

## **DOMESTIC STRESS AND MARITAL CONFLICT IN FAMILIES IN NIGERIA DURING THE COVID- 19 PANDEMIC: COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS**

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### **Abstract**

*This study focuses on domestic stress and marital conflict in families in Nigeria during the COVID-19 pandemic and its Counselling implications. Domestic stress and marital conflict are not good omen to couples as they pose serious challenges for marital adjustment and harmony in families. Domestic Stress and Marital conflict are the most dangerous and silent killers in many families around the world today and Nigeria in particular. Factors such as hunger in families, communication gap among couples, lack of emotional support among couples, Infidelity in marriages among couples were identified among others as major sources of domestic stress and marital conflict among couples in families during the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper then discussed Counselling implications for domestic stress and marital conflict management and finally, suggestions were highlighted among others include; that husbands should love their wives unconditionally and the wives should as well respond positively to this love unconditionally, that there should be effective communication among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there should be mutual understanding among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there should be exercise of patience among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there should be an element of flexibility in decision making among couples in order to accommodate new ideas during the COVID- 19 pandemic during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there should not be unhealthy confrontations among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there should be an acceptance of each other's limitations and weaknesses among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, that there should be emotional supports among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic, that couples should be sharing their difficult moments, anxieties and concerns together during the COVID-19 pandemic and that couples should avoid conflict around financial matters during the COVID-19 pandemic.*

**Keywords: domestic stress, martial conflict, counselling implications, Covid-19 Pandemic, Nigeria.**

## **Introduction**

Crucially, in many parts of the World, and in Nigeria in particular, the COVID-19 pandemic and its challenges are being exacerbated by the crisis of domestic stress and marital conflict among couples in many families. As the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases continues to surge in Nigeria, and across the nations, maintaining marital adjustment therefore becomes difficult, as the rates of domestic stress and marital conflict skyrocketed in many families. For the time past, things were going on well in many families until the outbreak of COVID-19 which is highly contagious deadly disease, recently declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization in March 11, 2020 and was also declared as " the invisible enemy" by U.S president Trump was first reported in Nigeria on 27th February, 2020 in Lagos State of Nigeria when an Italian citizen who worked in Nigeria returned from Milan , Italy to Lagos , Nigeria on the 25th of February, 2020 and he was confirmed by the virology laboratory of the Lagos university teaching hospital to have tested positive of the virus, caused by SARS-COV-2.( <https://en.m.wikipedia.org>) Retrieved on 23th June, 2020.

In Ogun State, a neighboring state to Lagos, a second case was recorded on the 9th March, 2020. It was discovered that the second COVID-19 patient had a close contact with the first Victim and then, the situation has escalated to other parts of the Nigeria States and the federal capital territory. According to the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control ( NCDC) , Nigeria has 20,919 confirmed COVID-19 cases, 7109 cases has been discharged and 525 deaths were recorded in 35 States including the federal capital territory.( <https://www.africanen.com>) Retrieved on Tuesday June 23rd 2020. With this development, the Nigerian Federal Government declared that no state in Nigeria is free of COVID-19 pandemic amid claims by some states government that they were free of the pandemic.( [https://. vanguard.com](https://vanguard.com)) Retrieved on Tuesday June 23rd , 2020. Therefore, in a move to combat the spread of the pandemic of COVID-19 disease, the federal government of Nigeria, directed the cessation of all movement across the nation for an initial first period of 14 days, which took effect from 11pm on Monday 30th March 2020. Later, the movement restriction was extended by another two weeks all in efforts to curtail the spread of the virus but on the contrary, the Nigeria's Federal Government prolonged lockdown order and restrictions of movement has triggered widespread of domestic stress and marital conflict in many families in Nigeria and maintaining harmony and marital adjustment amidst these challenges poses a great threat and is becoming a worrisome situation for counsellors and all those in the fields of helping relationship. One wonders, what could be the sources of domestic stress and marital conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic in families around the world especially in Nigeria. This question precisely reflects the problem addressed in this chapter of the book. And so, it is against this background that this chapter of the book aims at discussing the following:

- Concept of COVID-19
- Concept of domestic stress
- Concept of marital conflict
- Sources of domestic stress and marital conflict among couples in families during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Effects of COVID-19 pandemic on marital adjustment

