

## **Bullying, Self-Disclosure and Sexual Incompatibility as Correlates of Marital Instability among Newly Married Adults in Nigeria**

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**Abstract.** The rate of divorce is increasing steadily among newly married adults in Nigeria than what it used to be in time past. Some couples engage in activities that are detrimental to the growth and development of the family. The study investigated bullying, self-disclosure and sexual-incompatibility as correlates of marital instability among newly married adults in Nigeria. The descriptive survey research procedure of the correlational type was adopted. The target population was all newly married adults between 1-6 years in Nigeria. Multi-stage sampling consisting of purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to draw a sample of 2,400 respondents from the target population. The instrument used for data collection was tagged ‘Bullying, Self-disclosure, Sexual-incompatibility and Marital Instability Questionnaire (BSSMIQ)’. The instrument which has five sections was validated by experts in the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin. The instrument was subjected to test re-test reliability technique and the values of 0.76, 0.74, 0.72 and 0.76 were obtained for bullying, self-disclosure, sexual-incompatibility and marital instability respectively. One null hypothesis was raised. Data collected were computed using percentage

and correlation matrix. The findings of the study show that there were significant relationships among bullying, level of self-disclosure, sexual-incompatibility and marital instability of newly married adults in Nigeria ( $r=0.425$ ,  $p<0.05$ ),  $r=0.660$ ,  $p<0.05$ ,  $r=0.706$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). The study concluded that majority of the newly married adults attributed their marital instability to external factors; bullying, self-disclosure and sexual-incompatibility. The findings of the study have implication for counselling, the newly married adults can improve naturally when they align their desires and attitudes with principles of commitment, honesty and personal accountability. Based on the findings, counsellors need to counsel the newly married adults to ignore abusive behaviours such as destructive criticism, contempt or aggressive defensiveness.

**Keywords:** bullying; sexual incompatibility; self-disclosure; marital instability

### **1. Introduction**

Marriage is known to be a special bond shared between two souls, who tie the wedding knot after promising to be companion for a life time.

It is the physical, mental and spiritual union of two souls which brings significant stability and substance to human relationship and plays a crucial role in transferring the culture from one generation to the other (William, Chamber, Logan & Robinson, 1999). Marriage has been described as a covenant relationship between male and female adults. The covenant nature of marriage provides strong foundation and secure framework for spouses' commitment to each other.

Marriage is a common institution to all human societies which is supported by the major religions in Africa that is, Christianity, Islam and African traditional (Esere, 2002). It is also the role relationship between husband and wife which defines the manner establishing and dissolving family unit and the rights and obligations within it (Nwobi, 1997). The family is a social set up in the sense that it can hardly come into existence unless the couple decides to bring it into being (Olayinka & Omoegun, 2002).

When people make choices to marry, they want to live happily even after; they want a loving, happy, successful marriage. Nevertheless, after they have been married for a while, and the novelty has worn off, they tend to discover that marriage does not maintain itself. Marriage requires effort from both spouses to stay. Marriage can equal either bliss or chains. It all depends on what one makes of it. Marriage depends on many different things to be successful: trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty, sincerity and above all effective communication. Many marriages experience a lot of problems such as bullying, lack of self – disclosure and sexual incompatibility which may result into marital instability.

Internal marriage crises (e.g bullying) occur through a failure in marriage relationship of new couples. This failure is founded on many variables: lack of understanding, commitment, ineffective communication, irrational thinking, the nature and dynamic of the marital relationship among others (Jollin, 2007). Most newly married couples experience various tensions in their relationship which lead to

continuous deepening of crisis due to lack of constructive solution (Nwoye, 1991).

Bullying is a serious problem because spouses that experience any form of bullying at home become seriously affected by such acts. The home becomes an intimidating place for them and they spend their days worrying about being victimized. In fact, some homes have completely become a threatened environment for some newly married couples because of the type of relationship style (autocratic husband) where the husband bullied so much at his wife and thus makes her to be fearful in expressing her grievances. The wives who are bullied may as well become bullies themselves out of retaliation (Olweus, 1992). Bullying also involves direct acts such as physical violence and intimidation, as well as more indirect forms, such as isolation, exclusion and humiliation. Angst (1998) opined that bullying creates a lot of anxiety for the newly married couples (husband or wife) because it reduces emotional intelligence, self – esteem and thus makes the parties involved to create an unsafe environment for themselves because it encourages them to live in isolation by making them to be avoiding themselves from interacting with each other.

