

Psychotherapeutic Interventions' Awareness and Marital Conflict Among Couples in Ibadan Metropolis

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ABSTRACT: Marriage is an important social institution in Yoruba culture and Ibadan Metropolis but the high level of divorce and separation has become a key social concern in the social welfare. Psychotherapeutic Interventions' awareness and marital conflict in Ibadan Metropolis was studied. It included a study of the common causes and trends of marital conflict, the effect of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution methods on marital separation and divorce rates, and the relationship between these methods and rates of marital separation and divorce. A descriptive survey design with the quantitative approach was used. One hundred and seventy-five clients and twenty-one professional users of registered counselling and mediation centres in Ibadan were selected and data were collected using the Adapted Kansas Marital Conflict Scale (AKMCS). Descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis were used to analyse the data with a significance level of 0.05. The results showed financial problems (mean = 3.09), in-laws or extended family (mean = 3.01) and spousal infidelity (mean = 3.00) as the leading causes of marital conflict. In terms of the research question, it was noted that awareness and utilization of CBT and EFT, as well as other professional psychotherapeutic services is very low, while the couples mainly rely on informal support from their religious communities. The main challenges mentioned are awareness, financial constraints, inadequate referral mechanisms and partner constraints. The regression analysis did not reveal a significant effect of psychotherapeutic strategies on divorce/separation ($R = 0.086$, $R^2 = 0.007$, $F(1, 173) = 1.287$, $p = .258$). Additionally, there was no significant correlation found between conflict resolution strategies and divorce/separation rates ($r = -.10$, $p = .189$). Both null hypothesis were sustained. The non-significant results of the study suggest an absence of formal psychotherapeutic engagement in couples' therapy in Ibadan, not the ineffectiveness of psychotherapy. It suggests public awareness campaigns, elimination of financial and structural limitation and the gradual incorporation of evidence-based practices (CBT, EFT, IBCT) into the social welfare counselling infrastructure.

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Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Divorce, Ibadan Metropolis, Marital Stability, Psychotherapeutic Interventions, Separation

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INTRODUCTION

The institution of marriage has always been considered as the foundation of family and one of the pillars of the social stability. Marriage in the African context and Ibadan Metropolis, especially in the Yoruba culture is more than the simple fact of two individuals being joined together, it's about two families and communities coming together. It is seen as a close relationship that should be used to encourage companionship, to procreate, to socialise children and to pass on cultural values (Ala, 2018). Social change of recent has brought divorce and separation about, altering traditional expectations and family systems. The recent social changes have contributed to an increase in separation and divorce, challenging traditional expectations and destabilizing family

systems. The prevalence of marital dissolution as a phenomenon in Nigeria particularly in the urban centres such as Ibadan has generated a lot of concern from the academic, policy-making, religious and social service communities.

Statistics from the Oyo State Judiciary indicate that the rate of marital dissolution has been on the rise in Ibadan, with 536 divorces being recorded in 2021, 336 in 2022 and 349 in 2023 (Ibadan Judiciary, High Court of Justice, 2024). These statistics do not include informal separations, which are not registered, meaning that the proportion of marital instability may be even higher in reality. The increase in divorce rates has been associated with various factors, such as financial instability, unemployment, infidelity, interference from extended family, and changes in gender roles (Olasehinde & Onodje, 2023; Oliveira et al., 2020). In many cases, frustration with marital difficulties compounds due to poor conflict resolution skills, and ends in separation and divorce.

Worldwide, the increase in marital dissolution is becoming a significant issue. The divorce rate in the United States is between 40% and 50%, and some of the leading causes of divorce include financial issues, infidelity, and ineffective communication (Gambo & Rachel, 2024). Higher rates over 50% are reported in countries in Europe, such as Belgium and Portugal (Abdel-Sater, 2022). According to Nigerian data, the country is ranked as the 11th nation in the world, with an estimated of 2.9 per cent or 1.8 divorces per 1,000 people in 2023 (Ntoimo and Akokuwebe, 2014; Olasehinde and Onodje, 2023).

