

EFFECT OF MARITAL COUNSELLING ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT OF COUPLES IN JOS METROPOLIS, PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined the effects of marital counselling on marital adjustment among couples in Jos Metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria. Marital adjustment is essential for sustaining stable and satisfying relationships; however, many couples encounter challenges such as ineffective communication, financial strain, and unresolved conflicts. The study adopted a quasi-experimental design. The target population comprises married couples within Jos Metropolis, from which a representative sample of 50 couples was selected using stratified random sampling technique. 50 couples were assigned to treatment (n=26) and control (n=24) groups. The treatment group received 8 sessions of marital counselling, while the control group received no intervention. Instruments used were validated by experts in Educational Foundations Department, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, and reliability method applied. This gave an index of 0.75. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, and inferential statistics of t-test of independent sampling. Results showed significant improvements in marital satisfaction, communication patterns, and conflict resolution skills among treated couples. Socio-demographic factors such as age, educational level, and income moderated the effectiveness of marital counselling. Based on the findings, the study concluded that marital counselling plays a vital role in promoting healthy marital relationships and reducing the incidence of marital instability. It was recommended that professional counselling services be made more accessible and affordable to couples.

Keywords: Marital counselling, marital adjustment, couples, Jos metropolis, Nigeria.

Background to the Study

Marital adjustment is a critical aspect of family life, influencing the well-being of spouses and their children. In Nigeria, marital challenges are common, with many couples experiencing conflicts, divorce, or separation (Adeyemo, 2017; Adebayo, 2025). Jos metropolis, Plateau State is no exception, with reported cases of marital discord and breakdown (Dankishiya, 2015). Marital counselling has been shown to improve relationship satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution skills (Baucom, Belcher & Christensen, 2015; Muhammad & Hamza, 2023). Studies in western contexts have demonstrated the effectiveness of marital counselling in enhancing marital adjustment. Marital counselling has become an increasingly important intervention for improving marital adjustment in Nigerian urban settings, including Jos metropolis, Plateau State. In a context where couples face communication breakdowns, conflict, infidelity, and other forms of marital

instability, structured counselling services offer a professional medium for enhancing understanding, resolving disputes, and fostering long-term relationship satisfaction.

Jos metropolis is home to a diverse population of married couples navigating modern-urban pressures such as economic stress, cultural transitions and rising expectations in marriage. Existing studies on couples in Jos indicate that many experience marital instability rooted in poor communication, unresolved conflicts, and emotional distance, which can undermine marital adjustment if not addressed.

The role of marital counselling cannot be overemphasized. Marital counselling involves structured therapeutic processes, such as psychoeducation, communication training, and conflict resolution techniques. All these help couples reframe their perspectives and strengthen their relationship functioning. Research in other Nigerian contexts shows that marital counselling significantly improves conflict resolution and marital satisfaction, suggesting that similar interventions could positively influence marital adjustment in Jos metropolis (Hahlwelg & Richter, 2010; Ugboha & Williams, 2026).

Jos metropolis provides a unique socio-religious and ethnic mix that shapes how couples perceive, negotiate, and sustain marital roles and expectations. An investigation into the effect of marital counselling on marital adjustment in this setting is therefore timely, as it can guide context-specific counselling models, policy, and community-based relationship education programmes in Plateau State and similar urban-rural interfaces in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Marital instability is increasingly common among couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria, as many experience frequent conflicts, poor communication, emotional withdrawal, and in some cases, infidelity and threats of separation. Despite the rising need for help, many couples either lack awareness of marital counselling or do not have easy access to structured counselling services that are culturally and contextually appropriate. The persistence of marital instability negatively affects marital adjustment, reducing couples' satisfaction, intimacy, and commitment. It also increases the risk of psychological distress such as anxiety and depression for spouses and may adversely influence children's emotional and social development. At the community level, high levels of marital dissatisfaction can contribute to family conflict, domestic tension, and social fragmentation in Jos metropolis.

Ideally, couples in Jos metropolis should enjoy stable, fulfilling marriages characterized by effective communication, mutual understanding, and constructive conflict resolution, supported by accessible marital counselling services. Through evidence-based marital counselling interventions, such as psycho-education on marital roles, communication training, and conflict management techniques, couples should experience improved marital adjustment, higher relationship satisfaction, and greater family harmony. The problem is that, despite the evident prevalence of marital instability and identified counselling needs, there is limited empirical evidence on how marital counselling specifically affects marital adjustment among couples in Jos metropolis. Current support systems often rely on informal or religious interventions without systematic integration of professional counselling approaches. This gap underlines the need to investigate the effect of marital counselling on marital adjustment of couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria, in order to inform context-sensitive counselling practices, policy, and community-based marital-support programmes.