The bedrock of a good relationship that exists between the husband and the wife is good communication; marriage that was not built on an effective communication is likely to break up. Communication is very essential in stabilizing marriage. Communicating effectively enables the couples to resolve conflict amicably. It is also a life wire of marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship (Esere, 2002, 2006). A marriage without effective communication is likely to crumble. Effective communication is the elixir for ailing marital relationship. With so many marriages ending tragically in divorce (Adegoke & Esere, 1998), so many problems escalate when there is no adequate self-disclosure and many problems are resolved when there is effective self-disclosure. For sure, self-disclosure as an aspect of communication is the key to successful marriage, and without it, no marriage can survive in this divorce- filled dynamic world (Jolin, 2007).

Self-disclosure is seen by Hybels and Weaver (2001) as any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings which involve not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and style. Self - disclosure is an integral feature of interpersonal relationship. It is a pillar which maintains the influence of spousal communication on marital stability, structure of peaceful co- existence and mutual understanding. Self - disclosure is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship (Esere, 2008). It is the key to a strong healthy relationship. It allows partners to feel loved and caring. Effective self - disclosure requires practice of the skills of listening and expressing thoughts and feelings. Self-disclosure pattern includes having a partner who really talks, a good listener, a good friend who likes and appreciates his/her spouse as a person and does his or her share to make the relationship work. Intimacy begins when couples self- disclose something personal and important to each other, also responding in an encouraging way. Self-disclosure is an important building block for intimacy. Intimacy cannot be achieved among the newly married adults without it, so it has to be reciprocal and appropriate. Most self-disclosure usually occurs early in relational development, but more intimate self-disclosure occurs later. Women self-disclose to enhance a relationship whereas men self-disclose relative to control and vulnerability (Esere, 2008).

Idowu and Esere (2007) opined that more than half of the failed relationships are due to the fact that there was a severe lack of self - disclosure between couples. In order to have a long and lasting relationship with someone, one must have excellent self-disclosure skills. One must be able to convey one's emotions and thoughts, as well as being able to absorb one's partner's emotions and thoughts. Some people do not self-disclose with words, they self-disclose through actions. If one pays close attention, one will get what he/she wants from his/her partner. But the problem is that most couples do not pay close attention to each other, thereby causing marital disharmony (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Self-disclosure in marriage is fundamental to human

interaction and intimate couple relations, in part because it is a tool for knowing or emotionally connecting with one another. It was discovered from one study of couple that both men and women agreed that the emotional connection they shared with their partner was what determined the quality of their relationship (Barnett & Rivers, 1996).

Marital stability is the relationship in which couples live together in marriage, enjoying the closest possible loving and fulfilling relationship without any intention of break up (Adesanya, 2002). A peaceful relationship is achieved when married couples understand their individual's roles and work together towards it. Adesanya (2002) identified certain factors that ensure marital stability such as economic well-being, responsiveness among others. Job stability may mar or enhance marital stability because it determines the interactions between labour market and marital status outcome. High rates of instability may in turn lower marriage rates of young people (Neumark, 2002).

Owuamanam and Adesanya (2003) opined that inadequate provision of essential needs for wives and children within the family is capable of creating tension, conflict and poor marital adjustment. Also, Osundiya (2005) observed that marital instability in homes could lead to separation and divorce. Ambakederemo and Ganagana (2006) found that marital instability is caused by sex-related issues, bullying, lack of self-disclosure, love and trust, socio-cultural factors, anti-social vices and lasting economic factors.

Marital instability refers to series of thought or actions by spouses that frequently lead to actual separation or divorce as a result of problematic marital relationships which increase emotional distress among couples (Gotlib & McCabe, 1990). Emotionally balanced home has positive multiplier effect on the society and the family at large because an emotionally threatened home affects the interaction between the husband and the wife. To this end, this research investigated bullying, self - disclosure and sexual incompatibility as correlates of marital instability among newly married adults in Nigeria.

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Some couples engage in activities that are detrimental to the growth and development of the family (Conger et al, 1990). Amao (2002) in his study, found out that out of 547 cases of marital conflicts investigated, 206 of them were resolved and 314 disintegrated their marriages due to conflicts and disagreements. Various researchers have reported that the rate of divorce in Nigeria is steadily increasing and today more couples divorce more than what it used to be in the time past ( Lofas & Sova; 1995, Adegoke & Esere,1998).

