

Relationship between Incompatibility and Midlife Crises among Married Couples in Jos Metropolis: Counselling Implications

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Abstract

The study examines the relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises among married couples in Jos metropolis. Correlational design was adopted as the design for this study. The convenience sampling techniques was used in selecting 1,500 married people as sample respondents in this study. A self-designed questionnaire titled “Incompatibility of Midlife Crisis among Marital Couples” (IMCMC) was used for data collection. The data were analysed using regression. Findings from the study showed that there was a relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises among married couples. It is recommended that counselling should be provided to improve the commitment of the couples thus strengthening the stability of the marriage. This will go a long way to assist the couples to tide over the many challenges that would come up during the midlife of their marriage.

Keywords: incompatibility, midlife, crisis, marital, couples, counselling

Introduction

At the middle age in the life of every healthy human being, about 90% had married at least once. In marriage, one of the partners is a man and the other is a woman. Two people could never be the same or agree in a particular thing all the time. These differences are in their interest, physical appearance which is obvious, in the way they think, talk and respond to situation, among others. For spouses to live together as husband and wife, they face challenges of differences which could cause rancour between them. If such differences come in the mix of incompatibility between the couples, the situation could be severe.

Incompatibility in marriage simply means spouses do not communicate with their partners well as they did before marriage. At that period before marriage, both had so much to talk about; but after marriage both talk to each other very little. They often search for topic to interact with each other. Surendran (2020) posited that incompatibility in marriage is the situation in which the relationship becomes hostile and aggressive, and mental peace of the couple is wrecked. It is a situation where the spouses coexist out of compulsion and convenience. Jacobson (2019) observed that incompatibility is a situation where couple starts so great but then discovered that they cannot go together smoothly; and this could be a ground for divorce. The bases

could be from having bad relationship, sexual emotion and financial problems. Ricker (2020) posited that incompatibility is a situation where a spouse or both do not get close as they were before. It is a situation where spouses spend little time communicating with each other, not encouraging each other or flirting with the opposite sex.

Ninan (2020) observed that incompatibility among spouses could be caused by differences in temperament, family upbringing, spiritual maturity, educational level, financial background, intelligence level, skills, likes and dislikes, among others. All these can make the partners to treat each other as enemies. Such enmity is portrayed even in the public because each wants his/her partner to cringe in shame; both enjoy washing dirty linen in public, indulge in mutual mudslinging. All these could be as a result of lack of love that makes the relationship abusive and offensive. Surendran (2020) posited the following as the reason for incompatibility in marriage: where one of the couple wants things to be done in his/her own way, arguing on everything, lack of good communication, lack of supporting one's partner, insulting and abusing each other. At the beginning of the relationship after marriage, couples assumed they could maintain their joy, happiness and love throughout their stay as married couples. But the reality soon manifests and they later discover their differences; if these differences are not well managed, it could lead to divorce. Management Online (2020) observed that people describe their marriages are happiest during the early years but at the middle age they will start realizing and experiencing some midlife crises.

A midlife crisis is an emotionally uncomfortable period that men and women go through between the age of 35 and 55. For many, it is a time to question priorities and adjust one's lifestyle to reconcile with one's emotional needs (Meyer, 2019). It is a period that couple can stray from marriage for outside affection or attention. Kobayashi (2007) described this period as "sandwich stage," because of its chronological placement between young adulthood and later life. He defined this period as the transitions to various stages such as the return to caregiving triggered by the occurrence of life events in the domains of work and the family.

Fellizar (2018) sees midlife crisis as an experience that many people go through in their marriages. Such could be characterized by changes that occur in his/her thought as the individual is growing older. This could be about the amount of time left for an individual to spend on earth and what he/she has achieved so far. The person may be left wondering whether the life he/she is living is the type he/she intended to live when he/she was a youth. Again, whether the decision he/she had made to get to this point has been the right one. He/she is also thinking whether he/she will have the chance to do it while old age is catching up with him/her. Therefore, being in a relationship with a person that is completely incompatible or different from his/her partner in every way can make things a little more challenging at the period of middle age. Ricker (2020) stated that somebody who has social justice mindset will probably not be happy with someone who is super materialistic, unless they also have an altruistic side. Incompatibility among midlife could cause constant