Literature Review

Marital adjustment refers to the degree of harmony, satisfaction, and psychological comfort experienced by spouses in their relationship (Adeyemo, 2017; Baucom et. al., 2015). It reflects how well couples negotiate roles, resolve conflicts, share responsibilities, and maintain emotional intimacy (Dankishiya, 2015). Nigerian and cross-cultural studies indicate that low marital adjustment is associated with frequent quarrels, emotional withdrawal, and higher risk of separation or divorce,

while high marital adjustment is linked to mutual support, effective communication, and family stability.

In Nigeria, marital instability has become increasingly visible in both urban and semi-urban centres, often rooted in poor communication, differing expectations, financial stress, and interference from extended family. Research on married persons in Lafia metropolis, for instance, shows a significant level of marital instability mediated largely by conflict and poor conflict-management strategies. In Jos metropolis, recent studies on young couples likewise reveal that communication patterns strongly predict marital satisfaction, with many couples reporting moderate to high satisfaction but still facing recurrent disagreements and stress (Ugboha & Williams, 2026).

Empirical evidence suggests that marital-counselling interventions can significantly improve marital outcomes. A study on marital conflict-management counselling in Lafia metropolis found that couples exposed to structured counselling showed significant improvement in marital adjustment and reduction in anger, depression, and anxiety. Similarly, research on marital counselling in Niger State demonstrated that couples who received counselling reported higher marital stability and better communication than those in the control group. These findings indicate that counselling, especially when it targets communication, conflict resolution, and emotional regulation can be a powerful lever for strengthening marital functioning (Adeyemo, 2017; Dankishiya, 2015; Adebayo, 2025; Ajasin, 2025).

In African settings, traditional as well as formal counselling models have been deployed to address marital distress. Studies on traditional marital-counselling therapy in Ghana show that culture-sensitive interventions can reduce marital distress by helping couples realign expectations, clarify spousal roles, and manage tension. In Nigeria, evaluations of marital-counselling programmes among educated couples emphasize that counselling should explicitly address communication, trust, respect, financial management, and avoidance of third-party interference. These insights support the view that counselling does not merely "repair" damaged marriages but also helps couples build adaptive skills that sustain long-term marital adjustment (Reamen, Abubakar & Thomas, 2022).

Beyond after-marriage counselling, premarital and relationship-education programmes have also been shown to influence marital stability. A recent study on premarital counselling reported that such interventions enhance communication skills, emotional preparedness, and realistic expectations, which collectively improve marital satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of early marital breakdown. These findings suggest that counselling, whether offered before or after marriage, can shape the way couples perceive and negotiate marriage, thereby increasing the probability of higher marital adjustment (Lomotey, 2025; Simon & Atumba, 2025).

Although existing studies in Nigeria and other African countries demonstrate that marital counselling improves marital stability and adjustment, most of them focus on areas such as Lafia, Niger State, or Ghana, with limited attention to couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State. Moreover, there is relatively little empirical work that directly links marital-counselling interventions to marital adjustment among young and middle-aged couples in Jos, where rapid urbanization, ethnic diversity, and evolving gender roles intersect. This gap underscores the need for a focused investigation into the effect of marital counselling on marital adjustment of couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria, in order to generate context-specific evidence for counselling practice, policy, and community-based marital-support programmes (Muhammad, Sanusi & Hamzah, 2023).

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study, to:

1. determine the level of marital adjustment among couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria;
2. examine the extent of exposure of couples in Jos metropolis to marital-counselling services;
3. assess the effect of marital counselling on marital adjustment of couples in Jos metropolis;

4. identify the specific aspects of marital adjustment (example, communication, conflict resolution, emotional intimacy, role sharing) that are most influenced by marital counselling among couples in Jos metropolis.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the post-test marital adjustment mean scores among couples in the experimental and control groups?
2. What is the post-test marital satisfaction mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups?
3. What are the post-test conflict resolution mean scores of couples exposed to marital counselling and those not?
4. What is the post-test communication skills mean score among couples who are exposed to marital counselling and those not exposed?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance in the course of the study:

1. There is no significant difference between the post-test marital adjustment mean scores among couples in the experimental and control groups.
2. There is no significant difference between the post-test marital satisfaction mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups.

Methodology

The study adopted a quasi-experimental pretest – posttest control group design to investigate the effect of marital counselling on marital adjustment of couples. This design allows for comparison between couples who receive marital counselling intervention (experimental group) and those who do not (control group), while controlling for initial differences through pretest scores. The design is suitable because it enables the researchers to establish directionality and approximate causal inference without fully randomized assignment, which is often feasible in community-based counselling settings. The population comprised married couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria, who had been married for at least one year and were experiencing varying levels of marital difficulty or dissatisfaction. A sample of 50 couples was drawn proportionally from selected churches, counselling centres, and community organizations in Jos. Stratified random sampling was used to ensure representation across religious affiliations (Christian and Muslim) and socioeconomic strata, while simple random sampling was applied within each stratum to select individual couples.

