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Financial Conflict Management and Marital Stability among Couples in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District, Nigeria: Implications for Family Counselling

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Abstract
This study investigated financial conflict management and marital stability in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District. Three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. This study employed a correlational research design. The population for this study comprised all the 115,345 couples in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District. The sample size for the study was 389 couples. A questionnaire titled "Financial Conflict Management and Marital Stability Questionnaire (FCMMSQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was realized when the instrument was trial-tested on 30 couples from the study area who did not take part in the main study. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Finding of the study on hypothesis one revealed that making proper financial decision significantly relate with marital stability. Finding on hypothesis two revealed that sharing financial responsibilities between spouses significantly relate with marital stability. Findings on hypothesis three revealed that setting financial goals has a significant relationship with marital stability. Based on the findings, it was recommended that couples should sit down and outline their duties, such as bill payment, budget maintenance, grocery and clothes shopping, and so on.
Keywords: Financial, conflict, management, marital, stability

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable in families and financial conflict is one of it. Financial conflict among couples if not well handled could set aside the once peaceful and enjoyable family. Adesanya (2012) stated that most conflicts among spouses stem from finances; either the husband is the leading party in the conflict or the wife, and sometimes both. Financial conflict emerges when each party believes or feels that he/she is being cheated financially. Most often, it is the husband who controls the whole bulk of money while the wife is on the receiving side. This often brings dissatisfaction on the part of the wife. On the other hand, if the wife is in control, the case is often worse. The husband feels cheated, not happy, jealous, humiliated and sees the wife as a threat. Spending without agreement most often brings conflict, especially when the husband or wife spends without the consent of the other party. This most often results in conflict.

According to Adesanya (2012), marital stability is the relationship in which couples live together in marriage, enjoying the closest possible loving and fulfilling relationship without any intention of breakup. The scholar maintained that a peaceful relationship is achieved when married couples understand their individual roles and work together towards it. The scholar also identified certain factors that ensure marital stability to include economic wellbeing, responsiveness, faithfulness, acceptance and unconditional love. Adesanya (2012) noted that the strongest factor of marital stability is considered to be economic satisfaction. This may account for why Owuamanam (2001) stated that inadequate provision of essential needs for wives and children within the family is capable of creating tension, conflict and poor marital adjustment. Similarly, Owuamanan and Osakinle (2005) observed that poor economic wellbeing could cause marital instability in homes that may lead to separation and divorce.

Horrocks (2010) reported that ninety-six percent of the United States population will have reported having been married at some point by age 65 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004). With such a high marriage rate, it is not surprising that studies estimate between 40% and 50% will end in divorce before one partner dies (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007). This statement, however, is not true for everyone as factors such as education, age, and income can decrease the risk of divorce. For example, well-educated couples aged 25 and older with higher incomes that wait to have children until after marriage, have a greater chance of being happy in their marriage relationships (Wilcox & Wolfinger, 2007). Components of successful marriage relationships are, therefore, intriguing topics to research. Among the many aspects of successful marriages, researchers have studied how couples address financial issues. Financial issues may be approached by addressing the factors which either deter or enable couples to have success in marriage. Scholars suggest that how couples talk about financial matters in marriage has a greater impact than which specific financial issues cause conflict (Gottman, 1999). Thus, studying how couples in successful, healthy marriages address financial issues is an important topic to research (Dimkpa, 2014). One primary factor known to cause a decrease in marital satisfaction is arguments over finances (Dew, 2008; Dew, 2009). According to Olson, DeFrain and Skogrand (2011), among the factors which contribute to marital satisfaction is skill to handle conflict in marriage, especially financial conflict. Research has shown conflict management skills are pervasive among happily married couples (Dimkpa, 2014). Consistent findings regarding the connection between conflict resolution styles and marital satisfaction report a positive relationship between productive conflict resolution and marital satisfaction.

As stated by Stanley, Amato, Johnson and Markman (2006), money management is critical to the success and happiness of any relationship. Money management is a key to a happy family. Beyond physical survival, a family's emotional survival depends on financial stability and tranquility. Money can enhance or destroy one's marriage and can lead to mistrust, name-calling, selfishness, dishonesty, and even divorce. Research

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examining the causes of family financial problems shows that money problems are caused by a lack of financial understanding, personal behaviour problems, and relationship problems. Although some financial problems are simply caused by poor financial understanding resulting in unwise decisions, research suggests that most financial problems are caused by non-financial, behavioural problems such as impulse buying, excessive materialism, preoccupation with social image, using money to control others, addictive behaviour etc.