Psychotherapeutic interventions are gaining traction as one of the key strategies to address marital difficulties. Therapies such as EFT, CBT, and Integrative Behavioural Couple Therapy (IBCT) have been shown to improve communication, strengthen emotional bonds and prevent the increase of conflict (McClelland & Mansell, 2019; Salehi, Pirani & Heydari, 2025). The results of the study indicate that interventions focusing on emotional processing and cognitive-behavioral methods improved communication and reduced separation among troubled couples (Ghahari et al., 2021). Additionally, brief solution-focused methods were effective in reducing the escalation of conflict (Olusola & Falaye, 2024). A quasi-experimental study was also conducted to demonstrate the significant role of a unified approach in the family therapy program in reducing emotional divorce and marital boredom in women with marital conflicts (Poorhejazi, Khalatbari & Khodabakhshi-Koolae, 2021). However, despite these developments, many couples in Nigeria still rely on informal or religious mediation to settle their disputes, and often these methods are not as deep psychologically as they need to be to resolve underlying psychological and emotional issues in marital problems (Kofoworola & Rofiu, 2024). With the results obtained from the social welfare offices in Ibadan, it was discovered that most of the marital conflicts are not dealt with effectively until they become irreparable (Ala, 2018). This underscores the importance of including organized Psychotherapeutic conflict resolution approaches in marital counselling systems for the prevention of separation and divorce.

This investigation is based on two theories. Developed in 1974, the Thomas-Kilmann model of conflict resolution proposes five conflict styles: compete, collaborate, compromise, avoid, and accommodate. The model proposes that relational outcomes are more favorable in constructive styles such as collaboration and compromise, and more negative in avoidance and competing styles, which increases the risk of marital dissolution. This framework is important in understanding the factors associated with the currently noted poor marital outcomes of couples in Ibadan who are using destructive or avoidant conflict styles. The second theoretical anchor is Aaron Beck's Cognitive Behavioural Theory (CBT) which proposes that thoughts, feelings and behaviours are interrelated. Thoughts such as "my partner does not care about me" can contribute to negative feelings and unhelpful behaviours within relationships that can exacerbate marital conflict. CBT helps to change thinking patterns, enhance communication, and cultivate problem-solving skills, all of which can reduce marital stress and lower the risk of divorce (Mandal & Lip, 2022). In the Ibadan context, both theories play an important role: cognitive distortions are exacerbated by cultural and economic pressures and organised professional help is withheld because of these pressures.

Empirical research always demonstrates that psychotherapeutic styles of conflict resolution are successful in improving marital stability. Olusola and Falaye (2024) reported that CBT and Solution-Focused Therapy were effective in enhancing marital stability and reducing divorce rates in Christian couples in Ibadan. Elegbede et al., (2024) found that the validation of conflict resolution strategies was the most effective approach to enhance marriage stability among Lagos State married couples. Ghahari, Jamil, and Davoodi (2021) found that both Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) led to significant improvements in marital conflict and emotional regulation in married women. Poorhejazi, Khalatbari and Khodabakhshi-Koolae (2021) found a unified protocol significantly reduced emotional divorce and marital boredom, and these results were sustained at a three-month follow-up. The results of a comprehensive narrative review revealed that there was a consistent positive effect on communication, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction with CBT, emotion-focused and systemic therapy methods (Salehi, Pirani & Heydari, 2025). In spite of this evidence base, there is no localised study in Ibadan that shows if these psychotherapeutic strategies are making any impact on separation and divorce rates in Ibadan with the aim of this study to bridge this gap.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the increasing prevalence of marital discord, separation, and divorce in Ibadan Metropolis, numerous couples persist in facing unresolved conflicts that jeopardise family stability and social well-being. While empirical evidence has consistently shown that psychotherapeutic interventions like Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), and Integrative Behavioural Couple Therapy (IBCT) effectively enhance communication, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction,

their implementation in the Nigerian context is still largely unexamined. Current literature has predominantly examined the factors contributing to marital discord, the dynamics of marital stability, and the overall efficacy of counselling interventions. However, there has been insufficient exploration into the awareness, application, and impact of evidence-based psychotherapeutic strategies for conflict resolution on divorce and separation outcomes, especially within the context of Ibadan Metropolis. Moreover, there is a suggestion from anecdotal evidence that many couples depend on informal and faith-based counselling, whereas professional psychotherapeutic services are not fully utilised because of a lack of awareness, financial limitations, and restricted accessibility. This implementation gap has generated ambiguity concerning the degree to which psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies aid in decreasing separation and divorce rates among couples in the study area. In light of this context, this study investigated the impact of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on separation and divorce rates among couples in Ibadan Metropolis, aiming to offer empirical evidence that can enhance counselling practices, social welfare initiatives, and family policy

AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to examine the influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on separation/divorce rates among couples in Ibadan Metropolis. The specific objectives are to:

1. determine the level of awareness and utilisation of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and emotionally focused therapy, among couples experiencing marital discord?
2. determine the influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies in reducing the incidence of separation and divorce among couples; and
3. ascertain the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and separation/divorce rates.

