

**THE IMPACT OF MARITAL CONFLICTS ON MALADAPTIVE  
BEHAVIORS AND ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN EDO STATE****Okoye, Chinedu Emeka**

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**Abstract**

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that establishes a formal relationship between a man and a woman, founded on love, companionship, provision, protection, procreation, and mutual respect. It serves as a social, legal, cultural, and religious agreement aimed at uniting individuals to create and nurture a family. While marriage ideally represents a fulfilling and evolving partnership, conflicts may arise when expectations are unmet or challenges are not effectively managed. These conflicts, if unresolved, can escalate over time, potentially leading to maladaptive behaviors, dissatisfaction, or separation. Understanding the dynamics of marital relationships, including the expectations, motivations, and obligations of spouses, is crucial for promoting healthy family systems and societal stability. This study examines the nature of marriage, its intended benefits, and the factors that may lead to conflicts, providing insights for guidance, counseling, and interventions aimed at fostering resilient and harmonious marital relationships.

**Keywords:** Marriage, Marital Conflict, Expectations, Spousal Relationship, Family

**Introduction**

Marriage is a basic institution designed by God as a social agreement between two individuals to become husband and wife. Marriage is a unique commitment in the lives of a man and a woman for which they are expected to enjoy love, happiness, provision, protection, procreation and respect in the society. According to Garba (2016), marriage is a socially, legally, culturally and religiously approved intimate relationship between a man and woman, it is a means of unity that connect between a man and a woman who aim to share a life together for the purpose of establishing a family. Marriage should be an exciting and beautiful adventure which intend to get better with every passing day or year. However, Tolorunleke (2014) noted that little things can slip into this beautiful relationship and if these little things are not properly handled, they can cause conflict and eventual separation between the partners that may trigger over time. Okpechi (2019), opined that people marry for many reasons such as love, happiness, companionship and desire to have children, physical attraction or desire to escape from an unhappy situation. He further stated that marriage is a contract which spells out the reciprocal obligation between the spouse and future children with expectation. Though some of their expectations turned to be reality, while others are unrealistic due to the complex nature of marriage; and each individual is as complex as the universe. Sometimes where these marital expectations are not met, stress (frustration, anxiety, threat, conflict and tension) may occur. Accordingly, these variables work negatively to affect one's performance. Conflict is a state of disagreement between two parties. It is also a state of tension or anger that builds up as a result of disagreement

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or lack of understanding. Diez (2016) posits that conflict is a struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals. Conflict is not always characterized by violence, yet it might escalate and lead to destructive results. Marital conflict is referred to the interpersonal difficulties within the marriage relationship. It is depicted by husband and wife having different opinions about issues, events or activities which cannot be mutually resolved. Marital conflicts usually arise mostly due to lack of understanding between the couple. Dessislav (2015) wrote that family is the most basic unit of society and building block for national development. Just as there cannot exist any society without families or home, there cannot be sustainable development without stable families or home. Nothing man does is ever perfect, therefore, there are bound to be imperfections in marriages. Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola and Salau (2014) referred to marital conflicts as the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, abandonment or divorce. Marital conflicts have become a thing associated with the present-day family institution. This however, is not to say that it had never once occurred in the past, but the rate at which it occurs in our present society is quite alarming. Marital conflicts, worrisomely is continuously on the increase in Africa and other developing countries and is associated with separation, divorce and single parenthood (Duke-Natrebo, 2014). The increase rate in divorce is one of the most visible changes in our societies and the consequences of divorce or separation is high among people who experience their parents' marital conflict; children from intact families have better outcomes and a higher well-being than children from divorced families. Also, children from divorced parents have worse cognitive, behavioural and health outcomes in general than children in more stable families. In Nigeria today, the rate at which couples experience divorce and remarriage is quite alarming. Many families have been and some are still seriously at war with themselves simply because of their failure to arrest, manage and resolve conflicting issues between couples and families. Some families in Edo State are going through a lot of stress and hardships as a result of marital conflicts and this has devastating effects on the children. A conflict-riddled marriage may be associated with low achievement in children because witnessing conflicts between parents heightens the level of stress in children and keep them from focusing on school work. Marital conflict is one major factor that plays a negative role in child development. Castro-Martin and Bumpass (2019) narrated that children who witness higher level of marital conflict are more likely to internalize stress resulting in a multitude of negative symptoms including frequent illness, physiological indications of chronic stress, and high levels of blood pressure, heart rate reaction and poor academic achievement. Maladaptive behaviours can be said to mean a shift away from age long appropriate behaviours which significantly affects individual growth and societal development. That is, any behaviour tagged maladaptive runs contrary to generally accepted pattern of behaviour for the age and environment of the individual and this behaviour negatively affects him and other persons around. According to Onakpoberuo, Ugoji and Onoyase (2022), maladaptive behaviour is a source of worry for all school stakeholders. It is a multifaceted and complex school problem that is manifested in various forms. The various common forms

