

COUNSELLING SERVICES AS PREDICTOR OF MARITAL SUCCESS AMONG COUPLES IN BENIN METROPOLIS, EDO STATE, NIGERIA

PATRICIA EGHE IMA-OSAGIE, PhD

E-Mail: patricia.ima-osagie@uniben.edu

GSM-No.: 08055324995

CHIKA PATRICK OJIYI, PhD

E-Mail: chika.ojiyi@uniben.edu

GSM-No.: 08062480589

Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology

Faculty of Education, University of Benin,

Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined marital counselling services as predictors of marital success in Edo State, Nigeria. It specifically investigated how access to and use of marital counselling services influence marital quality, stability, and satisfaction among married individuals. A correlational survey research design was adopted, involving married persons across selected local government areas in Edo State. A total population of 1,200 out of which 400 respondents were selected using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure balanced representation across age, gender, educational level, and socio-economic status. Data were collected using a validated structured questionnaire titled Marital Counselling and Marital Success Scale (MCMSS), with a reliability coefficient of 0.87 using Cronbach's Alpha. Four research questions and three hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. It was therefore concluded that marital counselling significantly improves success by fostering better communicates emotional empathy and conflict resolution. Findings revealed a significant positive relationship between marital counselling services and marital success in Edo State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was therefore recommended among others that government organizations, non-governmental organizations, and faith based institutions should organize public enlightenment campaigns to promote the importance of marital counselling.

Keywords: Marital Counselling, Marital Success, Marital Satisfaction, Relationship Stability.

DOI: <https://doie.org/10.50390/SER.2026594987>

Introduction

Marriage remains one of the oldest and most fundamental social institutions, serving as the foundation of family life and community development across societies. Universally, marriage is regarded as a sacred union that embodies commitment, companionship, mutual responsibility, and emotional connection between partners (Amato & James, 2018). In Nigeria, marriage holds deep cultural, religious, and social significance, as it is often perceived not merely as a relationship between two individuals but as a union that binds families, lineages, and communities together. The stability and success of marriage are therefore considered vital not only to the individuals involved but also to the broader social structure.

Despite its importance, the stability and success of marriages in Nigeria have increasingly been threatened by numerous challenges. These include ineffective communication, financial pressures, domestic violence, infidelity, lack of emotional

maturity, and weak conflict management skills (Eze, 2021; Okorie, 2022). Such challenges often result in marital dissatisfaction, prolonged conflicts, emotional distress, and in many cases, separation or divorce. These issues highlight the growing vulnerability of marital relationships and the urgent need for effective interventions that can support couples in navigating marital challenges constructively.

Globally, marital counselling has emerged as both a preventive and remedial strategy for addressing marital difficulties and strengthening marital relationships. Marital counselling according to Birchler et al. (2022) also called couples therapy is a type of professional guidance that helps married partners understand and improve their relationship. Marital counselling provides couples with structured guidance, communication techniques, problem-solving skills, and emotional support aimed at enhancing relationship quality and stability (Johnson & Greenman, 2019). Counselling services may take various forms, including premarital counselling, ongoing marital therapy, and crisis intervention counselling. Empirical evidence consistently shows that couples who participate in marital counselling are more likely to experience higher levels of satisfaction, intimacy, trust, and effective conflict resolution compared to those who do not engage in counselling (Stanley et al., 2020).

In developed countries, marital counselling has become an integral component of marriage preparation and maintenance. Premarital counselling, in particular, has been shown to equip couples with realistic expectations and essential skills for managing marital transitions, while ongoing marital counselling provides continuous support as couples face challenges over time (Markman & Rhoades, 2019). Research indicates that structured counselling interventions significantly improve emotional resilience and reduce the likelihood of marital breakdown by fostering healthy communication patterns and emotional regulation (Baucom et al., 2018).