Research Question

- 1 What is the level of awareness and utilisation of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution interventions, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and emotionally focused therapy, among couples experiencing marital discord?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: There will be no significant influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on reducing the incidence of separation and divorce among couples.

H₀₂: There will be no significant relationship between conflict resolution strategies and separation /divorce rates.

Scope of the Study

This study focused on couples receiving marital conflict resolution services from selected counselling centres, religious institutions, and social welfare offices within Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo State. Psychotherapeutic strategies such as CBT, EFT, and IBCT were emphasised, while purely traditional or informal interventions without psychotherapeutic grounding were excluded from the primary analysis. Findings may not be generalisable across all regions of Nigeria due to cultural and demographic differences; however, they provide relevant insights for other urban centres in Nigeria facing similar challenges.

METHODOLOGY

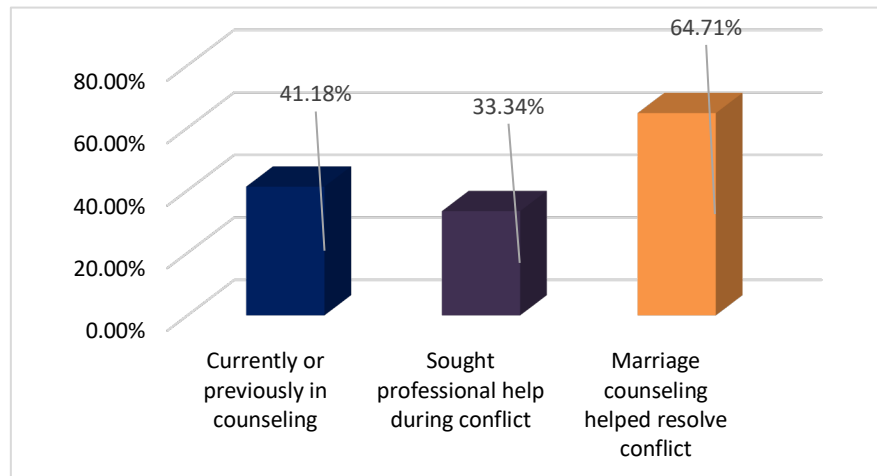
The investigation utilised a descriptive survey framework employing a quantitative methodology. This design is suitable as it methodically gathers statistical data regarding the causes of marital conflict and the connection between psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies and divorce/separation outcomes among couples in Ibadan Metropolis, all while avoiding variable manipulation. The study population included 350 clients (married individuals facing marital conflict) and 21 professionals (counsellors, therapists, and mediators) from nine registered counselling and mediation centers in Ibadan Metropolis, selected purposefully for their active participation in marital counselling. Through the application of stratified proportional allocation, a total of 175 clients, representing 50%, were selected, alongside the purposive inclusion of all 21 professionals, resulting in an overall sample of 196 participants. The nine centers included Temi's Love Clinic, NASFAT(Family Counsellor), the Zonal Office of the Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Women Affairs Head Office, the Counselling Unit of Living Faith Church (Winners' Chapel), Save Mind Counselling Center , Sure Hope Counselling Centre, Gracepoint Christian Center, and Savingcross Justice Point Foundation. Data were gathered utilising the Adapted Kansas Marital Conflict Scale (AKMCS), a systematic questionnaire designed to assess communication patterns, conflict resolution strategies, the origins of marital conflict, and the psychosocial and economic factors that impact divorce. Items utilised a four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. A version in Yoruba was created to enhance accessibility. The instrument received validation from specialists in counselling psychology and marital therapy, with reliability established through pilot testing utilising Cronbach's Alpha (≥ 0.70 threshold). Structured questionnaires were distributed by trained assistants across all nine centers. Ethical principles such as informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation were rigorously upheld. Secondary records from the Ibadan Judiciary (High Court of Justice) were examined to enhance the primary data concerning formal divorce filings. Data were systematically coded and analysed utilising SPSS version 29. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were

employed for the first research question. In addition, Pearson's correlation and regression analysis were utilised to evaluate the null hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS

Research Question Three: What are the level of awareness and utilization of, and the barriers to accessing, professional psychotherapeutic conflict resolution services (such as those employing Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Emotionally Focused Therapy) among couples experiencing marital discord in Ibadan?