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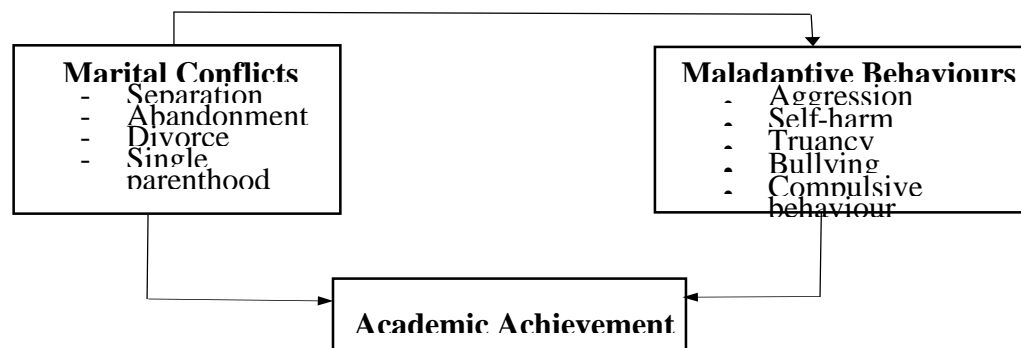
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of student maladaptive are late coming, backing classes, drug and alcoholic abuse, exam malpractice, bullying, love affairs, vandalism, assault on the school prefects, insult on educators, wearing the wrong school uniform, use of the mobile phone, smoking, writing or using foul language in class, work not done, class disruption and immoral acts. Maladaptive behaviours are actions or tendencies that interfere with an individual's ability to adjust to situations, cope with stress, or achieve their goals in a healthy and productive way. Owobamigbe, Aminu and Usman (2024) stated that these behaviours often develop as a attempt to handle emotional or environmental challenges but end up being counterproductive or harmful in the long run. Achievement is an attainment of a given standard in a particular field by an individual. Nwagu (2015) defined achievement as the ability of an individual to accomplish his set goal. Achievement in the school system involves the ability of students to realise their academic dreams in the school. In this context, academic achievement is the level of accomplishment one has achieved in an academic area. Ncharam (2015) defined academic achievement as the actualization of the educational standard and appropriate goals as the major objective functions of school in the society. Academic achievement of students has been of concern to parents, guardians, students and even the wider society, and it is one of the most important goals of the educational process. The success or failure of the students' achievement depend on a number of factors such as family background, study habits and relationship with peers, among others.

### Conceptual Framework

This section explains the concepts used in this study which includes: marital monflict, maladaptive behaviour, and academic achievement, influence of marital conflict on academic achievement and influence of maladaptive behaviours on academic achievement.