- Characteristics of marital adjustment
- Counselling Implications for domestic stress and marital conflict management
- Suggestions
- Conclusion

### **Concept of COVID-19**

The COVID-19 which first occurred in China has turned into a global disaster spread across the whole world. World Health Organization (2020) defines Corona virus as an infectious disease highly contagious with the possibility of causing mild to severe respiratory illness. In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the COVID- 19 outbreak a pandemic. In view of Mayo Experts (2020) COVID-19 started in December 2019 in Wuhan, the capital city of Hubei Province, China. This is in line with USA president Donald Trump report that COVID-19 originated from Wuhan Institute of Virology. The virus is known as the severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2 (SARS- COV-2). The disease it causes is called corona virus disease 2019(COVID-19). It is a new discovered pandemic that has not been previous identified in humans.

Furthermore, Mayo Experts explained that the signs and symptoms associated with COVID-19 may appear on the affected persons two to fourteen days after exposure and it's signs and symptoms may include these among others; fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, other symptoms may also include; tiredness, aches, runny nose, sore throat, headache, diarrhea, vomiting. Some affected persons too, may experience loss of smell or taste. However, some studies reported that some COVID-19 victims may not experience any symptoms at all. The severity of COVID-19 symptoms can range from very mild to severe. Most young people infected with the COVID-19 virus usually experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without requiring much special treatment but older people and those with underlying medical problems like cardiovascular disease, heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, chronic respiratory disease and Cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO, 2020).

### **Concept of Domestic Stress**

Stress is an occasional attribute of every person's ecology. As a result, everyone has a first-hand experience of stress. Ekennia (2019) described stress as a pressure, tension or worry resulting from problems in meeting the challenges of life. He further explained that Stress is closely associated with anxiety which is commonly experienced as general uneasiness, a sense of fore-bearing and a feeling of tension. Stress is an inevitable part of human condition that cannot be completely eliminated (Ogbuokiri, 2016).

Stress per se is not a negative phenomenon. The absence of stress in one's life is death (Ekennia, 2019). Moderate stress motives individuals to actions necessary for the adoptions that have to be made in a rapidly changing world. However, Ekwe (2000) cited in Ogbuokiri (2016) noted that Stress is an active ingredient to human existence but when there is too much persistence of stress, it can cause severe damage on the psychological and physiological well being of individuals. Therefore, when we talk about domestic stress, we are simply referring to stress that emanates from home and family life. For instance, during this period of COVID-19 pandemic, many families are experiencing

most crucial and devastating moments of their lives as a result of the domestic stress which has a far reaching Implications for all persons in the family and the World at large. Therefore, it can be noted that domestic stress appears to revolve around the degrees of harmony existing in families during this hard time of the pandemic. The more adjusted a home is, the less the domestic stress that is generated in the home.

### **Concept of Marital Conflict**

Marital conflict is one of the most pervasive social problems around the world especially in Nigeria. Conflict can be found at every stage of life. It is an inevitable phenomenon which is bound to set in, in every type of human relationship once two or more people meet and express opinions or interests. According to Opara (2014) conflict is perceived as differences in issue position between two or more parties at the same time. However, in the context of this work, conflict is refers to as a disagreement over an issue among couples which is capable of creating emotional, psychological, or physical problems in families if not addressed promptly. And so, marital conflict is an ill wind that blows nobody any good. Victory in such conflict is victory without joy. Both the "winning" and "losing party" is saddened by the conflict. These affect every activity within the homes. Ekennia (2019) remarked that such homes are characterized by unhappiness and disharmony, which precipitate devastating Stress.

### **Sources of Domestic Stress and Marital Conflict among Couples in Families during the COVID-19 Pandemic**

In marriage, people take martial vow on the presumption that they will live in harmony for better and for worst for the rest of their joint lives till death depart them. Today, Couples are no longer living in harmony; the domestic stress and marital conflict have become the order of the day in many families during this COVID-19 pandemic. The major Sources of these Stress and conflicts during the COVID-19 pandemic may have resulted from the following factors:

**(1) Hunger in families:** Hunger in families during the COVID-19 pandemic has been, and is still the highest source of domestic stress and marital conflict among couples in many families in Nigeria today. The primary cause of hunger in families during the pandemic has been resulted from families poor financial status as a result of non- payment of salaries, lockdown of major markets and economic activities across the nations though in an effort to control the pathogen spread of the corona virus. This has indeed, elevated the poverty index of Nigerians. Most couples argue over bills, payment of children's school fees for the online teaching and settlement of other financial matters and money for the house keep for daily expenses. Therefore, these financial matters should be amicably handled.