With rapid modernization and westernization of societies, those norms, practices and traditional values which initially kept African marriages are now being eroded. There is a big paradigm shift from what used to be obtained in marriage in the time past (Greene, Delerga & Mathews, 2006). The mindset, values and expectations with which couples enter into marriages have drastically changed. The average Nigerian lady is educated and has views and expectations of what her marital life should offer. The same applies to her male counterpart. It is common to hear young girls discuss the kind of man, they will like to marry. The media has made it worse with social media portrayal of who an ideal woman should be. All these lead young men and women to enter into marriage with wrong notions and expectations of what marriage should be.

Several propositions have been presented in the past to substantiate the enhancement or the deterioration of quality of couples' relationship such as those by Derlega (1993) and Mittal (2005) which focused on self-disclosure, closeness and its implication on the structure, development and prediction of marital instability. Yusuf (2005) focused on indices of marital instability; Isiaka (2005) investigated relationship between divorce and spousal communication and found that lack of effective communication in marriage precedes divorce. Oyewo (2007) worked on sexual dysfunction and communication as correlates of marital dissatisfaction among civil servants in Nigeria. It was revealed that these variables caused

marital dissatisfaction which later culminated into marital instability and divorce.

This study was a further attempt at investigating other variables that could predict marital instability among newly married adults in Nigeria.

## 3. Method

*Design:* Correlational research design was adopted for this study. The researchers employed correlational design because the research was aimed at investigating the relationship that exists between the independent variables (bullying, self-disclosure and sexual incompatibility) and dependent variable (marital instability).

*Participants and setting:* The population for this study consisted of all newly married adults in Nigeria. Respondents that fall between 1-6 years in marriage from churches, mosques and agencies in the sampled state formed the target population. The multi -stage sampling method was adopted in selecting participants for the study. At stage one, purposive sampling method was used to select six states, one from each of the six existing geo – political zones in Nigeria. At stage two, stratified random sampling technique was used to classify variables into group of desired characteristics such as age, religion, educational level among others. At stage three, the simple random sampling technique was employed to select participants from each stratum. A total of 400 newly married adults were randomly selected from each of the states of the six-geo political zones which amounted to 2,400 respondents.

*Instrument:* Data were gathered from the target sample using a self-developed questionnaire titled "Bullying, Self- Disclosure, Sexual-Incompatibility and Marital Instability Questionnaire (BSSMIQ). The instrument (BSSMIQ) was given to five (5) experts in the Department of Counsellor Education to ascertain its content validity. These experts, following detailed scrutiny, made suggestions which were taken into consideration in the final draft of the questionnaire. The reliability coefficient of

BSSMIQ was determined by using the test-retest method. The correlation coefficient obtained was 0.72. The coefficient was considered to be high enough for the researchers to conclude that the instrument is reliable.

*Method of Data Analysis:* Correlational Matrix was used to analyse the hypothesis to consider the relationship between the independent

*Hypothesis One: Bullying acts, self-disclosure patterns and sexual incompatibility indices will not significantly correlate marital instability among newly married adults in Nigeria.*

variables ( bullying, self-disclosure and sexual incompatibility) and dependent variable (marital instability).

**4. Results**

Correlational Matrix Analysis technique was applied to analyse the data, so as to check the significant correlations.

Variables	1	2	3	4
1.Bullying acts	1.000			
2.Self-Disclosure	0.532**	1.000		
3.Sexual incompatibility	0.410**	0.722**	1.000	
4.Marital Instability	0.425*	0.660*	0.706**	1.000

Table 1: Correlation Matrix Showing the Relationship between the Independent and Dependent Variables

The results from Table 1 revealed that marital instability had significant correlation with bullying acts ( $r = 0.425, p < 0.05$ ). The table also shows that marital instability had significant correlation with self-disclosure ( $r = 0.660, p < 0.005$ ), It was also revealed from the table that marital instability had significance correlation with sexual incompatibility ( $r = 0.706, p < 0.05$ ). Summary of correlational matrix of the combined correlation of marital instability by the three independent variables (i.e bullying acts, Self-Disclosure pattern and sexual incompatibility) revealed that the three independent variables play significant role on the marital instability of the newly married adults. Therefore the hypothesis is not accepted.