Achievement



A framework showing the link marital conflicts has on Maladaptive behaviour And academic

**Marital Conflict**

Marital conflict refers to difficult relationships experienced by husband and wife in their marriage. It can also be referred to as marital disruption, low marital quality and less frequently desertion, which affects the stability of marriage. Marital conflict refers to the unstable marriage characterized by frequent and persistent quarrels, fights, neglect and family abandonment, children and partner abuse together with divorced family and remarried families. As noted by Pathan (2015) conflict in marriage is inevitable. Whenever two people come together eventually some of the belief system and personal habits of one will annoy the other, regardless of the degree of love. In healthy relationships couples tend to accept and resolve conflict. But in case of unhealthy relationships marital conflicts arise due to several reasons. When there is conflict between role performance and role expectation of the spouses, it leads to maladjustment of husband-wife relationships and to marital disruptions. Marital conflict can be defined as the state of tension or stress between marital partners as the couple try to carry out their marital roles (Olugbenga, 2018). Marital conflicts in whatever guise occur in all human societies but it is observed in various degrees. Marital conflict exists where husband and wife have different opinions about issues, events or activities which cannot be mutually resolved (Kolo 2011). Marital conflict usually arises mostly due to lack of understanding between the man and his wife, differences in the level of education, social backgrounds, physical maintenance, love making and extra marital affairs are some of the factors to incessant marital conflict (Karanja 2016). Marital conflict is associated with heated quarrels, violence, and separation and in extreme cases divorce. Marital conflict may be described as a struggle, clash, strife, disagreement or quarrel between husband and wife, and sometimes with other members of the household, over opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals (Olugbenga, 2018). Marital conflict comes in different forms like spouse battering, spousal abuse, sexual abuse, marital irresponsibility, rape, subtle struggle for control between the couple and other abusive behaviours and also caused by childlessness, forced marriage, incompatibility, communication gap, interference by in-laws, finances, infidelity, and sex of children and lack of appreciation.

**Causes of Marital Conflicts**

The high rate of divorce cannot be farfetched from the inadequate length of courtship before marriage, dissimilarities between spouses in social and economic characteristics such as social class, ethnicity, religion and age. Some factors also include sterility, adultery, desertion and excessive cruelty. The fragility of the marital bond is a notable feature of the contemporary world and thus, spares no continent and is present at every level of society (Spanier & Glick, 2011). It makes society delicate and even endangers the education task and the trust that sustains a home. One may sometimes have the impression that separation and divorce are considered the only way out of marital problem. This is part of the growing divorce mentality which is the product of marital conflicts. Difficulties frequently lead to real friction that leads to separation, divorce, even murder, where a man kills his wife or the wife killing the husband. Marital conflict has made society to currently witness the invasion of many

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areas of human activity by an essential individualism; economic life, excessive competition etc. Some factors of marital conflict as highlighted by (Ezeh, 2012) include: childlessness, unsatisfactory sexual relationship, non-payment of dowry; polygamy; rumor and faction; lack of commitment towards marriage, sexual incompatibility and infidelity; lack of communication between spouses; abandonment, alcohol addiction, substance abuse; physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse; inability to manage or resolve conflict; differences in personal and career goals; different expectations about household tasks and financial problems; intellectual incompatibility and inflexibility; mental illness; religious beliefs, cultural and lifestyle differences. Desperation, especially on the part of the female folks, is a major cause of divorce. Uba (2017) noted that most young women feel, it is a must to get married at an early age while the older ones cannot stand the stigma of not being married, therefore, they enter into marriages not minding what it may cost because they must get married and some of them in their desperation avoid marriage counselling and courtship so that the man would not change his mind. Meanwhile, some families due to poverty give away their female children in order to make some money, parents who cannot afford to train their female children give them out for marriage so that she could fetch them money. Some factors of marital instability have been identified follows:

**(i) Infidelity:** infidelity is an act of not being faithful to one's partner. It occurs when a person has a sexual relationship with someone other than his/her marriage partner. There are many causes of infidelity – first is most people approach marriage with enthusiasm about the sexual freedom that will follow. Many of these people are disappointed when they discover that sex within marriage it not as consistently as they had expected. Eliud (2016) observed that this can make them to seek for fulfilment outside marriage.

**(ii) Financial Issue:** satisfaction with one's financial status can enhance marital satisfaction, and more broadly, life satisfaction. Conversely, financial difficulties and dissatisfaction with one's financial status can lead to marital conflicts (Dimkpa, 2017). Lack of finance is one major cause of marital conflicts and this is because money is essential not only for obtaining necessities of life but also for obtaining luxury issues.