In Nigeria, however, the adoption of formal marital counselling services remains relatively limited. Marriage is traditionally anchored in cultural and religious practices that emphasize family involvement, communal values, and adherence to social norms. Many couples rely heavily on traditional rites, family guidance, or religious counselling when facing marital challenges, often without accessing professional counselling services (Eboh, 2020). While these traditional systems may offer moral and social support, they may not adequately address the complex psychological, emotional, and interpersonal dynamics that characterize modern marital relationships.

Cultural perceptions, religious beliefs, stigmatization, and limited access to qualified counsellors further discourage couples from seeking professional marital counselling in Nigeria (Eboh, 2020). In many communities, discussing marital issues outside the family is considered taboo, creating barriers to professional intervention. As a result, unresolved conflicts often escalate into severe marital crises, contributing to rising rates of marital instability, domestic violence, and divorce.

The rapid social transformation occurring in Nigeria has further intensified marital challenges. Factors such as urbanization, changing gender roles, economic pressures, exposure to global values, and increased individualism have altered traditional marital dynamics (Osagie & Edebir, 2021). These changes have heightened expectations within marriage while simultaneously increasing stressors that couples may be ill-equipped to manage without professional support. Consequently, the need for structured marital counselling interventions has become increasingly critical in contemporary Nigerian society.

Edo State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, presents a culturally rich context for examining the role of marital counselling in marital success. The state is known for its strong family structures, traditional marriage ceremonies, and communal values. Despite these strengths, Edo State has experienced rising cases of marital instability, domestic violence, and divorce, which have become a growing concern for families and policymakers (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Many of these challenges stem from poor communication, lack of emotional preparedness, financial strain, and ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms among couples (Okorie, 2022).

According to Ibhakewanlan (2019) integrating marital counselling into traditional and religious marriage practices in Edo State has the potential to significantly enhance marital quality and reduce the prevalence of marital breakdown. By equipping couples with practical skills in communication, trust-building, emotional intelligence, and conflict management, marital counselling can serve as a strong predictor of marital success and stability (Johnson & Greenman, 2019). However, empirical research examining the predictive role of marital counselling services on marital success within the Edo State context remains limited.

This study therefore seeks to fill this gap by empirically investigating the relationship between marital counselling services and marital success in Edo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examines how access to and utilization of marital counselling services influence key indicators of marital success, such as satisfaction, trust, communication, and conflict resolution. Understanding this relationship is essential for developing evidence-based counselling practices and policies that support marital stability.

The significance of this study lies in its potential to bridge the gap between cultural marriage practices and professional counselling interventions. By examining marital counselling as a predictor of marital success, the study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform policymakers, religious institutions, counsellors, and community programmes. Such evidence may guide the integration of structured counselling services into premarital and marital processes within Nigerian communities.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are expected to contribute to the emotional stability of individuals, the well-being of children and extended families, and the promotion of social harmony and economic development. Strengthening marriages through effective counselling interventions ultimately supports the creation of stable families and healthier communities. By highlighting the critical role of marital counselling in reducing marital conflicts and divorce rates, this study underscores the importance of adopting proactive and professional approaches to sustaining successful marriages in Edo State and Nigeria at large.

Statement of Problem

Marriage, as a social institution, plays a crucial role in promoting emotional stability, family cohesion, and societal development. In recent years, however, the quality and stability of marriages in Nigeria have increasingly come under threat. Rising cases of divorce, separation, domestic violence, infidelity, and marital dissatisfaction have

become prevalent across various socio-economic and cultural groups (Eze, 2021; Okorie, 2022). The breakdown of marriages not only affects the couples involved but also has far-reaching consequences for children, extended families, and society at large. In Benin Metropolis, Edo State, marital instability has become a growing concern, with many couples experiencing persistent conflicts that often escalate into emotional disconnection or separation. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) indicate an upward trend in marital instability and divorce in parts of southern Nigeria, including Edo State, underscoring the urgent need for effective interventions to promote marital stability and satisfaction.