disagreement among couples, if the other partner finds the other partner's sense of humour offensive, having different schedule, different expectation of time and incompatibility in sex drives among others could be a source of crises among spouses at midlife. Management Online (2020) observed that at midlife, interpersonal disagreement may increase because they have become better acquainted with lack of compatibility. Most couple quarrel and argue at midlife but few know how to work at resolving conflict equitably (Fellizar, 2018). Henry and Miller (2004) posited that incompatible among married adults having midlife crisis may cause unfaithfulness, or file for divorce. These adults end up longing for respect, care and love from a new partner. Management Online (2020) explains the following as causes of crises at midlife of incompatible married couples; couples who cannot handle an extreme crisis, spouses change and grow at different direction, growing out of love, change in consummate love and fade of passion.

Passion enamoured some people to such a degree that they do not approach their loving relationship realistically. This observation especially holds true for those who anchor their relationship on infatuation or the assumption that true love will take care of all conflict and problems. When the flame of passion dies out or the goings get rough, divorce or extramarital relationship are the major consequences of marital unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

Couples who have no mastery of midlife crises will have difficulty in developing skills and competence that would improve their ability to have self-regulation. At the midlife of couples, to avoid crisis, they need a deeper processing strategy to maintaining a good and sustainable relationship in marriage. Absence of such strategies may result to loss of interest in each other, and this could lead to separation or divorce. Incompatible midlife couples behave differently at the same situation as well as from time to time. This can create issues that can creep into the marriage slowly, over a period of time. Where couples are both workers and are financially independent, they may find it difficult to be submissive and both may expect each other to have equal or more rights. Lack of commitment among couples could also lead to midlife crisis. Focusing on a partner's flaws or quirks by seeing them through a negative lens among incompatible couples at midlife could create crises in the marriage. The old cliché of a middle aged cheating over his partner could make the relationship hostile and aggressive. If argument crosses its limits, the married life will become abusive. If couples argue over trivial issues, it could make the marriage relationship totter towards failure, more especially if they are incompatible.

These realities prompted this researcher to investigate how married couples maintain their incompatible marriages during midlife crises, and the type of counselling assistance they may require. To the best of this researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted on how incompatibility is related to midlife crises among married couples in Jos metropolis. It is in view of this that the study aims at filling in this gap in Jos metropolis of Plateau state, Nigeria.

Research question

The study was guided by this research question:

1. What is the relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises among married couples in Jos metropolis?

Hypothesis

The following hypothesis was formulated to guide this study:

Ho1. There is no significant relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises among married couples in Jos metropolis.

Methodology

Correlational design was employed for this study. The justification for the use of this design is to observe how one variable (incompatibility) is related to the second variable (midlife crisis among married couples) in order to establish a corresponding statistically significant relationship between them (Blog, 2020). A sample of 1,500 married couples at their midlife age was drawn as the sample size for this study. The convenience sampling technique was used in drawing the sample from the married couples who were married for 20 years and above. All the participants are between the ages of 35 to 55 years old.

The incompatibility as it relates to midlife crises among married couples in Jos metropolis was measured using a self- designed instrument titled “Incompatibility of Midlife Crisis among Married Couples (IMCMC)”. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A dealt with personal information of the respondents; Section B contained 20 items on modified four Likert type scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The scoring is strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2 and strongly disagree = 1 while the reverse is the case for negatively worded items. Out of the 20 items, items 3, 5, 7, 10, 11, 15, 18 and 20 were negatively phrased while the rest were positively phrased items. The instrument designed was used in measuring incompatibility and midlife crisis among marital couples. The mean score of 2.50 and above for each scored item indicated agreement with or acceptance of the statement on the item, while mean score less than 2.50 is disagreement or rejection of the statement on the item.

Initially the questionnaire contained 30 items of which 10 items were rejected during the validity, as the instrument was validated by two experts in Guidance and Counselling and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation from Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi. A sample of 100 respondents was drawn and pilot tested in two different Local Government Areas of the state outside the target Local Government Area in Plateau State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Hair, Hult, Ringle and Sarstedt (2013) recommended that the value of Cronbach Alpha .70 and above is acceptable and sufficient. In the present study, reliability coefficient is .81, suggesting that the instrument is reliable.

