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Abstract

This study assessed the marital conflict resolution services of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Ilorin, Kwara State, to appraise the extent and level of effectiveness of services to the clients 'service users' of the Ministry. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 334 research participants, but 310 questionnaires were recovered from the participants. A self-structured questionnaire titled "Marital Conflicts Resolution Services Questionnaire" (MCRSQ) was used for gathering data for the study. Three hypotheses were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) statistics with a pre-set alpha of 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the level/extent of effectiveness of resolution services, and there is a significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality. However, the third hypothesis was accepted based on the result that there is no significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilization of services of the Ministry. Based on the findings of the study, it recommended that government should employ more qualified and competent staff to enhance effective marital resolution services of the Ministry; the welfare of the staff of the Ministry should be improved in order to enhance effective service provision to service users, and the Ministry should intensify efforts to adopt the new best practices in the service provided to the clients.

Keywords: Assessment, Conflict Resolution Services, Marital Conflicts, Marital Resolution, Marital Quality, Marriage, Utilization,

Introduction

Marriage is a social institution in which a man and a woman (or men/women) willingly decided to live as husband and wife (or wives) by social and legal commitment (Adeyemi, 2013). Marriage is a ubiquitous institution found in all cultures, races, ethnic or religious groups, and nations of the world (Vincent, 2007). Mahuta (2007) sees marriage as a publicly recognized, legally approved, and culturally sanctioned union between a male and one or more females and vice versa which is intended to be enduring, to give sexual rights to each other (the couples), and to fulfil other social functions like procreation, social status, economic roles amongst others. It is a unique institution that affirms and supports a diverse human culture coming together as a spouse, which ensures continuous human generation and existence through procreation and fosters the conjugal

relationship between the couples (Papeboes & Whitehead, 2011).

Marital conflicts often constitute a subject of discourse all over the world because of the side effect of broken marriages. Globally, divorce has become a serious problem as many are affected by the effects of marital conflicts and separation. Every marriage is constantly under the influence of some external and internal pressures, a condition that is sometimes inevitable; hence every marital union faces the dynamics of marital crises (Amadi & Amadi, 2014). Research has shown that marital conflicts in Nigeria manifest as a result of lack of meaningful courtship, incompatibility, childlessness, poverty, background differences, and unemployment, amongst others (Kreider & Fielders, 2012). It has been observed that in Nigeria, the rate at which couples experience conflicts, divorce, and re-marriage is quite alarming (Dada & Idowu, 2006). Adeniyi (2011) noted that the problems of the marriage institution in Nigeria had become a significant challenge to the society partly because of a situation where the economy is not stable, there is bound to be problems in the homes. According to Adeniyi (2011), women are the ones responsible for about 80% of the provisions in some homes as a home manager, and when the stress becomes too much, the woman could be lured into extra-marital affairs, which could cause a lot of problems to the marital relationships. Many married couples in Nigeria have been seriously in conflicts with themselves simply because of their inability to manage or resolve conflicting issues between themselves in their marriage.

The predisposing threat of divorce is inherent in marital conflicts, which pose a great concern to couples, children of the marriage, and significant others. Marital conflicts are inimical to a fulfilling and happy marriage, and efforts/attempts to consult experts such as Social Workers, Social Welfare officers, and other professionals for help by the affected couples for effective resolution in Nigeria are now standard. Killawi et al. (2014) conducted a study among the Muslim community, and it was discovered that most respondents did not seek professional intervention from the onset of their problem until their crisis had escalated. They pointed out that if the service was provided earlier, the issue could have been resolved amicably.

Similarly, some of the reasons militating against effective utilization of professional marital intervention services include unwillingness attitude, reluctance to share their private life, absence of effective intervention, the notion that it was already late to seek marital intervention from professionals, and interference by family members amongst others (Sullivan & Anderson, 2002). The roles of Social Workers in this context include Pre-marital counselling services, self-help organization, parents without partners (PWP), and divorce mediation (Zastrow, 2004). The Ministry of Women Affairs is one of the Agencies that are saddled with resolving marital conflicts at formal and official levels. In the Ministry of Women Affairs are seasoned social welfare officials and Social Workers whose duties, amongst others, are to bring about marital harmony and satisfaction. The choice of the study area was informed by the fact that most marital discord in the Ilorin metropolis, especially among those who originated from the areas and its environs, were usually settled at the family level. However, when all efforts by the family elders and other

significant others are futile, and the crisis degenerated. Ministry of Women Affairs (Social Welfare Unit), Ilorin, Kwara State is usually the next resolution centre where the aggrieved spouses of the areas usually approach for necessary resolution because of their great record in mediating marital disharmony over the years.

