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# Development of an Intervention Model for Marital Dissatisfaction among Working Couples in Benue State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study focused on the development of an intervention model for marital dissatisfaction among working couples in Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to identify the indicators and causes of marital dissatisfaction and to develop an intervention model for maritally dissatisfied working couples. The study was guided by three research questions. A mixed-methods research design was adopted for the study. The target population comprised 720 married secondary teachers and their spouses drawn from three highly populated secondary schools in Makurdi, Katsina-Ala, and Otukpo Local Government Areas of Benue State. A sample size of 144 respondents were selected using stratified, proportionate, and simple random sampling techniques. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising 40 items and a researcher-developed intervention program consisting of two instructional sessions. The instrument was validated by experts, and its reliability was established before administration. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while a pre-test and post-test design was employed to determine the effectiveness of the intervention model. The findings revealed that the most prominent indicator of marital dissatisfaction was secretive or undisclosed relationships (M = 4.18), while the leading causes were the influence of social media (M = 4.11) and interference from family and friends (M = 4.11). The intervention program produced positive outcomes, with the pre-test mean score decreasing from 4.44 to a post-test mean score of 4.09, indicating a reduction in the level of marital dissatisfaction among the participants following the intervention. The study concluded that social media influence, family and friends' interference, and secretive relationships significantly contribute to marital dissatisfaction among working couples. It further concluded that the developed intervention model was effective in reducing marital dissatisfaction by enhancing participants' awareness, communication, and relationship management skills. The study recommended that couples should promote openness, honesty, and transparency to strengthen trust and communication; marriage counsellors should organize workshops on healthy digital habits and responsible social media use; and family scientists, marriage and family therapists, and psychologists should develop intervention programs that equip couples with practical strategies for managing external pressures from relatives and friends, thereby enhancing marital stability and satisfaction.

**Key Words:** Marital Dissatisfaction, Marital conflicts, Communication, Marital Satisfaction, Marital instability

## Introduction

Marriage is an important part of adult life, providing individuals with emotional care, mutual companionship and a sense of stability that contributes to both personal wellbeing and social

harmony. Marriage goes beyond but a social and legal union of two consenting individuals it significantly influenced individuals' emotional, psychological, and financial well-being. It also strengthened society by offering stability, emotional support and a structured setting for raising children. Marriage can be described as a socially and legally recognized bond between two individuals, typically grounded in love, commitment, and shared responsibilities. Within this partnership, couples provide emotional and practical support to one another while building a shared life (Quinlan, 2023). Beyond being a formal union, marriage serves as a framework through which individuals establish long-term companionship and mutual dependence. It creates an environment where partners work together to achieve common goals, make important life decisions, and navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise throughout their relationship.

When the foundation of marriage is weakened by unmet emotional, social, financial, physical, or relational needs and unresolved conflicts, marital dissatisfaction can gradually emerge and produce wide ranging consequences for both partners. Marriage often requires spouses to communicate their needs, understand each other's expectations, share responsibilities, and negotiate differences in ways that promotes mutual understanding. However, when these needs remain unaddressed or partners repeatedly experience disappointment, neglect, lack of affection, poor communication, or unequal responsibilities, feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction may develop. Similarly, conflicts that are not constructively addressed can accumulate over time, creating resentment and emotional distance between spouses

Suri and Gakhar (2025) emphasized that marital dissatisfaction reduces relationship quality and increase emotional distress, ultimately lowering happiness, security and mental health. Scott (2023) noted that when communication is ineffective, deeper issues often remain unresolved, leading to continued dissatisfaction. Marital dissatisfaction can therefore be understood as a state of persistent unhappiness, frustration, and emotional unease within a marriage (Babul, 2023). Every marriage is unique, certain signs commonly indicate distress, such as persistent criticism, lack of intimacy, frequent conflicts, poor communication, limited quality time, secrecy and infidelity (Stritof, 2025). Robinson (2024) explained that unmet expectations and unresolved conflicts are key contributors to marital dissatisfaction. Over time, couples may drift apart, focus on daily pressures and neglect emotional connection. This disconnection often appeared as poor communication, reduced intimacy, and feelings of neglect or misunderstanding.

Societal and economic changes have significantly influenced family life and interpersonal relationships. As communities evolved, family structures and dynamics also shift, sometimes leading to challenges in how family's function and relate to one another (Kembe, 2022). An improvement in marital relationships and emotional stability allow couples have productive ventures that enhanced the economic stability of the family. Couples become willing to work together, in other to utilize resources, when there is satisfaction. Couples in stable relationships are more likely to attend agricultural empowerment trainings together, share knowledge gain and support each other in acquiring new skills.