**(2) Communication gap among couples:** Communication gap could also be another source of domestic stress and marital conflict in families during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Effective communication is important in building a healthy relationship especially during the hard time of the pandemic. In fact, quality communication is indeed needed among couples during this period of pandemic crisis. This is because of the fact that effective communication fosters couples understanding, build trust and respect for each other which will in turn brings about martial adjustment. While, poor

communication often leads to negative feelings, and depression. Therefore, it is important to note that effective communication must be maintained among couples in families during the pandemic.

**(3) Lack of emotional support among couples:** Lack of emotional support among couples could be another source of domestic stress and marital conflict in families. Therefore, it can be noted that feelings of affection and friendship contribute to the emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological well-being of any family and lack of it brings about negative feelings, frustrations and irrational thinking. Therefore, married partners must show emotional support to each other during the COVID19 pandemic as every husband or wife has a pathological need to be loved.

**(4) Infidelity in marriages among couples:** Infidelity in marriage refers to any act of betrayal, disloyal, unfaithfulness, untrustworthiness, extra martial affairs engaged in by either a wife or the husband. According to Wikipedia (<https://en.m.wikipedia.org>) Retrieved on 24/6/20 Infidelity in marriage is a violation of couple's assumed or stated martial vow regarding emotional and or sexual exclusivity. It is synonymous with cheating, straying, and adultery, being unfaithful or having an affair. Therefore, having love affair with people outside one's spouse is unfair, unpatriotic, uncivilized, wickedness, and above all dehumanizing. It is a major Source of domestic stress and marital conflict among couples in many families during the COVID-19 pandemic. This wicked act beclouds the vision and progress in the families. This is because when either the wife or the husband maintains a company outside the matrimonial homes, it brings God's wrath among the families. To avoid this, married partners must be faithful to each other.

### **Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Martial Adjustments**

The effects of COVID-19 pandemic on martial adjustment can be classified under two major categories of negative and positive effects.

#### **Negative Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Marital Adjustment**

The previous research findings have shown that a pandemic outbreak usually exposes problems in families and consequently increases the levels of domestic stress and marital conflicts among Couples and so also it is with the present COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Nigeria. Many families have experienced a lot of domestic stress and marital conflict resulting from the outbreak of the COVID-19 Pandemic and now worsened due to the prolonged periods of lockdown, social and physical isolations. In addition to the above already mentioned negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on martial adjustment, it has also heightened Couples levels of anxiety and anger behaviours in families about the future regarding how to make the ends meet.

#### **Positive Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Martial Adjustment**

Just as a challenge in one area can help advance the cause of peace in another. The fear over COVID-19 has surprising positive effect of bringing Couples together in love to spend quality time face - to - face with each other in families amidst the lockdown of activities and restrictions of movement across the nations. This in turns strengthens the marital adjustment.

### **Characteristics of Marital Adjustment**

The characteristics of marital adjustment presented in this work were drawn from the work of Ekennia (2019) as thus;

(1) **Couples love each other and themselves:** Self-esteem is an important quality in marital relationship. It is difficult to truly love others without also loving oneself. Couples need to feel secure and self-confident before they can truly give in love to another.

(2) **Couples enjoy being alone as well as together:** To balance the separateness and togetherness that an intimate marital relationship requires, Couples need to enjoy separate activities and time apart. Too much togetherness can lead to such negative behaviours as attempting to control one's partner and failing to appreciate the partner.

(3) **Couples are established in their careers:** A stable and satisfying Career fosters both financial and emotional security, enabling couples to devote more time and energy to their relationships.

