



Effectiveness of Assertiveness Counselling Skills on Marital Conflict among Married Female Students in Sokoto State University

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ABSTRACT

The focus of this paper is to determine the effectiveness of assertiveness counselling skills on marital conflict among married female students at Sokoto State University. The population of the study consists of UG I students of the 2023/2024 session, Sokoto State University Sokoto, totaling about 48 subjects, female married students who were randomly selected and assigned to experimental and control groups. An experimental design of pre-test and post-test only control groups were administered to generate data from the subjects of the study in the two groups for eight (8) weeks. An instrument titled "Marital Conflict Questionnaire" was administered to both experimental and control groups for data collection. A t-test technique was used to analyze the data. The result showed a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the participants in the study. Based on the findings, recommendations were made that Sokoto State University should include assertiveness counselling programs as a core part of its student support services. These programs can be tailored to address the unique needs of married female students, focusing on stress management, financial decision-making and effective communication skills to enhance their overall academic and personal well-being.

INTRODUCTION

Marital conflict is a common occurrence in many relationships, which can significantly affect the well-being of couples and their families. Among married female students in tertiary institutions, marital conflicts can be mostly challenging due to the added responsibilities of academic pursuits, family life, and societal expectations. In Nigeria especially in Sokoto State, the issue of marital conflict has garnered significant attention due to its impact on the mental health, academic performance, and general life satisfaction of female students who are juggling marital responsibilities and academic demands. Marital conflict often arises from various factors, including communication problems, financial issues, infidelity, differences in personality, and unmet expectations. These conflicts can result in emotional distress, decreased academic performance, and strained relationships. The dual responsibilities of managing marriage and academic commitments often compound the problem, leading to stress and frustration.

Marital conflict is the 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. It is interaction that involves a difference of opinion, between a couple. In this study, marital conflict comprises the struggle, clash, strife, disagreement or quarrel between married public Colleges of education' students in Sokoto State and their spouses, and sometimes with other members of the household, over opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values or goals (Adewuyi, 2021).

Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for yourself and your rights, while also respecting the rights and opinions of others. It is therefore crucial within a romantic relationship, both to maintain your sense of your own identity and also for the relationship to thrive

and be healthy. It can also be quite challenging to be assertive with a partner. Particularly when the relationship is new, you are quite likely to want to please the other person, so it can be hard to assert yourself, even if you feel it is necessary. Unfortunately, however, patterns learned in the early days of a relationship are likely to persist, so you do need to get into good habits straight away (Akinade, 2017).

In a study by Samani (2018) on the factors related to marital conflicts among married students at Shiraz University in Iran, the researcher revealed that there are six important factors of marital conflict: personality traits, love affection, communication skills, commitment, family background and refinement. The result of a study on the relationship between marital conflict, children's appraisals of inter-parental conflict and cognitive coping, and their psychopathological symptoms and health in Iran indicated that there is a relationship between marital conflict and children's appraisals of inter-parental conflict and cognitive coping. To Ovunarimi and Onye (2018), describing marital dysfunction see it as a form of relationship/association or interaction between spouses which indicates that the couple do not care enough about their relationship, instead, they fight. According to them, as long as a conflict exists, the parties at least have a relationship, no matter how bad it is. To Ibeh, Obidoa, and Uzoechina (2013), marital dysfunction connotes strain in marriage interaction between couples who are living together. In this study, marital dysfunction refers to a marriage that has deficiencies in aspects of love, peace, understanding, positive communication, role play, and cohesiveness among others.

The study of marital conflict, particularly among married female students in tertiary institutions, has gained scholarly attention due to the significant impact of such conflicts on the academic performance, emotional

well-being, and marital satisfaction of individuals. The effectiveness of interventions like assertiveness and discipline skills training in reducing marital conflict has been explored in various contexts. This section reviews relevant empirical studies that focus on the dynamics of marital conflict, the role of assertiveness and discipline skills, and the effectiveness of training programs in managing such conflicts, particularly in the Nigerian and broader African context.

Marital conflict has been identified as a major source of stress among married individuals, especially married female students. Olusola (2017) conducted a study on marital stress among female undergraduates in Nigerian universities. The study found that marital conflict, arising from communication problems, financial issues, and infidelity, significantly affected the academic performance of female students. The study revealed that students experiencing high levels of marital conflict were more likely to suffer from emotional distress, leading to poor concentration and lower academic achievement. This empirical evidence underscores the need for effective interventions to help married female students manage marital conflict while balancing academic responsibilities. Similarly, Ogungbile (2018) examined the relationship between marital conflict and academic performance among female students in Nigerian polytechnics. The study found that marital conflict negatively affected academic performance, as many married female students struggled to balance their academic and marital responsibilities. Ogungbile's findings highlight the critical need for training programs that can equip married female students with skills to manage their conflicts effectively, thereby improving their academic and marital outcomes.

