

Marital Expectations, Marital Infidelity and Neuroticism as Predictors of Marital Conflict: Case Study of Igbo Spouses in Imo State, Nigeria

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Abstract : Marital conflict, conceptualized in this study as the ongoing lack of peace and satisfaction in a marital union which threatens marital stability, has become quite prevalent in modern Igbo communities. The frequent incidences of spousal battery, spousal sexual abuse, domestic violence, long term separation and in some cases outright divorce are worrisome indicators of the endemic challenge marital conflict poses in most Igbo communities. This study examined marital expectations, marital infidelity (self and spouse), and neuroticism as predictors of marital conflict. Marital expectation was described as a married person's appraisal of how well their pre-marital desires were being met by their spouses and within the marriage relationship. It assessed different aspects of personal and interpersonal positive outcomes in a marital union. Marital infidelity referred to the likelihood that married individuals or their spouses could have indulged in intimate activities like passionate kisses and romantic dates with someone other than their spouses. Participants reported on themselves as well as their spouses. The last predictor variable neuroticism was measured as a personality trait that addresses issues of emotional instability especially as it relates to a person's interactions. Neurotic persons were considered to have high emotional reactivity; they would have strong emotional response to issues that emotionally stable persons might overlook. Participants comprised of Igbo male and female spouses selected from Imo state using randomized cluster sampling method. The study utilized the cross sectional survey design and Stepwise linear multiple regression for data analyses. Findings showed that though marital infidelity by spouse was generally below average and spouses marital expectations were being fulfilled; marital expectations followed by marital infidelity - spouse proved to be significant predictors of marital conflict. Marital conflict reduced as marital expectations got fulfilled and increased as the level of likelihood of marital infidelity by the spouse increased. Spouses in this study also reported an increased level of neuroticism, with males being more neurotic than females. Neuroticism was found to be the least significant predictor of marital conflict compared to marital expectations and marital infidelity - spouse. Finally, the article made recommendations to spouses and marital counsellors regarding especially the need to manage the neurotic tendencies of Igbo spouses.

Keywords : Igbo spouses, marital conflict, marital expectations, Nigeria

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