A lot of studies have been carried out on the issue of marital conflicts in Nigeria and other societies of the world, but none of these has focused on the activities of the Ministry of Women Affairs of the Kwara State Government of Nigeria. This lack of empirical study by researchers on marital conflicts resolution services of the Ministry of Women Affairs Ilorin, Kwara State, creates a knowledge gap in marital conflicts discourse in Nigeria. The goal of this study is, therefore, to fill this existing gap. It specifically explores the nature and impact of marital resolution intervention in Ilorin and environs and evaluates the roles/activities of the Ministry of Women Affairs in the context of proffering feasible panacea to the problems of marital conflicts in the study area. In view of this, the present study examines the marital conflict resolution services of the Ministry of Women Affairs (Social Welfare Unit), Ilorin, Kwara State.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted the correlational survey research design. The study used this method to survey the opinions, preferences, and perceptions of the services of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Ilorin, in one short survey contact with the participants. The population of this study included Social Workers and Social Welfare Officials in the Ministry of Women Affairs who have been in service for at least five years and have been involved in marital conflict resolution services. However, the study excluded the members of staff who are recently employed i.e., who have spent less than five years in the Ministry. In the same vein, other participants were the service users (clients) of the Ministry who were accessing the Ministry services and those that have assessed the services for one marital problem or the other.

The total number of service users (clients) from 2016 to 2020 was collected as the population for this study. According to the records in the Ministry, a total number of one thousand and thirty-three (1033) service users have assessed the services since 2016. The breakdown of the figures is: 2016 had 254 cases, 2017 had 217 cases, 2018 had 249 cases, and 2019 to 2020 had 314 cases. The population of Social Workers and Social Welfare Officials was 80. The total population for this study, therefore, was one thousand one hundred and thirteen (N=1113). The study adopted the purposive sampling technique because it allows the selection of desired elements in the sample. The selected participants are based on the researcher's sound judgment of a better representative sample among the target population. Researchers used some parameters, experience, and availability in picking the sample size from the population because some of them cannot render the needed data due to experience and willingness to respond. The sample size of this study was three hundred and thirty-four, which is equivalent to 30% of the total population of the study. Twenty-four service providers (Social Welfare officials and Social Workers) who have five years of working experience and available to respond to the questionnaire were purposively selected

from the Ministry and three hundred and ten service users were also purposively selected or the administration of the questionnaire. With the assistance of the service providers, the researchers purposively selected the participants that consented to be included in the study.

The researchers sought for assistance of the workers at the Ministry in the administration of the questionnaire to their clients. The method was devised in order to gain the confidence and cooperation of the clients in order to respond to it properly. More so, workers have better knowledge and record of them, which helped in easy administration and retrieval of the research instrument. Similarly, the Ministry also served as a meeting point for service users who were currently accessing the services of the Ministry on marital conflict issues. But the in-depth interview was organised for seven service providers of the Ministry. A Self-developed Scale tagged Marital Conflict Resolution Services Questionnaire (MCRSQ) was used to measure the variables in the study. The scale contains two sets of questionnaire items. The first set of questions were directed to service users (clients) and the second set of questions were meant for service providers. The scale consists of five sections, A-E. Section A focused on the personal data (demographic characteristics) of the participants, such as age, gender, religion, educational qualifications, amongst others, and section B focused on marital conflict resolution strategies, and section C focused on the marital conflict resolution outcomes. Section D focused on marital quality among the service users, and section E was developed to measure the service users' utilization of the services of the Ministry. The second research instrument was an in-depth interview (IDI) used in eliciting data from the service providers.

Based on the formulated hypotheses, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) Statistical analysis was used to analyse the data. This was used to establish the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 23.0 version was used for the coding of the collected data. On the other hand, after transcription, the thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered with the in-depth interview. The study was conducted within the ethical approval and guidelines outlined by the Ministry of Women Affairs, Ilorin, Kwara State. The ethical consideration under this study included confidentiality, informed consent and anonymity of the research participants.

Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

Table 1 shows the socio-demographic distribution of the respondents. The distribution of the respondents by gender indicates that more than the average (55.58%) of the service users (clients) and service providers (marriage counsellors) were males, while less than the average of the research participants were females. It can be inferred from the above information that males were the people who accessed the services of the Ministry of Women Affairs Ilorin, Kwara State than the females. Distribution of the respondents by age shows that 48.1 % (149) of the research participants were within the age bracket of 30 to 39 years, followed by 23.2 % (72) of the research participants who were between 20 and 29 years of age, while 16.5 % (51) of the research participants were within the age range of 20 to 29 years of age, followed by 7.7 % (24) of the research participants who

were within the age of 50 and above and 4.5 % (14) of the research participants were below 20 years of age. This implies that the majority of the respondents were between 30 and 39 years of age.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Research Participants

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	173	55.8
Female	137	44.2
Age		
30-39	149	48.1
20-29	72	23.2
40-49	51	16.5
50 and above	24	7.7
30-39	14	4.5
Religion		
Islam	229	73.9
Christianity	73	23.5
ATR	5	1.6
Others	3	1.0
Education		
B.Sc.	136	43.9
NCE and equivalent	70	22.6
M.Sc. and above	40	12.9
Western education (Adult)	18	5.8
Post primary school	18	5.8
Primary school	16	5.2
No formal education	12	3.9
Length of marriage		
1-9 years	195	62.9
10-19 years	115	37.1
Number of Children		
1-4	248	80.0
5 and above	44	14.2
None	18	5.8
Occupation		
Working	280	90.3
Non-working	30	9.7
Profession		
Civil servant	154	49.7
Artisan	72	23.2
Trading	40	12.9
Others	44	14.2
Ethnic group		
Yoruba	259	83.5
Igbo	29	9.4
Hausa	14	4.5
Others	8	2.6

Distribution of the respondents' by religion shows that 73.9 % (229) of the respondents were Muslims, followed by 23.5 % (73) of the respondents who were Christians, while 1.6 % (5) of the respondents were adherents of African Traditional Religion (A.T.R) and 1.0 % (3) of the respondents were adherent of other religions. Almost three-quarters of the respondents were Muslims. The reason for this was because the predominant inhabitants of Ilorin are Muslims. In other words, Islam is the dominant religion of the ancient city of Ilorin. Distribution of the respondents' by the level of education indicates that 12.0 % (40) of the respondents possess Master of Science or equivalent and above 43.9 % (136) of the respondents hold Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.), followed by 22.6 % (70) of the respondents who had National Certificate of Education (NCE) and its equivalent, while 5.8 % (18) of the respondents had Western Education (Adult), followed by 5.8 % (18) of the respondents with post-primary school certificate and 3.9 % (12) of the respondents who have no formal education.

Large proportions of the service users (clients) hold a Bachelor of Science or equivalent. The distribution of the respondents by the length of marriage reveals that more than half of the respondents, i.e., 62.9 % (195) of the research participants, have been married between 1 and 9 years, and 37.1% (115) of the research participants have been married for 10 to 19 years. Therefore, from the above information, the majority of the clients who have accessed the services of the Ministry of Women Affairs Ilorin, Kwara State, have been married for about 1 to 9 years. Distribution of the respondents by the number of children posits that more than three-quarters of the respondents (80.0 %) had between 1 and 4 children, 14.2 % (44) of the respondents had between 5 and above children, and 5.8 % (18) of the respondents had no children.

The distribution of the respondents by occupation revealed that 90.3 % (280) of the respondents are engaged in one work or the others, and 9.7 % (30) of the respondents were not working. This implies that more than 75% of the service users (clients) are working class. The distribution of the respondents' by profession indicates that 49.7 % (154) of the research participants are civil servants, 14.2 % (44) engaged in other professions, followed by 23.2 % (72) of the research participants who are artisan, and 12.9 % (40) of the research participants are traders. Distribution of the respondents' by ethnic group shows that 83.5 % (259) of the respondents are Yoruba, followed by 9.4 % (29) of the respondents who are Igbo, while 4.5 % (14) of the respondents are Hausa and 2.6 % (8) of the respondents are members of other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The majority of the respondents are Yoruba since Ilorin metropolis politically belongs to North-central and geographically South-west. Based on this, the predominant inhabitants of Ilorin are speaking Yoruba people. However, many of the inhabitants of the area of study were descendants of various ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Relationship between Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies and the Extent/Level of Effectiveness of Resolution Services

Table 2 shows a relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the extent/level of effectiveness of resolution services. The table shows an r-value (0.384), that is, a moderate positive

relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the extent/level of effectiveness of resolution services. Thus, it indicates there is a significant relationship between the variables ($p=0.382 < 0.05$ for a two-tailed test). Therefore, it can be inferred that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the extent/level of effectiveness of resolution services, is rejected.