Marital satisfaction is essential for healthy family relationships, yet many working couples seem to experience marital dissatisfaction due to poor communication, financial challenges, limited quality time, and changing family responsibilities, resulting in conflicts, emotional distance and family instability. According to Kalifat (2025), Nigeria ranked 11th out of 26 countries in divorce rates. The study further indicated that women in Nigeria, as well as across Sub-Saharan Africa, were more likely than men to initiate divorce. In 2023, the country recorded a divorce rate of 2.9%, equivalent to about 1.8 divorces per 1,000 people. In comparison, the Maldives reported the highest rate at 5.52%, while India had one of the lowest at 0.01%.

This growing pattern of marital instability is not unique to Nigeria. In the United States, approximately 43% of first marriages end in divorce, with the likelihood rising to 60% for second marriages and 73% for third marriages (Fatula, 2024). To address the limited accessibility of traditional therapy, this study developed a brief, nonclinical intervention to help working couples identify and address the causes of marital dissatisfaction and promote healthier, more satisfying

marital relation. Therefore, there was the need to create an intervention model to promote healthy marriages and alleviate marital dissatisfaction.

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study was the development of an intervention model for marital dissatisfaction among working couples in Makurdi, Katsina-Ala and Otukpo L.G.A. of Benue State Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were as follows:

1. identified common indicators of marital dissatisfaction among working couples in Makurdi, Katsina-Ala and Otukpo L.G.A. of Benue State Nigeria.
2. identified the causes of marital dissatisfaction among working couples in Makurdi, Katsina-Ala and Otukpo L.G.A. of Benue State Nigeria.
3. developed an intervention to manage marital dissatisfaction to among working couples Makurdi, Katsina-Ala and Otukpo L.G.A. of Benue State Nigeria.

## METHODOLOGY

**Study Design**

The study design that was used was the mixed research design, which included the descriptive research design and Research and Development (R&D).

**Population of the Study**

The population of the study comprised 720 respondents, consisting of 360 married male teachers and their spouses and 360 married female teachers and their spouses from the selected secondary schools in Makurdi, Otukpo, and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas of Benue State. A sample size of 144 respondents, representing 20% of the population, was used for the study. Stratified, proportionate, and simple random sampling techniques were employed in selecting the respondents. The respondents were first stratified according to the selected Local Government Areas. The sample size was then proportionately allocated to the respective strata based on their population sizes. Thereafter, simple random sampling was used to select the required respondents from each stratum.

**Instrument for Data collection**

There were two instruments for data collection. One was titled “Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire “(MSQ), while the second was "An Intervention Model for Martally Dissatisfied Couples “(IMD). The MSQ was used as an assessment instrument to measure marital dissatisfaction among participants. It assessed participants’ experiences within marriage. On the other hand, the IMD was designed to provide a structured framework to guide the process of addressing marital dissatisfaction and relationship functioning. The instruments were face and content validated by 3 experts, while a pilot study involving 10 married teachers established the instrument’s reliability, which yielded a Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of 0.93, this indicated a high internal consistency. The 5-point Likert scale was used for IMD and MSQ, with a bench mark of 3.00.

**Model Specification**

The Intervention Model for Maritally Dissatisfied Couples (IMD) was developed based on the major indicators and causes of marital dissatisfaction identified from the responses to the Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire. The intervention focused on communication, trust building, emotional connection, and constructive conflict management. Elements of the Gottman Method Couples Therapy developed by Gottman and Gottman (2015) were adapted to provide the theoretical and practical basis for the intervention.

The intervention program consisted of two instructional sessions. Before the intervention, a pre-test was administered to the participants to determine their level of marital dissatisfaction. The intervention was subsequently implemented through the two sessions. The first session focused on communication and building friendship, including identification of causes of marital dissatisfaction, discussion of the effects of marital dissatisfaction on couples' productivity, active listening, empathy, trust, understanding, intimacy, appreciation, and emotional connection. The second session focused on constructive conflict management, with emphasis on identifying destructive conflict patterns and

replacing them with healthier approaches to managing marital disagreements. Following the intervention, a post-test was administered using the same measurement procedure to determine changes in participants' marital dissatisfaction.

**Pre-test**

The participants were divided into 2 groups, A and B. Group A comprised of all the respondents, this was the control group, while B were selected based on voluntary participation of the respondents which comprised of 9 couples.