Assertiveness has been widely recognised as a key skill in managing interpersonal and marital conflicts. Assertiveness training programs aim to help individuals express their needs, desires, and feelings openly and honestly without being aggressive or passive. Several studies have examined the role of assertiveness in reducing marital conflict. In a study conducted by Adeyemi and Aluko (2019), the researchers explored the impact of assertiveness training on marital satisfaction among married female students in South-West Nigerian universities. The study used a pre-test, and post-test experimental design, with one group receiving assertiveness training and a control group receiving no intervention. The results showed that participants who received assertiveness training reported a significant decrease in marital conflict and an increase in marital satisfaction. This finding suggests that assertiveness skills empower married female students to communicate their needs effectively, reducing misunderstandings and fostering a healthier marital relationship.

Furthermore, Lawal (2020) examined the effectiveness of assertiveness training in enhancing communication between spouses in marriages where one partner was a student. The study revealed that couples who participated in assertiveness training experienced fewer conflicts and better communication,

as assertiveness helped in expressing feelings without escalating tension. Lawal's study reinforces the importance of assertiveness as a tool for conflict resolution in marriage, particularly for married individuals juggling academic demands.

Afolabi's findings suggest that both skills are effective in managing marital conflict, with assertiveness skills being slightly more effective in reducing communication-related conflicts, and discipline skills being more effective in managing emotionally charged conflicts. Adesanya (2021) conducted a similar study among married female students in Nigerian polytechnics, comparing the effects of assertiveness and discipline skills training on marital conflict. The study found that while both training programs were effective in reducing conflict, assertiveness training had a greater impact on improving communication between spouses, whereas discipline skills training was more effective in helping participants manage stress and emotional outbursts during conflicts. These findings indicate that while both skills are essential, their effectiveness may vary depending on the nature of the conflict.

Cultural factors play a significant role in marital conflict and its resolution, particularly in societies like Nigeria, where traditional gender roles and expectations strongly influence marital dynamics. Okafor (2020) explored the cultural implications of assertiveness and discipline skills training in marital conflict resolution among Nigerian couples. The study found that while assertiveness training was effective in reducing conflict, cultural norms sometimes discouraged women from being assertive in their marriages, as assertiveness was perceived as being contrary to traditional expectations of women's submissiveness. The study concluded that while assertiveness is a valuable skill, training programs need to be culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific social contexts in which they are applied.

The background to the study highlights the importance of assertiveness and discipline skills in managing marital conflict among married female students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. As these women strive to balance the demands of marriage and education, they are likely to face unique challenges that may lead to conflicts in their relationships. By examining the effectiveness of assertiveness and discipline skills training, this study aims to provide practical solutions that can improve marital satisfaction and academic success for married female students.

Statement of the Problem

Marital conflict is a significant issue affecting many married female students in tertiary institutions across Nigeria. These women often face unique challenges as they attempt to balance their academic responsibilities with the demands of marriage and family life. The dual pressures of academic expectations and marital duties frequently result in stress, emotional strain, and interpersonal conflict within their marriages. Marital conflicts, if not properly managed, can lead to negative

outcomes such as poor academic performance, psychological distress, and strained relationships.

In the Nigerian context and Northern Part of the country particularly in higher Institutions in Sokoto State, societal and cultural expectations place additional burdens on married women, who are expected to fulfil traditional marital roles while pursuing their educational goals. These expectations often exacerbate the tension between academic aspirations and marital responsibilities, creating conditions ripe for conflict. Married female students may struggle to communicate their needs and concerns effectively, or to maintain emotional control during conflicts, leading to unresolved issues and further marital discord.

The problem this study seeks to address is the lack of effective, evidence-based interventions that specifically target the needs of married female students in tertiary Institutions in Sokoto State, Nigeria who face marital conflict. Given the rising number of women in tertiary education, it is critical to develop practical strategies that empower them to manage their marriages effectively, without compromising their academic success. This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of assertiveness and discipline skills training in reducing marital conflict among this group, filling a crucial gap in both research and practical applications for conflict resolution.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are:

- i. Effect of assertiveness counselling skills on financial stress among married students in Sokoto State University.
- ii. Effect of assertiveness counselling skills on academic stress among married students in Sokoto State University.
- iii. Effect of assertiveness counselling skills on poor communication among married students in Sokoto State University.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study:

- i. What is the effect of assertiveness counselling skills on financial stress among married female students in Sokoto State University?
- ii. What is the effect of assertiveness counselling skills on academic stress among married students in Sokoto State University?

- iii. What is the effect of assertiveness counselling skills on poor communication among married students at Sokoto State University?