Figure 1: Bar Chart Showing the Level of Awareness and Utilization of Psychotherapeutic Conflict Resolution Interventions, such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy and Emotionally Focused Therapy, among Couples Experiencing Marital Discord



Source: Researcher's fieldwork 2026

Figure 1 reveals that although many couples acknowledged the value of marriage counseling in resolving marital conflict, the utilization of professional psychotherapeutic services remained very low. Most participants who sought counseling relied on religious institutions, particularly churches and pastors, with only a few accessing professional mental health practitioners such as clinical psychologists. Awareness and use of evidence-based psychotherapeutic approaches, including Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), were also minimal among both couples and counselors. The findings further identified several barriers to accessing professional psychotherapy, including limited awareness of available services, inadequate guidance on where to seek help, financial constraints, and, in some cases, controlling partner behaviors that restricted access to support. Overall, the results indicate a substantial dependence on faith-based counseling and highlight the need to improve public awareness, accessibility, and affordability of professional psychotherapeutic interventions for couples experiencing marital conflict.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀₁: There will be no significant influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on reducing the incidence of separation and divorce among couples.

Table 1: Regression Analysis showing the Influence of Psychotherapeutic Conflict Resolution Strategies on the Incidence of separation and divorce among Couples

R = 0.086 R ² = 0.007 Adj. R ² = 0.002 Std. Error = 1.81590					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.245	1	4.245	1.287	.258
Residual	570.464	173	3.297		
Total	574.709	174			

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 1 reveals that there is no significant influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on the incidence of separation and divorce among couples ($F(1, 173) = 1.287, p = .258$). The regression model showed a very weak correlation ($R = 0.086$), with psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies accounting for only 0.7% of the variance in separation/divorce outcomes ($R^2 =$

0.007). This negligible explanatory power is attributable primarily to the near-complete absence of formal psychotherapeutic engagement among the sampled population: the vast majority of couples had not utilised CBT, EFT, or IBCT. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is accepted: there is no significant influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies in reducing the incidence of separation and divorce among couples.

H_{02} : There will be no significant relationship between conflict resolution strategies and separation /divorce rates.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation showing the Relationship between Conflict Resolution Strategies and Separation/Divorce Rates

	Conflict Resolution Strategies	Separation/Divorce Rate
Conflict Resolution Strategies	Pearson Correlation: 1	-.100
	Sig. (2-tailed): —	.189
	N: 175	175

Source: Fieldwork, 2026

Table 2 reveals that the relationship between conflict resolution strategies and divorce/separation rates is weak, negative, and statistically non-significant ($r = -.10$, $p = .189$). The negative direction of the correlation indicates a marginal trend in which greater engagement with conflict resolution strategies is associated with slightly lower divorce/separation rates; however, this relationship did not reach statistical significance. Accordingly, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) is accepted: there is no significant relationship between conflict resolution strategies and separation/divorce rates.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The inquiry focused on understanding the extent of awareness and use of professional psychotherapeutic conflict resolution services, as well as the obstacles faced by couples dealing with marital discord in Ibadan. Findings from Figure 1 revealed a stark paradox: while most couples recognised the importance of marriage counselling in addressing marital conflict, the actual use of professional psychotherapeutic services was surprisingly low. Most participants relied on faith-based sources of support, especially churches and pastors, while only a small fraction sought help from professional mental health practitioners like clinical psychologists. There was a limited understanding and application of evidence-based methods, such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), among both couples and the counsellors assisting them. Multiple obstacles were recognised as limiting access to formal psychotherapeutic services, including a lack of public awareness regarding available professional options, insufficient information on how to seek assistance, financial limitations, and, in some instances, controlling behaviours from partners that hindered individuals from seeking support. These findings align with the work of Kofoworola and Rofiu (2024), who identified comparable structural and attitudinal barriers to the uptake of professional counselling in Nigerian marriage contexts. Additionally, they resonate with the observations made by Olusola and Falaye (2024), who noted that Nigerian couples tend to disproportionately depend on informal and religious support mechanisms, even when professional therapeutic options are accessible. This pattern of low awareness and low utilisation serves as a crucial precursor to the non-significant statistical outcomes observed for both hypotheses: couples who have not engaged with psychotherapeutic services are unable to exhibit its measurable effects on marital outcomes.