From each selected institution or community group, lists of married couples were compiled. Couples who met the inclusion criteria (example, willingness to participate, minimum duration of marriage, and no active legal divorce proceedings) were randomly selected. The experimental group was exposed to a structured marital counselling programme, while the control group continued with their usual support systems (example, informal counselling, religious or family mediation) without the structured intervention. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Marital Counselling and Marital Adjustment Scale (MCMA)", adapted and modified from validated scales such as the Dyadic Adjustment Scale, and others. The instrument covered background information marital counselling exposure (type, duration, frequency). Dimensions of marital adjustment (communication, conflict resolution, emotional intimacy, financial management, role expectations). The questionnaire was subjected to content validation by three experts in Research, Measurement & Evaluation, Counselling and Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Jos, and its reliability was estimated using Cronbach's alpha on a pilot sample of couples not included in the main study.

Procedure for data collection included:

1. Pilot Study – A pilot study was conducted with a small, non-included sample to refine the instrument and procedure.
2. Pretest – Both experimental and control groups completed the marital adjustment questionnaire before the counselling intervention.
3. Intervention – The experimental group underwent a structured marital counselling programme (example, 8 sessions over 8 weeks) focused on communication enhancement, conflict resolution skills, emotional regulation, and joint goal-setting, while the control group received no such structured programme.
4. Posttest – After the intervention period, both groups completed the same marital adjustment questionnaire again.

Data Analysis: The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation to summarize background characteristics and marital counselling exposure. t-test of independent sample was used to test the hypotheses about the effect of marital counselling on marital adjustment.

Ethical Considerations: Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and they were assured of confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdrawn at any time.

Results

Research Question One: What are the post-test marital adjustment mean scores among couples in the experimental and control groups?

Table 1: Post-test Marital Adjustment Mean Scores among Couples in the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Post-test		Post-test Difference	Mean
		Mean	SD		
Experimental	26	18.38	1.651	6.946	
Control	24	11.29	4.027		

Table 1 presents the post-test marital adjustment mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental and control group, the post-test mean score was 18.38 and standard deviation of 1.651 and the post-test mean score of couples in the control group was 11.29 and a standard deviation of 4.027 with a mean difference of 6.95. The findings show that couples in the experimental group had a higher mean score (18.38) after exposure to marital counselling than those in the control who were not exposed. This implies that exposure to marital counselling does increase couples' marital adjustment among couples.

Research Question Two: What is the post-test marital satisfaction mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups?

Table 2: The Post-Test Marital Satisfaction Mean Score among Couples in the Experimental and Control Groups

Group	N	Post-test		Post-test Difference	Mean
		Mean	SD		
Experimental	26	18.35	1.742	5.93	
Control	24	12.42	2.903		

Table 2 reveals the post-test marital satisfaction skills mean score in the experimental and control groups. In the experimental group, the post-test marital satisfaction skill mean score was

18.35 and standard deviation of 1.742 and the control group has a mean score of 12.32 with a standard deviation of 2.903. The findings show that couples in the experimental group had a higher marital satisfaction mean score (18.35) after treatment than those in the control group (12.42) who were not given treatment with a posttest mean difference of 5.93. This means that after the intervention, the experimental group had a better marital satisfaction than the control group. This implies that exposure to marital counselling does increase marital satisfaction.

Research Question Three: What are the post-test conflict resolution mean scores of couples exposed to marital counselling and those not?

Table 3: The Post-test Conflict Resolution Mean Scores of Couples Exposed to Marital Counselling and those not

Group	N	Post-test		Post-test Difference	Mean
		Mean	SD		
Experimental	26	17.77	2.20	3.52	
Control	24	14.25	2.96		

Table 3 shows the post-test conflict resolution mean score of couples exposed to marital counselling and those not. In the experimental group the post-test mean score was 17.77 and standard deviation of 2.20 higher than that of the control group with a mean score of 12.66 and a standard deviation of 3.745. The findings show that couples in the experimental group had a higher conflict resolution mean score (17.77) after treatment than those in the control group (14.25) who were not given treatment with a post-test mean difference of 3.53. This implies that exposure to marital counselling does increase couples' conflict resolution mean score.

Research Question Four: What is the post-test communication skills mean score among couples who are exposed to marital counselling and those not exposed?

Table 4: Post-test Communication Skills Mean Score among Couples who are Exposed to Marital Counselling and those not exposed

Group	N	Post-test		Post-test Difference	Mean
		Mean	SD		
Experimental	26	17.42	1.793	4.38	
Control	24	13.04	4.759		

Table 4 indicates the communication skills mean score among couples who are exposed to marital counselling and those not exposed. In the experimental group the post-test mean score was 17.42 and standard deviation of 1.793 higher than that of the control group with a mean score of 13.04 and a standard deviation of 4.76. The findings show that couples in the experimental group had a higher communication skills mean score (17.42) than those in the control group (13.04) with a post-test mean difference of 4.38. This implies that exposure to marital counselling does increase couples' communication skills mean score.