Although marital counselling is widely recognized as an effective intervention for enhancing marital success and reducing relationship distress (Stanley et al, 2020), its utilization and integration within Nigerian marriage systems remain limited. Many couples may continue to rely on traditional and religious marriage preparation processes that emphasize cultural rites rather than emotional and psychological readiness. In many cases, marital counselling is sought only as a last resort when marriages are already facing severe challenges, rather than as a preventive measure designed to equip couples with communication, emotional intelligence, and conflict resolution skills (Eboh, 2020). This reactive approach undermines the proactive and developmental role of marital counselling in building resilient marriages.

Furthermore, socio-cultural and religious beliefs in Nigeria often discourage open discussion of marital problems outside the family or religious circle, leading to the stigmatization of professional counselling services (Osagie & Edebir, 2021). Consequently, many couples enter marriage without adequate knowledge of emotional compatibility, financial management, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for marital success (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). While studies in developed countries consistently demonstrate the positive effects of marital counselling, there is limited empirical evidence on its predictive influence on marital success within the Nigerian context, particularly in Benin Metropolis, Edo State. This gap makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness and accessibility of marital counselling services across diverse cultural and socio-economic settings. Therefore, there is a pressing need to empirically examine the relationship between marital counselling services and marital success in Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the influence of marital counselling services on marital success among couples in Benin Metropolis, Edo State, Nigeria. The study seeks to determine whether access to and participation in marital counselling can significantly predict indicators of marital success such as communication effectiveness, trust, emotional intimacy, conflict resolution, and overall marital satisfaction.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

- i. What is the level of awareness of marital counselling services among couples in Benin Metropolis, Edo State?

- ii. To what extent do couples in Benin Metropolis in Edo State access and utilize marital counselling services?
- iii. What are the perceived effects of marital counselling on marital success among couples in Benin Metropolis in Edo State?
- iv. Does marital counselling predict successful marriage among couples in Benin Metropolis, Edo State?

Hypotheses

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

- Ho1: There is no significant relationship between marital counselling services and marital success among couples in Benin Metropolis, Edo State.
- Ho2: Marital counselling does not significantly predict marital success among couples in Benin Metropolis, Edo State.
- Ho3: There is no significant difference in the perception of marital counselling based on gender in Benin Metropolis, Edo State.

Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey research design. The correlational design is considered appropriate because the study seeks to determine the predictive relationship between marital counselling services and marital success among couples in Edo State. The population comprised 1,200, married and intending couples residing in Edo State, who have either participated in marital counselling or are aware of such services. A multistage sampling technique was used to select a total of 400 respondents. The researcher developed a thirty four (34) item instrument titled “Marital Counselling and Marital Success Scale (MCMSS)” which had four clusters ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. The instrument was validated by two experts in the department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology University of Benin. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient obtained from the pilot test was 0.86, indicating a high level of reliability. Data collected were analysed using Mean, Standard Deviation for the research questions and inferential statistics for the hypotheses testing. Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed to married and intending couples across the three senatorial districts of Edo State (Edo North, Edo Central, and Edo South), 320 copies were properly completed and returned, representing a 91.4% response rate. This high rate of response indicates a strong level of interest and cooperation from participants, enhancing the reliability and validity of the findings.

Results

Demographic information such as gender, age, educational qualification, marital status, and years of marriage was summarized using frequency and percentage distributions.

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	130	40.6
	Female	190	59.4
Age	21–30 years	65	20.3
	31–40 years	118	36.9

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
	41–50 years	87	27.2
	51 years and above	50	15.6
	50 years and above	50	15.6
Educational Qualification	Secondary	42	13.1
	Tertiary	198	61.9
	Postgraduate	80	25.0
Duration of Marriage	1–5 years	90	28.1
	6–10 years	115	35.9
	11 years and above	115	35.9

From the table above, the majority of respondents was females (59.4%), aged between 31–40 years (36.9%), and most had tertiary education (61.9%). This distribution reflects a population well-informed and possibly aware of marital counselling and relationship dynamics.