**5. Discussion**

The study focused on the investigation of the relationship among Bullying, Self-Disclosure, Sexual incompatibility and marital instability of the married adults in Nigeria. A total of 2,400 newly married adults in Nigeria participated in the study out of which 2399 became the actual respondents because one of the questionnaire forms was not returned by the respondent.

A significant relationship was found between marital instability and bullying acts ( $r = 0.425, p < 0.05$ ). This affirms the study of Squire and Susan (2008) who opined that the couple, who engages in any form of bullying at each other,

ends up in divorce or marital instability. Schuster (1996) also affirmed that power imbalance and the fact that bullying behavior is repeated overtime among couples, makes them to experience marital instability. These findings may be due to the fact that bullying can cause a lot of pandemonium among newly married adults. This finding corroborates Olweus (1993) who noted that males tend to be more aggressive than females, they have little empathy for their victims and show little or no remorse.

The findings also implies that marital instability had a significant correlation with self-disclosure ( $r = 0.660, p < 0.05$ ) which indicates that self-disclosure had significant relationship with marital instability of newly married adults. This findings corroborate (Brandon, 2004) which noted that self-disclosure in marriage is a life giving river, when husband and wife cannot self-disclose effectively, a huge dam is built stopping the flow of water, seeds that were once planted cannot grow and both spouses develop a strong inward thirst for their unmet needs, eventually causing multiple cracks throughout their relationship. This corroborates the study of Aphys (2012) which expressed that the place of communication in marriage cannot be over emphasized in a marriage relationship. The study of Barnett, (1998); Gutheil and Gabbard, (1998) also established that verbal and other deliberate actions, such as placing a certain

family photo in the office or an emphatic gesture such as a touch or certain sound enhances the marital stability of married adults. The couple must be counselled on the emotional communication as a way of self-disclosing to each other which means the creation of relationship-relevant meaning which is like circulatory system of a relationship which allows meaning and sentiment to flow between partners. It is the system for paying attention to each other (Gottman, 1994). Also, they must be made to understand that intimacy is the basis for healthy self-disclosure patterns which begins with partners sharing something personal and important to them and the spouse responding in an encouraging way, i.e couples need to pay more attention to each other's patterns of emotional engagement and responsiveness in contexts other than conflict resolution (Driver & Gottman, 2004).

It was also revealed that marital instability had significant correlation with sexual incompatibility ( $r=0.706$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) which implies that the sexual incompatibility of the newly married adults had significant relationship with marital instability of the newly married adults. This corroborates Murdock (2006) which expressed that sexual aversion disorder is an exaggerated form of hypoactive sexual desire disorder and it represents the persistent or recurrent phobic aversion to genital contact with a sexual partner which causes personal distress that can lead to marital instability. This corroborates the study of Akinade and Sulaiman (2005) who observed that inability or failure to engage in effective sexually stimulating behaviour is a cause of sexual dysfunction which may lead to marital instability among married adults in Nigeria.

The findings confirm various studies (Nadir, 2003; Isiaka, 2005, Manning and Cohen 2010, Hess, 2011) which indicated that the three predictor variables have influence on marital instability of the newly married adults.

## 6. Implications for Counsellor Education

The findings of study will contribute significantly in training professional counsellors in the following ways:

- to make them to recognize the significant effects of variables, such as bullying, self-disclosure and sexual incompatibility on marital instability
- to incorporate these variables (bullying, self-disclosure and sexual incompatibility) into the counsellor education curriculum
- to fully incorporate sexuality education into counsellor education curriculum

## 7. Recommendations

Based on the outcome of this research, the following recommendations were made:

- the newly married should be taught about self-disclosure strategies that promote healthy relationship.
- religious organizations should invite professionals in the field of marriage counselling to sensitize the members of their religious organizations about the importance of self-disclosure in marriage.
- professionals in counselling psychology, most especially marriage counsellors should organize couples education where self – disclosure, bullying and sexuality education will be discussed
- newly married adults should be encouraged to pay attention to the non-verbal communication aspects of their relationships, i.e body language, eye contact and that physical touch goes a long way to self-disclose thoughts and feelings. Each (husband or wife) must refuse to play the blame game, which means they must be able to tolerate and accept each other as they are.

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