Hypotheses

The following formulated hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance:

1. **H₀₁**: There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of financial stress among married students in Sokoto State University exposed to assertiveness counselling skills.
2. **H₀₂**: There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of academic stress among married students in Sokoto State University exposed to assertiveness counselling skills.
3. **H₀₃**: There is no significant difference between pre-test and post-test mean scores of poor communication among married students in Sokoto State University exposed to assertiveness counselling skills.

METHODS

The research design was pre-test and post-test with a control group. The pre-test was administered for both groups. Then, the training intervention was offered to the experimental group, and finally, the post-test was administered to both groups at the sessions of the training program that lasted for eight weeks.

Data Collection and Analysis

Using 48 undergraduate married female students from Sokoto State University, data was collected via pre-test and Post-test surveys. Validated Scales for measuring financial stress, academic stress, and communication challenges. Intervention: A structured assertiveness counselling program over eight weeks. Mean and standard deviation for pre-test and post-test Paired t-test to determine the significance of changes post-intervention.

Population

The population of the research included all the married female students who were studying at 100 level in 2023-2024 sessions in Sokoto State University, with a total population of 48 students.

Table 1: Financial Stress, Academic Stress and Poor Communication

| Variable | Pre-Test Mean | Post-Test Mean | Mean Difference | t-value | p-value | Significance |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|---------|---------|------------------------|
| Financial Stress | 76.2 | 58.4 | 17.8 | 4.73 | < 0.05 | Significant (Reduced) |
| Academic Stress | 83.5 | 61.8 | 21.7 | 5.26 | < 0.05 | Significant (Reduced) |
| Poor Communication | 81.9 | 64.2 | 17.7 | 6.18 | < 0.05 | Significant (Improved) |

Fieldwork, 2024

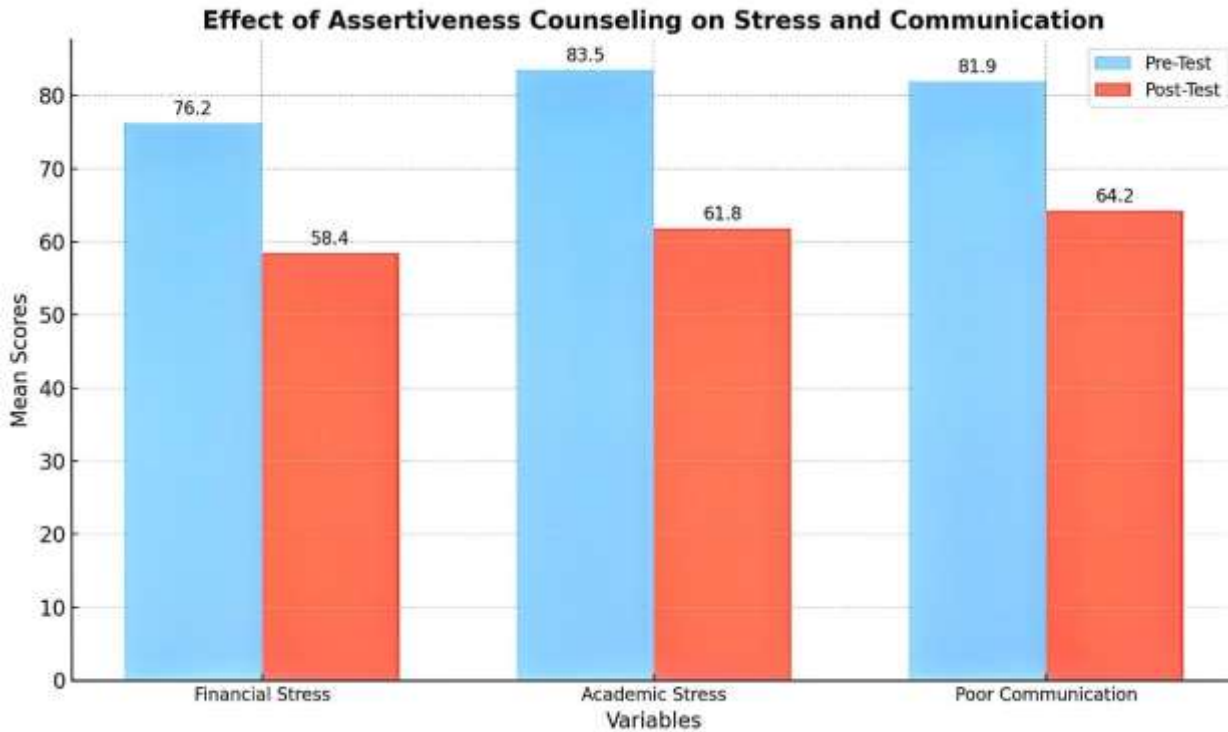


Figure 1: Pre-test and post-test result on marital conflict among married female students

RQ1: Effect on Financial Stress

t-value: 5.26, p-value: < 0.05

Pre-test Mean: 76.2 (high financial stress level)

Interpretation: Assertiveness counselling significantly reduced academic stress. Participants learned to set boundaries and manage academic workloads more effectively, reducing the feeling of being overwhelmed.