Table 2: Correlation between marital conflict strategies and extent/ level of effectiveness of resolution services.

Variables			Mean	SD	N	R	P-Value	Decision
Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies			16.9029	1.98131	310	0.384	0.000	Rejected
Effectiveness of resolution Services			18.7516	3.58975				

In addition to the above data, some of the data gathered from the in-depth interview of the service providers to check the response of the service users showed a connection and relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the level of effectiveness of resolution services.

A transcript of one of the participants reads:

Approach and strategy in providing a solution to marital conflict go a long way in determining the level of effectiveness of resolution services. Some marital conflict cannot be solved with just mere counselling which is a form of resolution strategies; some requires more proactive intervention strategies. It can be seen in many cases brought to the Ministry as most of them have grown into more difficult marital conflict because they were being managed using counselling alone. However, with the use of more improved professional marital resolution strategies in the Ministry, the level of effectiveness of the resolution services is more positively felt by the couples.

Relationship between Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies and Marital Quality of Service

Table 3 shows a relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality. The table shows an r-value (0.162), that is, a weak positive relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality; thus, it indicates there is a significant relationship between the variables ($p=0.004 < 0.05$ for a two-tailed test). Therefore, it can be inferred that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality, is rejected.

Table 3: Correlation between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality

Variables			Mean	SD	N	R	P-Value	Decision
Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies			16.9029	1.98131	310	0.162	0.004	Rejected
Marital Quality			28.2871	5.87283				

In the interview, some participants reiterated the influence of the conflict resolution strategies on their marital quality. A participant reported:

I have been in the Ministry for some years, and I can testify that most of the cases that have been solved here usually promote marital quality of the couples afterward. I have seen so many of our clients coming back to show gratitude based on the service rendered. They see different improvements in terms of their sex life, communication, and household upkeep and provisions. Most of them are wives who have seen tremendous change in their spouse attitudes

Another participant interviewed pointed out a great relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality. She said:

The lives of couples have always been influenced positively based on intervention strategies adopted here. We ensure that we do a follow-up after some weeks, months, or years depending on the case. So many service users have reported improvement in marital quality among them. Some have said it in a parable by showing gratitude and excessive greetings concerning the intervention strategies. Some will even come back to present gifts as a sign of gratitude to workers here.

Other participants reported a deal of improvement in the marital quality of the service users based on the kind of strategies being adopted. Some even believed that the individualism principle mostly adopts in the provision resolution service has a great deal of influence in the improvement of marital quality. No one has a contrary view regarding the relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality. Some opined that when strategies are not fit for marital conflict, it is going to affect the marital quality indirectly.

Relationship between Marital Conflict Resolution Strategies and Utilisation of Services

Table 4 shows no relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilization of services. The table shows an r-value (0.72), that is, a strong positive relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilization of services; thus, it indicates there is no significant relationship between the variables ($p=0.203 > 0.05$ for a two-tailed test). Therefore, it can be inferred that the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilization of services, is accepted.

Table 3: Correlation between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilisation of services.

Variables			Mean	SD	N	R	P-Value	Decision
Marital	Conflict	Resolution	16.9029	1.98131	310	0.72	0.203	Accepted
Strategies								
Utilisation of Services			19.7710	4.95179				

In the interview transcript, some service providers of the Ministry were interviewed on the challenges to the effective use of their marital resolution services.

One of the participants reported that:

I have been handling marital conflicts for over fifteen years. The significant challenge for our effective services is that most of our service users usually resort to Ministry

when they have explored and exhausted all the options at the family level and when their marriage is on the verge of total collapse and has deteriorated. This has made it difficult for us to easily find an immediate solution to their marital problems.