**(iii) Extended Family Issue:** sometimes, parents and relatives may unduly interfere in a couple's private life, and thus cause tension. For example, some relatives want to have a say over a couple's life, this makes a couple feel strongly compelled to live by the expectations of their parents. Such spouses have no independence in their domestic affairs. The interference by extended family members in a couple's private life often leads to marital disharmony (Berry & Williams, 2017) Positive support from family affects couples' satisfaction with their relationships and is essential for marital stability. When family members are supportive, they help to resolve marital issues, provide financial support or assist the couple in childcare (Amadi and Amadi, 2014). While negative interference of family members on couples' interpersonal relationships could lead to decreased family commitment, marital insecurity which can have negative consequences on their marital satisfaction.

(iv) **Poor Communication:** marital communication has been a factor that has occupied central position in all discourse concerning marital stability (Esere, Yusuf & Omotosho, 2011). Inability of spouses to communicate effectively with each other is very unhealthy to the union. Effective marital communication entails that couples discuss issues, respond to questions, call for explanations and accept same timely (when given), as any delay may send out a wrong signal which a partner is bound to give a different interpretation. Effective communication can ease many other marital unrests before they could degenerate into crisis situations. Put differently, poor marital communication has been blamed for some other marital problems that have ended in divorce or separation. Purposeful open dialogue between couples often tends to be overtaken by incessant arguments about anything, everything, and nothing; misinterpretation generates misunderstandings; verbal attacks are countered by keeping silence especially on the husband's side.

(v) **Social Incompatibility:** there is no doubt that some marriages have absolutely no foundation or basis for being contracted at the first instance. This is so because the pair is socially incompatible and may only manage to get along for a short while before signs of incompatibility would start to manifest. It would then be discovered that the couple are strange bed fellows - socially, religiously and ideologically. The imperfection of man is unquestionable and as such it is not possible that such idealistic standards are realized. This is capable of degenerating into crisis in the home. Many married people become disappointed when they discover that their union is not all they had expected and that their spouse is not quite what they had envisioned him/her to be (Amao-Kehinde, 2008).

### **Maladaptive Behaviour**

Maladaptive behaviours are actions that harm the well-being of others. It can also be seen as any type of conduct that violates the basic rights of another person or any behaviour that is considered disruptive to others in society. Betterhelp (2023) stated that maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students is a conduct that disallow students from conforming, adjusting or participating in various academic activities in school. Such actions are intended to help relieve or avoid stress, but they are often disruptive and may contribute to increased distress, discomfort, and anxiety over time. Students who display maladaptive behaviour typically show no regard for the moral of ethical rules of the society neither do they put into consideration the rights of others thereby, manipulating people and situation for their own benefits. According to Owobamigbe, Aminu and Usman (2024), maladaptive behaviours are behaviours exhibited by students which are undesirable by the norms of conventional society and the institutions. Maladaptive behaviours among secondary school students can sometime be as a result of lack of motivation and unfavourable social climate which makes students to often abandon their study. Maladaptive behaviours is referred to a predisposition to and indulgence in cultic activities by children under the age of 18. As stated in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), maladaptive behaviours in Nigerian secondary schools has been a running sore in the educational system of this country. In the past few years, the

footprint of maladaptive behaviour has become so visible in our learning institutions especially among the secondary school students. This ugly menace has also had its expression in section 26 of the National Policy on Education. Maladaptive behaviour problems are the most common mental health problems in childhood and are associated with serious negative outcomes such as delinquency, school failure and substance abuse. Maladaptive behaviours can be said to be the behaviours that are not acceptable in the society. Adikwu, Oguiche, Usman and Olabode (2023) stated that maladaptive behaviour is when students exhibit behaviours that do not conform to the acceptable moral norms in our society. These behaviours in turn affect their academic performance and may lead to their dropout from school. The unpleasant behaviours exhibited by some of these students are their mode of dressing, truancy, aggressiveness, disrespect to elders, cheating, exam malpractice, etc. These students who exhibit maladaptive behaviour may not measure up academically with their counterpart.