The validated instruments were distributed to 1,500 sampled couples selected from the Jos metropolis. Out of the 1,500 copies of the questionnaire distributed, a total of

1,187 (80%) were returned, while 313 (20%) were not returned. The returned questionnaires were thereafter scored and coded in order to determine the relationship between incompatibility and midlife crisis among married couples in Jos metropolis.

The regression analysis was employed to test the hypothesis, because the researcher is interested in describing how the changes in the independent variable (incompatibility) relate to the dependent variable (midlife crisis) among married couples. Frost (2017) posited that regression is used when research question have entwined independent variable that can influence the dependent variable.

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between incompatibility and midlife crisis among married couples in Jos metropolis.

The hypothesis was tested using regression at 0.05 level of significance, and the result is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Regression analysis of the relationship between incompatibility and midlife crisis among married couples in Jos metropolis

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	Sig
1 Regression	.159	1	.159	7.607	.006
Residual	37.582	1797	.021		
Total	37.741	1798			

The low P-value indicates that the relationship between incompatibility and midlife crisis among married couples are statistically significant. The coefficient for incompatibility indicates that each additional midlife crisis increases instability in the marriage by approximately 37.582 while controlling everything else in the model. Furthermore, any additional crisis increases average incompatibility by 37.741 while holding the other variables constant. This indicates that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is retained, which is that there is significant relationship between midlife crisis and incompatibility among married couples.

Discussion of the findings

The finding of this study indicated that there is a significant relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises among married couples in Jos metropolis. This implies that couples with good compatibility have better means of managing their midlife crisis, while couples who are incompatible suffer from midlife crisis such as financial problem, sexual satisfaction and lack of good communication. The finding also indicate that couples who are incompatible in their marriage feel less than human because they experienced a lot of midlife crises that lead them to lack accommodative, friendship, caring, empathy, forgiveness and relevant

communication. The finding that there was significant relationship between incompatibility and midlife crisis among the respondents is similar to the findings of Quity (2020) who reported incompatible married adults as having midlife crisis, which made them to commit infidelity, or file for divorce. These adults end up craving for respect, attention and affection from a new partner. In similar findings, Kobayashi (2007) examined some of the diversity of midlife families by describing patterns of separation and divorce, remarriage, same sex relationship between midlife families and social policy. Thus the study reported incompatibility as a cause of midlife crises.

Counselling Implications

Counselling is care given by the counsellor to the client because of an unusual behaviour due to lack of stability in the marriage. It is the responsibility of the counsellor to work on approaches in those areas that cause friction in the marriage. This will enable him/her find resolution to the problem. The counsellor should lead the couples in taking a mature way to tide over the discouragement or disappointment they may discover in the aspect of incompatibility. Based on the findings of this study, counselling provided by trained professionals can make a profound impact on the midlife individual, family as well as the society. This service helps couple in the midlife to navigate the area of their incompatibility that create crisis in them. The priority of the intervention and counselling is to make couples attain a stable marital life at midlife. The intervention is given in form of individual or group counselling. The more they understand the counselling experience the more comfortable they will live with each other as married partners.

Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises in Jos metropolis. A self-structured questionnaire was used to obtain data for the study. A sample of 1,500 couples was used. Findings from the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between incompatibility and midlife crises among middle aged married couples. It can therefore be concluded that incompatibility is a factor in the midlife crises of married couples. Although the study was limited to married couples between the ages of 35 to 55 in Jos metropolis, there is need for a similar study to be carried out in other Local Government Areas of Plateau State.

Recommendations

There is a need for counsellors to sensitize married couples through counselling to improve their commitment to each other, in such a way that will provide strength and stability to the marriage. They should understand the implications of divorce. Couple should understand that it is better to live and manage an incompatible marriage than being divorced. This will go a long way to assist the couples to tide over the many challenges that would come up during the midlife of their marriage. Government should establish counselling centres for giving pre-marital counselling for young adults to understand compatibility in marriage.

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