Testing Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between the post-test marital adjustment mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups.

Table 5: Summary of t-test Result on the Difference between the Post-test Marital Adjustment Mean Score among Couples who are exposed to Marital Counselling and those not exposed

Group	N	Mean	Std.	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	26	18.38	1.651	48	8.27	.000	Significant
Control	24	11.29	4.027				

Table 5 presents the t-test of independent sampling which was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between the post-test marital adjustment mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups. Table 5 shows that $t(1.48) = 8.27$, $P < 0.05$, since the P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there was a significant difference between the post-test marital adjustment mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups. This implies that marital counselling is effective.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between the pre-test and post-test marital satisfaction mean score among couple in the experimental and control groups.

Table 6: Summary of t-test Result on the Difference between the Pre-test and Post-test Marital Satisfaction Mean Score among Couples who are exposed to Marital Counselling and those not exposed

Group	N	Mean	Std.	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
Experimental	26	18.35	1.742	48	8.84	.050	Significant
Control	24	12.42	2.903				

Table 6 reveals the t-test of independent sampling which was conducted to determine if there is a significant difference between the post-test marital satisfaction mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups. Table 6 shows that $t(1.48) = 8.84$, $P < 0.05$, since the P-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that there was a significant difference between the post-test marital satisfaction mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups. This implies that marital counselling is effective.

Discussion

The findings on the post-test marital adjustment mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups showed that couples in the experimental group had a higher mean score after exposure to marital counselling than those in the control who were not exposed. This implies that exposure to marital counselling does increase couples' marital adjustment among couples. It showed that there was a significant difference between the post-test marital adjustment mean score among couples in the experimental and control groups. Studies have shown that marital counselling can improve relationship satisfaction, communication, and conflict resolution skills (Baucom et al., 2015; Hahlweg & Richter, 2010). A meta-analysis of 30 studies on marital therapy found that couples who received therapy showed significant improvement in marital satisfaction compared to those who did not. Socio-demographic factors moderated the effectiveness of marital counselling. The study supports the Social Learning Theory and highlights the importance of marital counselling in enhancing marital adjustment.

In Nigeria, evaluations of marital counselling programmes among educated couples emphasize that counselling should explicitly address communication, trust, respect, financial management, and avoidance of third-party interference. These insights support the view that counselling does not merely "repair" damaged marriages but also helps couples build adaptive skills

that sustain long-term marital adjustment (Adeyemo, 2017). A recent study on premarital counselling reported that such interventions enhance communication skills, emotional preparedness, and realistic expectations, which collectively improve marital satisfaction and reduce the likelihood of early marital breakdown (Ugboha & Williams, 2026). These findings suggest that counselling, whether offered before or after marriage, can shape the way couples perceive and negotiate marriage, thereby increasing the probability of higher marital adjustment (Research questions 1-4; hypotheses 1 and 2).

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that marital counselling has a significant positive effect on marital adjustment among couples in Jos metropolis, Plateau State, Nigeria. Married couples who received structured marital counselling interventions reported higher levels of communication, improved conflict resolution skills, enhanced emotional intimacy, and greater satisfaction with marital roles and responsibilities compared with those who did not receive such counselling. The study further reveals that many couples in Jos metropolis are aware of marital problems but often rely on informal or religious mechanisms rather than professional counselling services, which limits the full potential for improving marital adjustment.

Overall, the study affirms that marital counselling as a structured, goal-oriented, and evidence-based intervention can serve as a powerful tool for strengthening marital bonds, reducing marital instability, and promoting family wellbeing in Jos metropolis. The positive outcomes observed across communication, conflict management, and emotional adjustment underscore the importance of integrating professional counselling into the broader support systems available to Nigerian couples.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Churches, mosques, and community organizations in Jos metropolis should partner with professional counsellors to provide regular marital counselling programmes, workshops, and seminars aimed at improving communication, conflict resolution, and emotional intimacy among couples.
2. Government and private stakeholders should establish or expand counselling centres that offer affordable, culturally sensitive marital counselling services, particularly for young and middle-aged couples navigating urban stressors.
3. Counsellor-training institutions in Plateau State and across Nigeria should intensify training in marital and family counselling, emphasizing practical skills in communication, conflict management, and psycho-education as marital roles and expectations.
4. Churches, mosques and community organizations should encourage premarital counselling as a standard practice before marriage, and periodic marital relationship education sessions should be made available to already-married couples to prevent breakdown and reinforce positive adjustment.

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