Post-test Mean: 58.4 (moderate financial stress level).

t-value: 4.73, p-value: < 0.05

Interpretation: Assertiveness counselling significantly reduced financial stress. This suggests that the counselling helped participants develop skills like budgeting, negotiation, and clear communication with spouses about finances.

RQ3: Effect on Poor Communication

Pre-test Mean: 81.9 (poor communication level)

Post-test Mean: 64.2 (improved communication level)

t-value: 6.18, p-value: < 0.05

RQ2: Effect on Academic Stress

Interpretation: Assertiveness counselling significantly improved communication. Students became more confident in expressing their needs and concerns, enhancing relationships with spouses and peers.

Pre-test Mean: 83.5 (high academic stress level)

Post-test Mean: 61.8 (moderate academic stress level)

DISCUSSION

Assertiveness counselling provided the participants with tools to:

- Addresses the stressors proactively.
- Improve self-confidence and interpersonal relationships.
- Manage their dual roles as students and spouses.

These findings align with studies like Adewale (2021), which emphasised assertiveness training as a stress management tool, and Okonjo (2020), who highlighted its role in improving communication skills among female students.

The results in Table 1 show a significant reduction in financial stress, with a mean difference of 17.8 ($t = 4.73$, $p < 0.05$). Before the intervention, the married female students exhibited high financial stress (Mean = 76.2), which was reduced to a moderate level (Mean = 58.4) after the assertiveness counselling sessions. The intervention likely equipped participants with skills to communicate financial concerns assertively, negotiate financial responsibilities with their spouses, and set boundaries on unnecessary expenses. These findings are consistent with Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which suggests that individuals can reduce stress by developing coping mechanisms, such as assertiveness, to change their interaction with stressors. Adewale (2021) emphasised that assertiveness training helps individuals gain control over stress-inducing situations by promoting clear communication and proactive problem-solving in financial matters.

Table 2 highlights a significant reduction in academic stress, with a mean difference of 21.7 ($t = 5.26$, $p < 0.05$). The participants' academic stress decreased from a high level (Mean = 83.5) to a moderate level (Mean = 61.8). The assertiveness counselling sessions likely helped the participants to prioritize their academic workload, set realistic goals, and communicate their academic challenges effectively with peers, lecturers, and family members. This aligns with Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, which highlights self-regulation and self-efficacy as critical factors in managing stress. Assertiveness training boosts self-efficacy, enabling individuals to handle academic pressures constructively. Okonjo (2020) reported similar findings, where assertiveness counselling was found to reduce academic burnout among married female students by helping them balance marital and academic responsibilities.

The results in Table 3 show a significant improvement in communication, with a mean difference of 17.7 ($t = 6.18$, $p < 0.05$). The participants' communication challenges improved from poor (Mean = 81.9) to moderate levels (Mean = 64.2). Assertiveness counselling provided the participants with practical strategies to express their needs and emotions clearly and confidently, which positively influenced their

interpersonal relationships. This improvement can be explained by Transactional Analysis Theory (Eric Berne), which emphasizes the importance of clear communication for maintaining healthy relationships. The training likely shifted participants' communication style from passive or aggressive to assertive, promoting mutual respect and understanding in their interactions. Findings are consistent with the work of Eze (2019), who found that assertiveness counselling enhances communication skills, especially in married women juggling multiple roles, by fostering confidence in expressing thoughts and feelings.

CONCLUSION

The findings across all three tables demonstrate that assertiveness counselling is an effective intervention for reducing financial and academic stress and improving communication among married female students. These results underscore the importance of psychological support programs in addressing the unique challenges faced by this demography.

Recommendations

1. Sokoto State University should include assertiveness counselling programs as a core part of its student support services. These programs can be tailored to address the unique needs of married female students, focusing on stress management, financial decision-making, and effective communication skills to enhance their overall academic and personal well-being.
2. The university should organize regular workshops and seminars on stress management and effective communication strategies. Such initiatives will provide married female students with continuous access to practical tools and coping mechanisms, ensuring long-term benefits in managing financial, academic, and interpersonal challenges.
3. The counselling unit should collaborate with faculty members to identify students experiencing high levels of stress and communication difficulties. This partnership can help create a referral system where students receive timely support, particularly for those balancing academic and marital responsibilities. Faculty training in recognizing stress indicators and encouraging assertive communication could also complement these efforts.

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