Research Question 1:

What is the level of awareness of marital counselling services among couples in Edo State?

Result of research question one indicated a high level of awareness ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.69$), suggesting that most couples are aware of the availability and importance of marital counselling services in their communities.

Research Question 2:

To what extent do couples in Edo State access and utilize marital counselling services?

Result revealed a moderate level of utilization ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.82$). While awareness appears high, not all couples actively seek or attend counselling sessions, often citing time constraints, cost, or cultural perceptions as barriers.

Research Question 3:

What are the perceived effects of marital counselling on marital quality and success?

Result revealed that respondents strongly agreed that marital counselling contributes to improved communication, conflict resolution, and emotional understanding between partners ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.55$). This indicates that counselling interventions significantly enhance relationship satisfaction and stability.

Research Question 4:

Does marital counselling predict marital success among couples in Edo State?

Result of preliminary descriptive analysis showed a positive trend, indicating that couples who participated in counselling were more likely to report higher marital satisfaction.

Tables 2 to 4 of Research Questions

Research Question	Mean (M)	Std. Dev. (SD)	Interpretation
Level of Awareness	3.85	0.69	Most couples are aware of the availability and importance of services
Level of Utilization	3.21	0.82	Moderate: Participation lags behind awareness due to cost, time, and cultural stigma
Perceived Effects	4.12	0.55	Very High: Respondents strongly agree counselling improves communication and intimacy

Hypothesis One

There is no significant relationship between marital counselling services and marital success among couples in Edo State.

Using Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation, results showed a significant positive relationship ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that marital counselling services are positively related to marital success and satisfaction.

Hypothesis Two

Marital counselling does not significantly predict marital success among couples in Edo State.

Results of a simple linear regression analysis revealed that marital counselling significantly predicts marital quality ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 7.84$, $p < 0.05$). The model accounted for approximately 37% of the variance in marital success ($R^2 = 0.37$).

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference in the perception of marital counselling based on gender.

Using an Independent Samples t-test, results indicated no statistically significant difference ($t = 1.13$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that both male and female respondents share similar perceptions of marital counselling.

Tables 5-7 of Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis	Statistical Tool	Result/Value	Decision	Analysis of Result
SH_1S: Relationship	Pearson Correlation (SrS)	S0.68S	Rejected SH-0S	There is a strong, positive relationship between counselling and marital success
SH_2S: Predict Power	Simple Linear Regression	S\beta = 0.61S	Rejected SH_0S	Counselling is a significant predictor ($Sp < 0.05S$). The model

SH_3S:	Independent	St= 1.13S	Accepted	explain 37% of success variance.
Gender	t-test		SH_0S	There is no significant difference in how men and women perceive counselling
Difference				

Summary of Findings

1. Awareness of marital counselling services among couples in Edo State is generally high.
2. Utilization of marital counselling services remains moderate despite widespread awareness.
3. marital counselling significantly enhances relationship communication, understanding, and conflict resolution.
4. There is a strong positive relationship between marital counselling and marital success.
5. Marital counselling is a significant predictor of the quality and stability of marriage Edo State

Discussion

This paper discussed the major findings of the study in relation to the research questions and hypotheses. The purpose of this study was to examine how marital counselling services predict marital success among couples in Edo State.

The findings revealed a high level of awareness of marital counselling services among couples in Edo State ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.69$). This suggests that most couples are familiar with the availability and potential benefits of marital counselling within their communities. This outcome could be attributed to the increasing role of churches, mosques, and community-based organizations that emphasize premarital and post-marital counselling.

This finding aligns with the submission of Adebayo (2020), who noted that awareness of counselling services has significantly improved in Nigerian urban centers due to educational exposure and the influence of faith-based organizations. Similarly, Okorie and Onuoha (2021) observed that the promotion of counselling programmes through social media and marriage seminars has contributed to better recognition of marital counselling as a preventive measure for marital crises.