The regression analysis for hypothesis one revealed no significant impact of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on the incidence of divorce or separation ($F_{(1, 173)} = 1.287$, $p = .258$; $R = 0.086$). This non-significant finding should not be construed as proof that psychotherapy lacks efficacy. Instead, it indicates the almost total lack of formal psychotherapeutic involvement within the sampled group. This interpretation is substantiated by the existing body of literature: Ghahari, Jamil, and Davoodi (2021) illustrated that both EFCT and ACT yielded significant enhancements in marital conflict and emotional regulation; Poorhejazi et al. (2021) indicated substantial decreases in emotional divorce via a unified family therapy protocol; and Salehi, Pirani, and Heydari (2025) validated in an extensive narrative review that CBT and EFT reliably enhance communication, emotional regulation, and marital satisfaction. The null finding of this study suggests an implementation gap in Ibadan, rather than a failure of psychotherapy itself.

The Pearson correlation analysis for hypothesis two indicated a weak, negative, and non-significant relationship between conflict resolution strategies and divorce/separation rates ($r = -.10$, $p = .189$), resulting in the acceptance of H_{02} . The negative direction, although not statistically significant, indicates a subtle directional trend: in instances where conflict resolution strategies are applied, there appears to be a slight inclination towards lower divorce or separation rates. This aligns with the findings of Batista da Costa and Pereira Mosmann (2021), who identified that constructive conflict resolution strategies among Brazilian heterosexual couples significantly predicted marital satisfaction. Similarly, Ünal and Akgün (2022) demonstrated that effective conflict resolution

styles served as predictors of marital adjustment and satisfaction. The prevalence of harmful strategies as the primary method in Ibadan clarifies why the anticipated positive correlation between strategy use and marital outcomes did not achieve significance: the strategies mainly utilised are those that deteriorate rather than improve marital outcomes.

Collectively, these findings support the notion that marital instability in Ibadan Metropolis is more a result of the lack of availability of psychotherapy rather than its ineffectiveness. Until psychotherapeutic models grounded in evidence are systematically incorporated into accessible and culturally responsive counselling and social welfare frameworks, and widely embraced by couples, their potential to significantly lower divorce rates in urban Nigerian contexts will remain unfulfilled.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies on separation/divorce rates among couples in Ibadan Metropolis. The findings established that financial problems, extended family interference, and spousal infidelity are the foremost causes of marital conflict in the study area. With respect to the research question, findings revealed that despite widespread acknowledgement of the value of marriage counselling, awareness and utilisation of formal psychotherapeutic services such as CBT and EFT remained critically low among couples in Ibadan, with most individuals depending on faith-based informal support instead. Multiple barriers including limited public awareness, financial constraints, inadequate referral pathways, and partner-related restrictions were identified as constraining access to professional therapeutic services. The statistical analyses further revealed that psychotherapeutic conflict resolution strategies had no statistically significant influence on reducing divorce and separation rates ($R = 0.086$, $R^2 = 0.007$, $F_{(1, 173)} = 1.287$, $p = .258$), and that no significant relationship exists between conflict resolution strategies and divorce/separation rates ($r = -.10$, $p = .189$). Both null hypotheses were retained. These outcomes do not negate the theoretical and empirical efficacy of psychotherapeutic approaches documented in the global literature; rather, they underscore that the non-significant statistical outcomes are a direct consequence of the near-absence of formal psychotherapeutic utilisation identified in the research question findings. Marital instability in Ibadan stems less from psychotherapy's ineffectiveness than from its scarcity and inaccessibility. Until structured psychotherapeutic models are embedded within accessible, culturally responsive social welfare and counselling frameworks and actively promoted among couples, their capacity to reduce divorce and separation rates will remain significantly unrealised.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government, non-governmental organisations, and public health communicators should implement targeted sensitisation campaigns to raise public awareness of professional psychotherapeutic conflict resolution services in Ibadan, specifically promoting evidence-based approaches such as CBT, EFT, and IBCT as effective and accessible options for couples in marital distress, thereby addressing the critically low levels of awareness and utilisation identified in this study.
2. Structural and financial barriers to accessing professional psychotherapeutic services must be dismantled through the provision of subsidised or free marital counselling services at government social welfare offices, health centres, and community hubs, and through the development of referral networks that clearly guide couples in crisis toward professional help, particularly in cases where controlling partner behaviours restrict access.
3. Couples experiencing marital discord should be encouraged to seek professional psychotherapeutic support at the early stages of conflict rather than waiting until disputes become irreconcilable, as timely intervention significantly improves relational outcomes and reduces the likelihood of separation or divorce.

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