(4) **Couples know themselves:** An intimate marital relationship requires openness and honesty between partners. They must be able to evaluate their personal strengths and weaknesses objectively and not blame their problems on other people. Intimacy is a very important element of marital adjustment. Concept of intimacy usually addresses one (or more) of these three phenomena: intimate interactions, intimate relationships, and intimate experiences. Intimate interactions are communicative exchanges between married couples. Counselling psychologists contend that effective communication is key to intimacy in marriage. A couple once said: There is no area of our married life that is not affected by communication (our bed, our job, our children, our social life, our leisure time, our relationship with relatives and friends. Therefore, communication is the essence of establishing a relationship with someone. One can then deduce that the ability to communicate effectively is regarded as central to the establishment of a quality marital relationship.

Intimate experiences on the other hand are the feelings and thoughts people have, as a result of their intimate interactions. Intimate relationships are those in which couples know each other very well and maintain positive, loving feelings towards the partner whom they know so well. The various ways of demonstrating this among others include; openness and personal sharing or self disclosure, affectionate expressions, acts of service and sexual intimacy.

(5) **Couples express themselves assertively:** One key to developing intimacy in marital life is the ability to express oneself assertively in a direct and general positive manner without offending the other. Therefore, Couples who are not assertive in communication often adopt a passive-aggressive approach. The more clearly couples can ask what they want from each other, the better the chances for compliance.

**(6) Couples are friends and lovers:** When people focus on their lover's needs, they find out that the loved one tends to focus on their needs too. This has been called the law of enlightened self-interest which was developed by the social exchange theories to describe successful relationships. Theories hold that being less selfish is in a person's best interest in relationships because it helps build cooperation and intimate relationships that benefit everyone.

### **Counselling Implications for Domestic Stress and Marital Conflict Management**

Counselling has far reaching Implications for domestic stress and marital conflict management in families around the world especially for Nigerians. And so, one of the major Implications of Counselling for domestic stress and marital conflict management is using Counselling to help couples understand the various helping skills they need to acquire for the peaceful co-existence in families. These skills among others include; skills of forgiveness of one another, skills of love and respect for individual opinions, skills of effective communication, skills of appreciation for one another, skills of spending quality time together as one family, skills of praying together as one family, skills of eating together as one family, skills of planning activities together as one family, skills of openness to one another, skills of handling marital misunderstanding in a constructive way, and skills of sharing experiences together as one family.

Counselling also proffers a lot of techniques that can be adopted in the management of domestic stress and marital conflict among Couples in families using the various techniques of cognitive therapies to attack couples irrational beliefs and thoughts; and unrealistic and illogical ideas which Ellis in his Therapy of; Rational Emotive Therapy believed is responsible for conflict and dysfunctional behaviours, especially in an interpersonal relationship such as marriage relationship using desensitizing techniques, didactic teaching, use of bibliography, philosophic discussions, operant conditioning procedures, and most importantly, homework to couples. The Rational Emotive Therapy holds that people's belief system and negative Interpretation people give to events in their lives, and not the event itself is what makes people to behave irrationally because they arise from faulty reasoning or logical errors such as absolute thinking and over generalizing. Therefore, the rational-emotive counsellor uses sound logic and reasoning, teaching, suggestions, persuasion, de-indoctrination, indoctrination, and prescription of behaviour to show each couple what his or her Irrational philosophies are and how these lead to domestic stress and marital conflict in the families and then assist them to replace these Irrational philosophies to rational thoughts such encourages marital adjustment and harmony in families.

### **Suggestions**

- (1) Husbands should love their wives unconditionally and the wives should as well respond positively to this love unconditionally during the COVID-19 Pandemic
- (2) There should be effective communication among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic
- (3) There should be mutual understanding among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- (4) There should be exercise of patience among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic
- (5) There should be an element of flexibility in decision making among couples in order to accommodate new ideas during the COVID-19 pandemic
- (6) There should not be unhealthy confrontations among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (7) There should be an acceptance of each other's limitations and weaknesses among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic
- (8) There should be emotional support among couples during the COVID-19 pandemic
- (9) Couples should be sharing their difficult moments , anxieties, and concerns together during the COVID-19 pandemic
- (10) Couples should avoid conflict around financial matters during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter of the book discussed the concept of domestic stress and Concept of marital conflict. It further discussed the sources of domestic stress and marital conflict during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on marital adjustment and Counselling Implications for domestic stress and marital conflict management were discussed. Finally, suggestions were highlighted and a conclusion drawn.

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