However, while awareness is high, it does not necessarily translate to utilization, which indicates that other factors such as cultural beliefs and accessibility may influence the actual use of counselling services.

Utilization of Marital Counselling Services among Couples

Despite the high level of awareness, the study revealed a moderate level of utilization of marital counselling services among couples ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.82$). This implies that although couples know about counselling, not all actively participate in it. Some respondents cited reasons such as lack of time, cost of sessions, cultural perceptions

that counselling is only for troubled marriages, and the stigma associated with seeking help.

This finding is consistent with Olowu (2019), who observed that in many Nigerian societies, couples often perceive marital counselling as unnecessary unless serious problems arise. Additionally, Eze and Nwoye (2020) reported that socio-cultural norms and patriarchal beliefs in some parts of Nigeria discourage open communication about marital challenges, thereby reducing couples' willingness to seek professional guidance.

The moderate level of utilization highlights the need for public education and awareness campaigns to promote the preventive and developmental aspects of counselling, not just its remedial function.

Effects of Marital Counselling on Marital Success.

The study established that marital counselling significantly improves communication, understanding, and conflict resolution among couples ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 0.55$). This suggests that counselling interventions positively influence the success of marital relationships. Couples who participated in counselling reported better emotional bonding, tolerance, and teamwork in managing marital responsibilities.

This finding agrees with Amadi and Okwu (2018), who found that couples who underwent counselling before and during marriage displayed higher levels of marital satisfaction compared to those who did not. Similarly, Nwachukwu (2021) emphasized that marital counselling equips couples with coping strategies and emotional intelligence skills necessary for sustaining long-term relationships.

These findings validate the premise of Family Systems Theory, which posits that healthy communication and problem-solving patterns within couples lead to stable and satisfying relationships (Bowen, 1978). Counselling thus serves as a structured process that strengthens the emotional and cognitive understanding between partners.

Predictive Power of Marital Counselling on Marital Success

The regression analysis demonstrated that marital counselling significantly predicts the quality of marriage among couples in Edo State ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 7.84$, $p < 0.05$), accounting for 37% of the variance in marital success. This indicates that counselling services have a measurable and substantial effect on the overall quality of marriages.

This finding corroborates Ogunleye (2020), who concluded that structured counselling sessions that emphasize communication skills, empathy, and conflict resolution significantly improve marital adjustment and satisfaction. The result further implies that marital counselling serves as a proactive tool for preventing divorce, promoting harmony, and fostering emotional intimacy.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine marital counselling services as a predictor of marital success among couples in Edo State. Guided by specific research questions and

hypotheses, the study explored the level of awareness, utilization, perceived impact, and predictive influence of marital counselling on marital success.

The findings of the study revealed that while there is a high level of awareness of marital counselling services among couples in Edo State, the level of utilization remains moderate. This suggests that even though couples recognize the value of counselling, not all take advantage of it largely due to cultural beliefs, misconceptions, and limited access to professional counsellors. Furthermore, the study established that marital counselling significantly improves marital success by fostering better communication, emotional understanding, empathy, and conflict resolution skills between partners. Couples who participated in counselling were more likely to report satisfaction, mutual respect, and stability in their marriages.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, some recommendations are proposed to strengthen the role of marital counselling in enhancing marital success of couples in Edo State and beyond:

1. **Promote Public Awareness and Education on Marital Counselling:** Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and faith-based institutions should organize public enlightenment campaigns to promote the importance of marital counselling. Many couples still view counselling as a service meant only for troubled relationships. Awareness programmes should therefore reorient couples and the public to see counselling as a preventive and developmental tool that enhances communication, trust, and understanding within marriages. Community radio programmes, social media sensitization, and premarital workshops should also be utilized to reach younger couples and intending partners.
2. **Institutionalize Counselling in Religious and Marriage Registries:** Given that most marriages in Edo State are conducted in religious institutions and local marriage registries, it is recommended that premarital and post-marital counselling be made mandatory before the formal solemnization of marriage. Religious leaders, marriage registrars, and local governments should collaborate with trained counsellors to provide structured counselling sessions focusing on topics such as emotional intelligence, financial management, sexual compatibility, and conflict resolution.
3. **Strengthen the Availability of Professional Counsellors:** There is a need to increase the number of trained marital and family counsellors across Edo State. Educational institutions, particularly universities and teacher training colleges, should expand programmes in counselling psychology and family therapy.
4. **Integrate Marital Counselling into Workplace Wellness Programmes:** Organizations and institutions especially those with a large number of married employees should include marital and family counselling in their employee wellness and mental health programmes.
5. **Address Cultural and Gender Barriers to Counselling:** There are some cultural beliefs and sex norms in Nigerian society which discourage couples, particularly as to males, from seeking counselling help. To overcome this, community and religious leaders could advocate for counselling as a sign of strength and maturity, not weakness.

6. **Encourage Continuous Counselling Beyond the Premarital Stage:** Marital counselling should not end after the wedding ceremony, couples should be encouraged to seek periodic counselling sessions to evaluate their relationship dynamics.

References

- Amadi, O., & Okwu, C. (2018). Premarital counselling as a tool for marital stability in Nigeria. *African Journal of Psychology and Counselling*, **10** (1): 89–101.
- Amato, P. R., & James, S. (2018). Changes in spousal relationships over time. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, **80** (2): 234–249.
- Adebayo, T. M. (2020). Counselling and family stability in Nigeria: The moderating role of cultural awareness. *Journal of Social Sciences*, **14** (3): 122–130
- Baucom, D. H., Chen, K., Perry, N., & Addison, W. (2018). Couple-based interventions for relationship distress and adult mental health problems. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, **86** (6): 463–477.
- Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. Jason Aronson.
- Birchler, G.R., Simpson, L.E., & Fals-Stewart, W. (2008). They contribute to the field of marital therapy, focusing on evidence-based approaches to repairing distressed relationships.
- Eboh, L. (2020). Cultural perceptions and utilization of counselling services in Nigeria. *African Journal of Social Work*, **12** (4): 57–68.
- Eze, A. N. (2021). Marital instability in Nigeria: Trends, causes and consequences. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Research*, **9** (3): 88–96.
- Ibhakewanlan, J. O. (2019). Marriage practices and cultural beliefs in Edo State. *Nigerian Journal of Culture and Society*, **6** (1), 14–22.
- Johnson, S. M., & Greenman, P. (2019). The science of couple therapy: The new frontier for relationship interventions. *American Psychologist*, **74** (1): 33–45.
- Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2020). Contextual influences on marriage: Implications for policy and intervention. *Annual Review of Psychology*, **71**: 211–236.
- Markman, H. J., & Rhoades, G. K. (2019). Relationship education research: Current status and future directions. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, **45** (3): 431–444.
- National Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Divorce and separation trends in Nigeria*. Abuja: Government Press.
- Nwachukwu, R. C. (2021). *The relevance of marital counselling in promoting emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction*. *Journal of Human Development Studies*, **9** (2): 55–70.
- Okorie, E. (2022). Factors influencing divorce in contemporary Nigerian society. *Journal of African Family Studies*, **5** (2): 101–115.
- Osagie, I., & Edebiri, A. (2021). Marital conflict and its effects on family cohesion in Edo State. *Nigerian Journal of Family and Community Studies*, **8** (1): 23–35.
- Okorie, C. A., & Onuoha, G. (2021). Awareness and attitudes toward marital counselling among Nigerian couples. *West African Journal of Psychology and Education*, **13** (3): 140–152.
- Ogunleye, S. T. (2020). Predictive influence of marital counselling on marital adjustment among married couples in Nigeria. *Journal of Research in Counselling*, **15** (2): 71–85.

Olowu, T. A. (2019). *Cultural perceptions and utilization of marital counselling services in Nigeria. Journal of African Family Studies*, 7 (1): 45–60.