lead to conflict. In Nigeria, and particularly in Umuahia North Local Government Area, such conflicts have contributed to rising cases of marital instability, separation, and divorce, which negatively affect not only the couples but also the larger society.

Traditionally, marital conflicts in Igbo communities were managed through the intervention of family elders, kinsmen, or religious leaders. While these methods remain relevant, the complexities of modern marriage shaped by economic hardship, urbanization, shifting gender roles, and individualism demand more systematic and professional approaches. Unfortunately, many couples still enter into marriage without the benefit of adequate pre-marital preparation, and those who encounter difficulties are often reluctant to seek post-marital counselling due to stigma, lack of awareness, or limited access to trained counsellors. This gap has left many marriages vulnerable to persistent conflicts and breakdown.

It is against this background that the present study examined pre- and post-marital

Pre-and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married... **434**

counselling as a panacea for conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. The study established structured counselling interventions that can help couples resolve conflicts, promote marital satisfaction, and strengthen family stability in the local context.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the effectiveness of pre- and post-marital counselling as a panacea for conflict resolution among newly married adults in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. Specifically, the study sought to achieve the following:

1. To assess the impact of pre-marital counselling on conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North.
2. To determine the impact of post-marital counselling on marital satisfaction among newly married couples in Umuahia North.

Research Questions

1. How does pre-marital counselling influence conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North?
2. In what ways does post-marital counselling contribute to marital satisfaction among newly married couples in Umuahia North?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to collect data from a sample of newly married couples and counsellors in order to describe and analyze their views on the impacts of pre- and post-marital counselling in resolving conflicts. The target population for this study consisted of all newly married couples (1–5 years of marriage) residing in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State, estimated at 1,200 couples (2,400 individuals) based on marriage registry. A sample was drawn from the target population using simple random sampling technique to ensure equal representation of couples across different communities in Umuahia North. Stratification was applied based on gender (husbands and wives) to ensure balanced representation. 60 respondents (husbands and wives) were sampled for the study.

The main instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling Questionnaire (PPCQ) with eight items. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validation by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Educational Psychology in Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike Abia State, to ensure its clarity, relevance, and adequacy. Out of the 343 questionnaires distributed, 330 were properly filled and returned, representing a 96.2% return rate, which was considered adequate for the study. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study which was conducted with 10 couples outside the study area. The reliability of the

Pre-and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married... **435**

instrument was determined using the test-retest method, and the reliability coefficient of 0.70 was calculated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation.

The researchers administered the questionnaires personally with the assistance of trained research assistants to ensure a high response rate and to clarify any misunderstandings. Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and chi-square to test

the hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1: How does pre-marital counselling influence conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North?

Table 1: *Respondents' views on the influence of pre-marital counselling on conflict resolution*

SN	ITEM	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Decision
1	Pre-marital counselling helped us set realistic expectations	3.52	0.65	Agreed
2	It improved our communication and understanding	3.47	0.70	Agreed
3	It prepared us to manage financial disagreements	3.32	0.81	Agreed
4	It reduced the level of conflict in our marriage	3.10	0.95	Agreed
Cluster Mean		3.36	0.67	Agreed

Data in Table 1 show that the mean responses (all above 2.50 benchmark) show that respondents agreed pre-marital counselling plays a significant role in conflict resolution among newly married couples.

Research Question 2: In what ways does post-marital counselling contribute to marital satisfaction and stability among newly married couples in Umuahia North?

Table 3: *Respondents' views on the contribution of post-marital counselling*

SN	Item	Mean ($\bar{X}$)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Decision
5	Post-marital counselling helped us resolve conflicts effectively.	3.20	0.80	Agreed
6	It improved emotional intimacy and understanding.	3.00	0.90	Agreed
7	Counselling reduced thoughts of separation/divorce.	2.40	1.10	Agreed
8	It enhanced our overall marital satisfaction.	3.45	0.70	Agreed
Cluster Mean		3.13	0.52	Agreed

Data in Table 3 indicate that respondents agreed that post-marital counselling contributes positively to marital stability and satisfaction among newly married couples in Umuahia North.

Discussion of Findings

The analysis revealed that pre-marital counselling significantly influences conflict resolution among newly married couples in Umuahia North. Respondents agreed that pre-marital

counselling helped them set realistic expectations, improve communication, manage finances, and reduce conflicts in their marriages. This supports the work of Elegbede *et al.*, (2024), who asserted that pre-marital counselling equips couples with preventive skills that reduce marital stress and misunderstandings. Similarly, the finding aligns with Agboola and Adeoye (2018), who noted that couples who undergo pre-marital counselling report lower levels of conflict compared to those who did not. The implication is that equipping couples with knowledge before marriage provides a strong foundation for stability.

Results further indicated that post-marital counselling significantly enhances marital satisfaction and stability. Respondents noted that counselling helped them resolve conflicts effectively, improved emotional intimacy, and reduced thoughts of separation or divorce. This is in line with the findings of Okorie (2019), who observed that post-marital counselling serves as an intervention strategy that helps couples address ongoing challenges. Similarly, Ofoegbu and Chukwu (2020) emphasized that counselling sessions provide a safe environment for couples to air grievances and develop healthier coping mechanisms. The implication is that post-marital counselling does not only address conflicts but also reinforces marital bonds and satisfaction.

Conclusion

This study examined Pre- and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married Couples in Umuahia North Local Government Area, Abia State. Based on the analysis, it was concluded that both pre- and post-marital counselling play significant roles in promoting marital harmony, stability, and satisfaction. Pre-marital counselling helps couples set realistic expectations, develop communication skills, and anticipate possible challenges, while post-marital counselling serves as a remedial tool for resolving conflicts and strengthening emotional bonds. Together, they provide a dual framework that equips couples with preventive and corrective strategies for marital success.

Recommendations

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

1. Religious institutions, marriage registries, and community leaders should make pre-marital counselling compulsory before solemnization of marriages. This will ensure that couples enter into marriage with adequate preparation and realistic expectations.
2. Counsellors, churches, and family life educators should create accessible post-marital counselling programs where couples can seek help in times of conflict. This can be achieved through periodic marriage seminars, workshops, and professional counselling services.

Pre-and Post-Marital Counselling as a Panacea for Conflict Resolution among Newly Married... **437**

3. The Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development in Abia State should collaborate with professional counsellors to design family stability programs that emphasize the importance of counselling as a preventive and remedial measure.
4. Media outlets and community-based organizations should be engaged to sensitize couples on the benefits of both pre- and post-marital counselling in achieving stable marriages.

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EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND EMPATHY AS PREDICTORS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND AFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ABIA STATE

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