Scholars have identified several factors that drive financial behaviour, including emotions, personality, and an individual's attitude toward money. Papp and Goeke-Morey (2011) maintained that money is closely connected to our emotions. Most people spent money on others to control them. Some have acquired debt to buy gifts and relieve feelings of guilt because they neglected someone. Others go on a shopping spree to overcome sadness or loneliness. An individual's personalities also affect financial behaviour. A wife who is carefree and values spontaneity may resist financial planning, budgeting, and saving. On the other hand, a husband who values order, control, and authority may resist spending money on anything but "absolute necessities"; he may also have difficulty sharing financial control with his wife. People's financial behaviour is also influenced by their attitude toward money, which is partly determined by their childhood. Money can symbolize feelings like control, fear, guilt, or abandonment. Majority of spouses resist discussing financial matters with their partners because their parents argued about it frequently when they were young. Most spouses grow up in an affluent family and, consequently, do not understand the need to budget and save. A greater number of people need to have a new car to feel confident and superior to their neighbours.

Sharing some of the financial responsibilities like budgeting, shopping, investing, and paying bills is very essential in reducing financial conflict among spouses. In addition to an individual and spouse's individual financial behaviour, one's relationship has a tremendous impact on his money. Researchers have identified the following qualities of marriage that affect financial security: communication, emotional intimacy, mutual respect and communication, trust and love. If an individual's relationship is plagued by mistrust, poor communication, selfishness, disrespect, or manipulation, he/she may be likely to have money problems. Some of the relationship issues that can cause financial distress include poor communication, control and manipulation of others, ill-defined roles, selfishness, disrespect, mistrust.

Effective communication about family finances and goals is critical to money management. Most spouses have bad attitude toward money, as such one should understand his or her spouse's financial goals to avoid coerciveness. Some spouses do not talk to their partners before making a large purchase nor do they consult their spouse about how to spend extra money like refunds, gifts, or bonuses. Most men for instance,

are motivated to save money for a rainy day because his family had money problems when they were children. Personal observation by the researcher reveals that many spouse use money to control their partners. Some go on shopping and exceed the family budget because of anger with the spouse. Only few spouses consider their partners' feelings before making financial decisions. A greater number of spouses do not communicate openly with their spouse, especially the wife, about their financial income while some hide some of their money so that the other partner will not spend it.

There are various financial conflict management strategies and one of them is changing one's financial behaviour. This involves managing one's money with a written budget, making a list defining each spouse's financial roles and responsibilities, making purchases that are appropriate to one's income level, making a list separating one's basic needs from one's wants, keeping expenses constant even when one's income increases, giving family members some allowance to spend the way they choose without being accountable to anyone.

Cutting down expenses could help in resolving financial conflict. This include avoiding impulse buying, making a shopping list and sticking to it, setting time delays or waiting periods before making large purchases, establishing a limit to the amount of money either spouse can spend before consulting his or her partner etc. Apart from cutting down expenses, preparing for the future could equally be helpful in eliminating financial conflict. In this case, the family should establish an emergency savings fund of at least three months' income. If the family has only one breadwinner, consider having savings of six months' income; review medical, life, and property insurance policies to make sure they fit one's circumstances. Ultimately, the goal is to do whatever you can to preserve civility and resolution of conflict in the family because in the long-term, this will have ripple effects on the family.

According to Cattony (2017), spending the "extra" money from one's paycheck without consulting one's spouse, who wanted to save the money for one's children's college funds, could result in financial conflict. The author therefore maintained that financial goals should be set together by spouses. He reiterated that each person should talk to his/her spouse before making large purchases or investments. Other strategies include:

- Be aware that each individual have different values, standards, and goals that influence his or her view of money and its uses.
- Understand the family financial rules that existed in one's spouse's family of origin and how they affect his or her financial perspective.
- Communicate openly and lovingly with one's spouse about one's family financial patterns. Assess one's family financial rules and decide which ones you want to keep and which ones you want to change.
- Increase one's financial understanding and skills by using community resources like libraries, schools and seminars.

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- Consider the motivation behind one's financial habits. Do you spend money to "keep up with the Joneses" or improve one's social image? Do you spend money to buy the love and affection of others? Do you control the family money too much because you do not trust one's spouse?
- Plan a family activity to teach all family members about the family finances. For example, cash one's paycheck and show one's children how the money is allocated to various expenses and savings programs.