Another service provider submitted that:

Our offices are not conducive enough for effective service delivery because we don't have a large hall that can accommodate a large number of service users, especially when there is a need for witnesses from the members of the family. Similarly, epileptic power supply, inadequately qualified staff, and lack of incentive are other barriers bedevilling our effective services.

Another service provider pointed out another area of challenges to the effective use of their services thus:

Most of our invited spouses, especially the accused spouse, don't honour our invitation at the initial stage of their cases because of the fear that we are going to divulge their information to a third party which is against the ethic of our service. Fear of stigmatization by the third party is another challenge facing our effective services. Similarly, the government has not been responsive enough to sponsor most of our members of staff to attend seminars and workshops in order to develop ourselves.

Discussions of Findings

The study indicated that effective marital resolution strategies moderately correlated with the extent and level of effectiveness of the marital resolution services of the Ministry. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not accepted because the result shows that effective marital resolution strategies have a significant relationship with the extent and level of effectiveness of the marital resolution services of the Ministry. It can be deduced from this finding that marital conflict resolution strategies such as the use of family/marriage therapists or social workers to mediate between couples, guided courtship, ruling by the court of law, legislating against forced/early marriage, amongst others, have a significant relationship in curbing the high rate of marital conflicts. The outcome of this finding corroborates with the earlier findings of Chandler (1972), whose study posits that individuals can have a crises state and they may lack the capacity to solve it by using their coping efforts, and it becomes imperative for such union to consult specialists for effective conflicts resolution services. It is also in line with Umar (2014), who found that there is a significant relationship between effective marital resolution and the level of effectiveness of resolution services. He noted that marital conflict resolutions are applied psychology which utilizes the psychological process of assisting couples in coping with marital conflicts.

The finding of this study is also in tandem with Samson (2016), which revealed that Social Work is a professional who is trained to help couples maintain a marital relationship where the service provider gave professional assistance to couples so that they can overcome their challenges. Similarly, the outcome of this study is subscribed to Templer (2008), who posited that an effective marital resolution has to do with a change of mind set about children and marriage. This implies that the spouse should not be substituted with children. Therefore, no matter how the level of

conflicts between couples, the partners should always hold each other in high esteem and regards without having the mind set of divorce or separation. The finding of Furlong and Cartmel (2006) supported the stance of the study that there is a relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the extent/ level of effectiveness of the resolution services. Though not all conflict is resolvable, the couple(s) must seek the services of a trained professional like seasoned social workers and trained social welfare officials to initiate peace moves towards a suitable end that is suitable for all concerned parties.

The study also revealed that there is a significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality. The null hypothesis was rejected because the result shows that marital conflict resolution strategies have a significant relationship with marital quality among the participants. The result of this study is in line with the findings of Gladys (2019) that effective marital conflict resolution could help couples maintain marital quality. Thus, the intervention of family therapists goes a long way to enhance the quality of marital satisfaction.

The study also showed that there is no significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilization of services of the Ministry. This implies that once the conflict is amicably resolved by the Ministry, the affected couples may cease to utilize their services. This finding is in tandem with Valiente, Belanger, and Estrada (2002), who posited that the majority of couples whose marital discord has been resolved at the resolution centres did not always utilize the services thereafter. Thus, this demonstrated that seeking post-marital conflict resolution remains a significant challenge for married people.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In view of the foregoing, the categorical state here that there is a significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and the extent/level of effectiveness of resolution services; there is a significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and marital quality, and there is no significant relationship between marital conflict resolution strategies and utilization of services of the Ministry. The Social workers and Social Welfare officials employed the following strategies to ensure fairness and objectivity in their services; they try to negotiate and adopt a give-and-take approach to problem situation; they explore issues with others to find solutions that meet everyone's needs; try to accommodate the wishes of the service users (clients) and they try to figure out what needs to be done and always exhibit fairness and justice when dealing with service users (couples). The above-mentioned strategies have a significant relationship with the reconciliation of marital conflicts. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should employ more qualified and competent staff to enhance effective marital resolution services of the ministry.
2. Conducive environment and the needed facilities should be provided for the ministry to discharge their duties effectively.

3. The staff of the ministry should always guarantee their clients/service users that the information given to them concerning their marital conflicts will be treated with utmost confidentiality as not part of the information will be divulged to the third party.
4. Welfare of the staff should be given utmost priority. Hence, it will boost the morale of the staff to discharge their duties without fair or favour

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