**Intervention**

The Intervention for Marital Dissatisfaction among Working Couples (IMD) was administered to the participants in Group B. Elements of the Gottman Method Couples Therapy developed by John and Julie Gottman was adapted for the Intervention program (Gottman & Gottman, 2015). The elements were as follows:

**Session 1**: The communication/building friendship session

i. Identified causes of dissatisfaction (small group discussion for male and female spouses separately).
ii. Effects of marital dissatisfaction on couples' productivity in work setting (small group discussion for male and female spouses separately). This was followed by a large group discussion for couples together.
iii. Strategies for effective communication (large group discussion): practice active listening, empathy, trust and understanding among couples
iv. Building friendship emphasized on trust-building, intimacy, and appreciation, admiration, and emotional connection among couples.

**Session 2**: The constructive conflict management session focused on recognizing destructive conflict patterns and replacing these patterns with healthier strategies.

**Data Analysis Techniques**

Descriptive statistics, which included: means and Standard deviations were used to answer research question 1 and 2. The Pre-test Pot-test were analyzed using the general mean score of respondents. A paired sample t-test was used to calculate the significance of the mean scores for the Pre and Post-test.

The result in Table 1 showed the respondents' perceptions of indicators of marital dissatisfaction. The findings indicate that secretive relationships or undisclosed associations leading to feelings of betrayal and dissatisfaction (4.18), communication breakdown (4.17), emotional disconnection (4.15), and concealing information (4.13) were the most highly rated indicators. Other indicators such as relationships built on weak foundations (4.08), repeating the same behavior that gives rise to conflicts (4.00), constant criticism (3.99), and not giving adequate time for spouse and family (3.99) were also highly rated and accepted.

**Results and Discussion**

**Table 1: Mean Score on Indicators of Marital Dissatisfaction**

| S/N | Item | Mean ($\bar{x}$) | Std. Dev |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1** | Secretive relationships or undisclosed associations can lead to feelings of betrayal and dissatisfaction | 4.18 | 0.79 |
| **2** | Communication Breakdown | 4.17 | 0.72 |
| **3** | Emotional Disconnection | 4.15 | 0.74 |
| **4** | Concealing information | 4.13 | 0.86 |
| **5** | Relationships built on weak foundations may struggle to withstand challenges, leading to feelings of discontent and frustration. | 4.08 | 0.87 |
| **6** | Repeating the same behavior that gives rise to conflicts | 4.00 | 0.98 |
| **7** | Constant Criticism | 3.99 | 0.86 |
| **8** | Not giving adequate time for spouse and family. | 3.99 | 0.90 |
| **9** | Loss of sexual activities | 3.93 | 0.96 |
| **10** | Feeling undervalued | 3.91 | 0.97 |
| **11** | Infidelity | 3.90 | 1.05 |
| **12** | Keeping late nights, while indulging in anti-social behaviors, alcoholism and smoking | 3.88 | 1.11 |
| **13** | Loss of Interest in Shared Time | 3.87 | 1.02 |
| **14** | Disrespectful remarks | 3.85 | 0.92 |
| **15** | Lack of team work and cooperation | 3.84 | 1.03 |
| **16** | Using coded languages on phone | 3.84 | 0.98 |
| **17** | Engaging in social, cultural, and religious activities over family. | 3.76 | 1.06 |
| **18** | Withdrawal syndrome | 3.73 | 1.04 |
| **19** | Loss of interest in self-care, hobbies, and recreation | 3.64 | 1.03 |
| **20** | Personal Growth Stagnation | 3.60 | 1.12 |
| | **Cluster** | **3.95** | **0.95** |

The result in Table 2 showed the respondents' mean scores on the causes of marital dissatisfaction. The findings indicate that influence of social media (4.11), interference from family and friends (4.11), constant comparison with other families and people (4.09), and a spouse feeling emotionally unsupported, unheard, or neglected (4.09) were the most highly rated causes of marital dissatisfaction. Other causes include, use of phones at irregular times (4.08), not giving adequate time for spouse and family (4.08), lack of sexual intimacy (4.07), domestic violence and abuse (4.02), unappreciation of contributions made for family stability (4.01), and poor or weak communication (4.01).