Horrocks (2010) conducted a study on financial management practices and conflict management styles of couples in great marriages. The study presents findings on the financial management practices and degrees of conflict of couples in great marriages. Qualitative data from a national sample of couples in great marriages were collected using a 31page questionnaire. Of the 81 couples who responded, 40 fit the criteria for the study in that they discussed their level of agreement about financial issues in marriage. Their responses were coded to discover which financial topics are pervasive and whether or not couples agreed over these topics. Responses about conflict were also analyzed to determine the degree of agreement between spouses in different categories. Findings of the study revealed that making proper financial decisions together has influence on home stability. Willie (2017) carried out a study of financial obligations of married couples and marital harmony in Ikot Ekpene Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State with a total of 200 married teachers. Ex-post facto research design was used. Questionnaire was used for data generation and data were treated statistically using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). Findings of the study revealed that couples who shared financial obligations tended to enjoy marital harmony.

Statement of the Problem

For the past decades, there have been cases and reports of marital instability occasioned by financial conflict between spouses. Incessant fighting by couples is heard among neigbours, which sometimes result in domestic violence and even murder. Marital instability has continued to be a serious social problem in the society. This has become a serious threat to the stability of the society since the stability of each marriage or family is the building block for the stability of the nation at large. Marriage counsellors, religious groups, and government have proffered series of strategies towards the achievement of marital stability through various financial management strategies such as financial openness through marriage seminars and workshops. Despite these efforts, financial conflict which results in marital instability has continued to be a mirage in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.

Personal observation by the researcher has shown that most of the marital conflicts in the family are caused by mismanagement of funds, and taking financial decisions by one spouse without consulting the partner. This has generated a cause for concern among stakeholders. Some observers tend to lay the blame on lack of financial goal setting by

the spouses, while others blame it on such factors as lack of sharing financial responsibilities in the family between the husband and wife. It is against this backdrop that the researcher deemed it fit to carry out a study on the financial conflict management and marital stability among couples in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study was to examine financial conflict management among spouses in Akwa Ibom State. The study specifically examine:

i. The relationship between making weekly or monthly decision on how to spend money and marital stability.
ii. The relationship between sharing financial responsibilities and marital stability.
iii. The relationship between setting financial goals and marital stability.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at .05 alpha level:

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between making decisions on how to spend money and marital stability.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between sharing financial responsibility and marital stability.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between setting financial goals and marital stability.

Research Methodology

This study employed a correlational research design. A *correlational* study is a type of research design where a researcher seeks to understand what kind of relationships naturally occurring variables have with one another. In simple terms, *correlational* research seeks to figure out if two or more variables are related and, if so, in what way. The population for this study comprised all the 115,345 couples in Akwa Ibom South Senatorial District who have married for five years and above (Community Register, 2019). The sample size for the study was 389 couples. To determine the sample size, Taro Yamen formula (1964) was used as follows:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where;
N = Total Population Size
e = Level of Significant
n = Total Sample Size
1 = constant

$$\text{Then } n = \frac{115345}{1 + (115345 \times 0.05^2)}$$

$$= \frac{115345}{289.36}$$

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n = 398.62
Sample size = 399

A researcher-developed questionnaire was used for collecting data from the respondents. The questionnaire titled "Financial Conflict Management and Marital Stability Questionnaire (FCMMSQ)" was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 20 items with four options of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by three experts. A reliability coefficient of 0.82 was established when the instrument was trial-tested on 30 couples from the study area who did not take part in the main study. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents in their respective offices with the help of two trained research assistants. Out of 399 copies of questionnaire administered, 389 copies were retrieved. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. For the null hypotheses, the decision rule was to reject the null hypothesis, if the calculated r is greater than the critical r at the .05 level of significance

Presentation of results

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between making decisions on how to spend money and marital stability.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Making Financial Decision and Marital stability

Variables	n	r_{-cal}	r_{-cri}	df	p-value	Remarks
Making Financial Decisions	389	.768*	.088	387	.011	Significant
Marital stability	389					

Table 1 showed a calculated r value of .768, which indicates a strong relationship between making financial decisions and marital stability. Also, the p-value is found to be less than .05 at 387 degree of freedom. Since the p-value of .011 is less than 05, then the null hypothesis, which stated that making financial decisions has no significant relationship with marital stability, is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This shows that making proper financial decision significantly relates with marital stability.

Ho2: There is no significant relationship between sharing financial responsibility and marital stability.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Sharing Financial Responsibility and Marital Stability

Variables	n	r_{-cal}	r_{-cri}	df	p-value	Remarks
Sharing Financial Responsibility	389	.897*	.088	387	.020	Significant
Marital stability	389					

The result on table 2 indicates a calculated r value of .897, at 387 degree of freedom and .05 significant level. Since the calculated p-value (.020) is less than .05, then the null hypothesis, which stated that sharing financial responsibility has no significant relationship with marital stability is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This shows that sharing financial responsibility has significant relationship with marital stability.