### **Academic Achievement**

Academic achievement has been one of the most important goals of educational process. It has been of concern to parents, guardians, students and the society at large. The desire for a high level of achievement puts a lot of pressure on students, teachers, schools, and in general the education system. Academic achievement therefore could be referred to as the degree of success reached or attained by an individual in some general or specific academic area which is measurable. Enyi (2014) noted the following as uses of academic achievement: it is used to determine the relative effectiveness of the programme (teaching/learning) in terms of students behavioural output.

- (i) It provides the educational administrators with adequate information about teachers' effectiveness and school need.
- (ii) It helps the school administrators to make reliable decisions about educational planning.
- (iii) It is used to predict the general trend in the development of the teaching-learning process.
- (iv) It is used to encourage students to develop a sense of discipline and systematic study habit.
- (v) It helps the teachers to determine the effectiveness of their teaching techniques and learning materials.
- (vi) It is used to identify students who have achieved growth or lack of growth in acquiring desirable knowledge, skills, attitude and social values. Academic achievement is the outcome of education, the extent to which a student, teacher or institution has achieved their educational goals and it is commonly measured by examinations or continuous assessment (Bossaert, Doumen, Buyse & Verschueren, 2013). The authors maintained that academic achievement is an important parameter in measuring students' learning outcome in various school discipline. Academic achievement is a key mechanism through which in-school adolescents learn about their talents, abilities and competencies which are important parts of developing career aspirations. Kapur (2018) defined academic achievement as the measure of students' learning acquisition of certain skills at the end of teaching and learning activities. It reflects in examination written by students after the process of learning.

Academic achievement is based on the degree of intellectual stimulation that the student could receive from learning situations. It is the degree or level of success attained at the end of an academic endeavour. The yardstick for measuring one's level of academic achievement is by assessing the academic performance of the individual through test and observation.

### **Influence of Marital Conflict on Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students**

Marital conflicts can be likened to a stumbling block to students' learning behaviour which is an essential element in education practice. Marital conflict, no doubt may have a link to poor academic achievement. Nwaokwah (2013) pointed out that children are the ones that majorly suffer certain consequences associated with marital conflicts. Children reared in homes of divorce or separated parents may engage in disruptive behaviour, aggression, poor capacity to interact with peers, low academic performance, high tendency for violence, report of drug abuse and even suicidal thought. In the same vein, Hussani and Adejare (2021) noted that children living in homes that experience marital conflicts may experience extreme emotional expressions; they suffer cognitively, struggle in school and they often have difficulty socializing and expressing appropriate social behaviour. Several factors are at play on the influence marital conflicts have on academic achievement of secondary school students.

#### **1. Psychological Trauma**

- (i) Exposure to Violence – students exposed to marital conflicts often exhibit heightened levels of anxiety, depression and aggression, which are common maladaptive responses to trauma. These behaviours can hinder students' ability to function effectively in school.
- (ii) Behavioural Issues – students whose parents are involve in marital conflict may display aggressive behaviours or emotional withdrawn as coping mechanism, which can disrupt their academic progress.

#### **2. Effect on Academic Achievement**

- (i) Loss of Motivation – students affected by marital conflicts may develop a sense of hopelessness, reducing their motivation to engage with their studies.
- (ii) Cognitive Impairment – trauma as a result of marital conflicts negatively affect cognitive processes such as concentration, memory and problem-solving, leading to poor academic achievement.

#### **3. Social and Peer Relationships**

- (i) Altered Social Dynamics – marital conflicts can alter peer relationships, leading to isolation or formation of cliques among students based on shared traumatic experiences. This shift in social dynamics can negatively affect behaviour and academic outcome.
- (ii) Bullying and Victimization -conflicts affected students may be more susceptible to bullying or social exclusion, exacerbating their psychological distress which will further impair their academic performance (Masten & Narayan, 2017).