**Table 2: Respondents Mean Scores on Causes of Marital Dissatisfaction**

| S/N | Item | Mean ($\bar{x}$) | S. D |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Influence of social media | 4.11 | 0.85 |
| 2 | Interference from family and friends | 4.11 | 0.78 |
| 3 | Constant comparison with other families and people | 4.09 | 0.80 |
| 4 | A spouse feeling emotionally unsupported, unheard, or neglected | 4.09 | 0.85 |
| 5 | Use of phones at irregular times | 4.08 | 0.84 |
| 6 | Not giving adequate time and attention to spouse and family | 4.08 | 0.88 |
| 7 | Lack of sexual intimacy | 4.07 | 0.88 |
| 8 | Domestic violence and abuse | 4.02 | 1.00 |
| 9 | Unappreciation of contribution made for family stability | 4.01 | 0.93 |
| 10 | Poor or weak communication | 4.01 | 0.95 |
| 11 | Both partners returning home physically and mentally drained, leaving no energy for intimacy, emotional connection, or family activities | 4.00 | 0.93 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 12 | When both partners shoulder excessive work and family responsibilities without support, it leads to burnout and resentment | 4.00 | 0.91 |
| 13 | One partner making major financial commitments without consultation of the other | 4.00 | 0.92 |
| 14 | Inability for either spouse to take time off for family emergencies, school functions, or personal appointments | 3.96 | 0.96 |
| 15 | Arguments over who pays for what, especially when one spouse earns significantly more or less than the other | 3.96 | 0.94 |
| 16 | Infidelity | 3.95 | 1.00 |
| 17 | Irregular or demanding work hours strain a marriage | 3.89 | 0.89 |
| 18 | Crisis on children discipline and child care | 3.84 | 0.92 |
| 19 | Shaming | 3.83 | 0.95 |
| 20 | Unequal division of labor | 3.62 | 1.05 |
| | | 4.01 | 0.91 |

The results in Table 3 presented the general mean scores of the respondents in Group B for the pre-test and post-test phases of the developed intervention model.

**Table 3: General Mean Scores for the Pre-test and Post-test of Group B**

| Intervention Phase | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|
| Pre-test | 4.44 | 0.29 |
| Post-test | 4.09 | 0.42 |

The results in Table 4 showed the paired sample t-test to determine the significant difference of the general means scores of the Pre-test and Post-test

**Table 4: Test of Significance of Difference of the Pre-Test and Post- Test**

| Pair | Mean Difference | t | df | Sig (2-tailed) | Decision |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pre-test | 0.35 | 2 .94 | 17 | 0.009 | Significant effect |
| Post-test | | | | | since P (0.009) < 0.05 |

## Discussion

Table 1 showed that most prominent indicator of marital dissatisfaction among working couples was secretive relationships or undisclosed associations (4.18). This finding aligned with Staton (2025), keeping secrets, whether about finances, friendships, or significant life decisions, undermines the foundation of trust in a relationship.

The results presented in Table 2 indicated that the causes of marital dissatisfaction were the influence of social media (4.11) and interference from family and friends (4.11). This shows that the strong

influence of social media reflected how digital platforms could create unrealistic expectations, comparison, and distraction in relationships. Mian et. al. (2025), reported that intense social media usage disrupted direct human interaction, because it diminished relationship trust and degraded marital contentment levels. Similar, interference from extended family and friends was where external opinions often affected marital decisions. Travers (2025) added that without clear limits, overbearing relatives gradually eroded marital harmony. Also, Owen (2023), added that friends might be one of them.

The results presented in the Table 3 showed a comparison between the pre-test mean (4.44) and the post-test mean (4.09) in relation to the developed intervention model on marital dissatisfaction among working couples. This comparison provided insight into the effectiveness of the intervention model in addressing marital dissatisfaction. After the implementation of the intervention model, the decrease of the general mean score of respondents from 4.44 to 4.09 showed that the intervention had a positive effect in improving marital conditions. A reduction in mean score from pre-test to post-test indicated an improvement in marital satisfaction among participants after exposure to the intervention. This implied that, the intervention improved communication, conflict management, and emotional connection among couples, because the posttest remained above the midpoint of 3.00, the intervention did not eliminate marital dissatisfaction completely. The paired sample t-test result revealed a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores ($t = 2.94$, $df = 17$, $p\ (0.009) < 0.05$). This implied that the developed intervention model had a significant effect in alleviating marital dissatisfaction among the participants

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study underscores the importance of addressing key relational stressors to improve marital satisfaction. Marital intervention was effective, a sustained reinforcement and follow up support are necessary to maintain and promote long term relationship stability. The following recommendations are made based on the findings:

1. Family and Marriage Scientists should train couples with practical communication and crisis management skills that will strengthen marital trust and enhance marital satisfaction
2. Continuous intervention, follow-up and multi-component strategies, should be done by family counselors and marriage therapists to improve and sustain marital satisfaction among couples.

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