Ho3: There is no significant relationship between setting financial goals and marital stability.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Setting Financial Goals and Marital stability

Variables	n	r_{-cal}	r_{-cri}	df	p-value	Remarks
Setting Financial Goals	389	.801*	.088	387	.015	Significant
Marital stability	389					

The result as presented in Table 3 reveals a calculated r value of .801 on the relationship between setting financial goals and marital stability. The result infers that setting financial goals significantly relates to marital stability. From the result, it is seen that the calculated p-value of .015 is less than .05 at 387 degree of freedom. Since the calculated p value is less than the .05, then the null hypothesis, which stated that setting financial goals has no significant relationship with marital stability stands rejected, showing that setting financial goals promotes marital stability.

Discussion of the findings

Findings of the study on hypothesis one revealed that making proper financial decision significantly relates with marital stability. The finding inferred that when couples make proper and open financial decision on how each kobo would be spent, there is likelihood of marital stability among them. For instance, making weekly or monthly appointments to discuss money matters with one's spouse is very important. It is pertinent to note that when money is spent based on mutual agreement between spouses, the tendency of conflict is eliminated. This finding corroborates Horrocks (2010), whose findings revealed that making proper financial decisions together has influence on home stability.

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Finding on hypothesis two revealed that sharing financial responsibilities between spouses significantly relate with marital stability. The finding implied that sharing some of the financial responsibilities like budgeting, shopping, investing, and paying bills together is a panacea for treating financial conflict among couples. Sitting down with one's spouse and outlining one's duties, such as bill payment, budget maintenance, grocery and clothes shopping, and so on helps in curbing financial conflict. This finding corroborates the finding of Willie (2017) which revealed that couples who shared financial obligations tend to enjoy marital harmony.

Findings on hypothesis three revealed that setting financial goals has a significant relationship with marital stability. The implication of the finding is that when couples set their financial goals even before the money comes, they are less likely to spend recklessly. The finding corroborates the finding of Cattony (2017) who concluded that spending the "extra" money from one's paycheck without consulting one's spouse, who wanted to save the money for one's children's college fund could result in financial conflict. The author therefore maintained that financial goals should be set together by spouses. He reiterated that each person should talk to his/her spouse before making large purchases or investments.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was therefore concluded that making proper financial decision is a strong force in maintaining marital stability. Sharing financial responsibilities among spouses also serves as a therapy for solving financial conflict among couples. Setting financial goals determines the level of marital stability.

Implications for Counselling Practitioners

The present study offers implications for professional counsellors who assist couples both in managing relationships and finances. Even though couples may be willing to admit readily that money issues are problems, this does not mean that these issues are handled readily or effectively. Family counsellors should be aware of this data to support the likelihood that unresolved strife is increased when money issues arise. Moreover, disagreements concerning money and finances may need to be monitored for compartmentalization. That is, because results indicated money conflicts to be difficult to handle, family counsellors are encouraged to make sure money tensions are not spilling over into other areas of the couples' relationship. Next, although some attention has been given to couples handling money issues during divorce (Benjamin & Irving, 2001), the present results strongly encourage family counsellors to be aware of the threats to intact marriages that are posed by money issues and the importance of facilitating how marital partners manage their money differences.

Practitioners and educators who address couples' money and debt concerns would benefit from having additional knowledge of money disagreements across relationship contexts (Dew, 2008). As examples, this study indicates: (1) decisions about money and finances are likely to have been discussed previously and may need to be addressed again in the future; (2) couples use more negative interaction styles when discussing money compared to other issues; and (3) partners rate money disagreements as having important implications for their relationship in the short and long terms. When coaching couples through money-related decisions, areas that cause disagreements or conflicts for couples may require additional time, empathy, and guidance. Many couples may be reassured to hear that money differences (independent of marital and financial functioning) are likely to persist and require explicit attempts at problem-solving, and that handling them well may require more effort than other issues.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings and conclusion of this study, it was recommended as follows:

1. Couples should share responsibilities to ensure that financial burdens are not laid on one partner.
2. Couples should sit down and outline their duties, such as bill payment, budget maintenance, grocery and clothes shopping, and so on.
3. There is need for financial openness between spouses.
4. Couples should communicate with their spouses about each other's expectations and desires. They should seek to understand one's spouse's feelings.

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