**Influence of Maladaptive Behaviour on Academic Achievement of Secondary School Students**

It has been an everyday phenomenon in the society that secondary school students are exhibiting much maladaptive behaviours irrespective of the stages of socialization and cognitive development. According to Betterhelp (2023), maladaptive behaviours serves as coping mechanisms in students and as a result, such behaviours may lead to isolation, relationship issues as well as negative consequences on their academics. Fareo (2019) stated that students' unruly behaviour has constantly affected their academic achievement to the extent that teachers are unable to cover the contents of the school curriculum and this often result into producing half-baked graduates. Maladaptive behaviours of secondary school students according to Adikwu, Oguche, Usman and Olabode (2023) have reached an alarming rate and this could be traced to the home, society and the attitude of students towards schooling. These in turn have contributed to poor academic achievement of many students. In order for these students to perform well in external examinations like WAEC and NECO, they often resort to examination malpractices.

**Theoretical Framework**

The study is hinged on Marital Communication Theory by Weakland (1956).

**Marital Communication Theory**

The marital communication theory was propounded by Weakland (1956). According to him crisis in marriage arises due to inappropriate communication. The theory stipulates that crises ensues in marriage relationship in a situation where there is confusion and lack of clarity in communication pattern of husband and wife. This is a situation when the partner who is receiving the message of the communication finds it very difficult to make a meaning out of it. When there is confusion and lack of understanding in the communication between couple, the tendency is for the confused partner to reject the communication thereby creating a vacuum, which leads to crisis. Also, the presence of noise in the communication network leads to crisis in marriage. Lack of communication among couple is an important source of marital conflict. This is because many things suppressed and left unsaid, the result of which leads to bitterness, frustration and tension within either of the partners. The theory recognizes three levels of human communication where crisis can arise. Such levels are at the syntactical level, semantic level and pragmatic level in communication network. The syntactical level refers to the way the information is transmitted, the semantic aspect refers to when the information is received while the pragmatic aspect is the effect of the information on one another. Marital communication theory is explicit on what could cause marital crises, which is inappropriate communication between couples. Weakland (1956) formulated this theory based on the assumption that in any marriage relationship where there is confusion and lack of clarity in communication pattern of husband and wife crisis is bound to ensue in such marriage, disharmony will ensue and each of the partner sees his/her position as being superior to the other. In a situation where the couples fail to understand each other due to gender difference, age, educational qualification or occupational status, crisis will definitely arise. The theory

made it clear that when there is lack of communication in any marriage, there is bound to be frustration and situation of hate within either of the partner. The marital communication theory is relevant to this study as it stipulates that problems arise in marriage when couple fail to understand information conveyed by each other clearly which will in turn affect their children.

### **Conclusion**

Marital conflicts significantly influence maladaptive behaviours and academic achievement of secondary school students. Exposure to violence, insecurity and instability resulting from such conflicts disrupts the learning environment, negatively impacting students' emotional wellbeing and academic focus. Students may develop maladaptive behaviours, such as aggression, withdrawal, or anxiety, as coping mechanisms for the trauma they experience. These behaviours often interfere with their ability to concentrate, participate actively in class and achieve academic success.

### **Recommendations**

1. Provision of Trauma Counselling and Psychosocial Support: schools should implement counselling services and mental health programmes into their activities to help students cope with the emotional and psychological impact of marital conflicts.

Trained counsellors and social workers should be available to address trauma and promote resilience.

2. Teacher training on Conflict sensitivity: teachers should be trained to recognize signs of trauma and maladaptive behaviours in students and use conflict-sensitive teaching approaches to create an inclusive and supportive atmosphere.

3. Peer Support programmes: schools should establish peer mentoring and support groups where students can share their experiences and develop positive coping strategies in a supportive environment.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation Systems: schools should establish systems to track the academic progress and well-being of students affected by marital conflicts, ensuring that interventions are effective and can be adjusted as needed.

5. Community involvement and Peace Education: schools, in collaboration with local communities should incorporate peace education into the curriculum to promote conflict resolution skills, tolerance and nonviolent behaviours among secondary school students.

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