

Relationship between Collaboration Conflict Resolution Style and Marital Satisfaction among Couples in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

Marital satisfaction is key to fulfilling relationships, yet many Kenyan couples report dissatisfaction. Effective conflict resolution and interpersonal skills strongly predict marital satisfaction, while low satisfaction often leads to dissolution. Despite declining divorce rates in some countries like Germany, divorce remains prevalent globally. The Kenya National Bureau of statistics shows that about 5.5% of households are headed by divorced or separated individuals. Research has shown increase in divorce rates and separation in Nairobi County. There is need to enhance marriage satisfaction to alleviate divorces. This study examined the relationship between collaboration conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction among couples in Nairobi City County. The study hypothesized that the inability to resolve marital conflicts or manage post-conflict experiences affects perceptions of marriage. The study utilized a correlational study design. Stratified and proportional simple random sampling were used to sample sub counties and households respectively. The study targeted 858,926 households with married couples in Nairobi County. Some 400 households were sampled using Yamane's formula from which 200 men and 200 women were purposely selected to ensure balanced gender representation. Data was collected using structured self-reported questionnaires. Modified Conflict Resolution Strategies Scale (CRSS) and Marital Satisfaction Index (MSI) were incorporated into the questionnaire. Pearson's correlation was used to determine relationship between the variables. Results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between collaboration conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction, $r_s(398) = .465, p < .05$. The findings of this study could be used to guide marriage counsellors and developers of conflict intervention programs for couples. Since the relationship is positive, marriage counselors can consider using conflict resolution as a strategy to improve marital satisfaction which eventually may decrease cases of divorce.

Keywords: Marriage, Marital dissolution, Marital Satisfaction, Conflict, Collaboration Conflict Resolution.

Introduction and Background

Marriage is a lifelong and exclusive commitment made by a man and a woman to be linked in an intimate connection (Girgis et al., 2015). Couples expect marriage to bring satisfaction and happiness, and they view it as a necessary step in life (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). However, marriage comes with many responsibilities and challenges that sometimes reduce desired happiness and satisfaction. Conflicts and conflict resolution strategies are some of the challenges that couples may encounter. The ability to resolve conflicts amicably is crucial for maintaining healthy family relationships and marital satisfaction. Marital conflicts, if unresolved, can lead to dissatisfaction and divorce, which negatively affect children and society at large. Dissatisfaction, divorce, and separation are sometimes very difficult and painful (Sheykhi, 2020).

Marital satisfaction is the perceived sum of total benefits and/or costs a person gets from marriage (Shackelford & Stone, 2017). Both perceived benefits and costs influence marital satisfaction. Shackelford and Stone (2017) further identify love, happiness, patterns of interactions, and social support as some of observable characteristics of marital satisfaction. According to Ali and Saleem (2020), marital satisfaction is associated with happiness, stress, and/or harmony experienced by the couple. Current research has sought to establish how couples could sustain marital satisfaction, especially during conflicts.

Kadiradjieva and Alekseeva (2023) report of a 10-year longitudinal study on relationship dissatisfaction and other risk factors to marriage. Sample population included pregnant mothers at different stages of pregnancies and pregnancy cycles and their husbands in all Norway's hospitals. The findings show that marriage dissatisfaction is a main contributor to marriage dissolution among other factors. Gottman and Levenson's (2000) 14-year longitudinal study on predictors of divorce among 79 couples recruited through a Newspaper advert, showed that marital dissatisfaction is a predictor of divorce. Hence, to sustain a marriage, marital satisfaction should be maintained among the couples.

Sustaining marriages bring many family benefits. For instance, Odudu (2018), posited that parent's marital relationship sets tone for all other relationships in the family culture such as Child/Parent relationship. Du Plooy and De Been (2018), in their literature review of four online

databases: PsycINFO, PsychARTICLES, JSTOR Journals, and Science Direct, explained that marital satisfaction can be maintained in relationships through effective conflict management. The present research is designed to establish relationship between collaborative conflict resolution and marital satisfaction. Collaboration style includes engaging, participative reasoning, and problem-solving. Couples work to resolve problems so that everyone wins, placing maximum focus on both partners' concerns. Couples cooperate and strive to find out solutions to their conflicts together, hence experiencing increased marital satisfaction (Ünal & Akgün, 2022). According to Ali and Saleem (2020), collaborative conflict management is an effective method to resolve marital discords, they posit that Collaboration Conflict Resolution style can be an effective method of handling conflict among couples who experience high marital satisfaction.

Vulnerability Stress Adaptation theory by Karney and Bradbury (1995) showed that individuals entering marriage bring vulnerabilities in form of personality characteristics and personal life experiences. Vulnerabilities may determine how a person handles conflicts. Adaptive processes can be the Conflict resolution style that an individual use to resolve the conflict without impacting negatively on how they view their relationship (Hanzal & Segrin, 2015). Collaborative conflict resolution style was considered an adaptive behavior during disputes among couples.

Conflict Resolution refers to an intervention aimed at alleviating or eliminating discord among married partners. Conflicts are inevitable in relationships and may cause dissatisfaction if they are not well resolved. In Kenya, Odhiambo (2021) who studied marital discord among fishers in Siaya, Kenya found that most fishers, reported unsatisfied marriages and therefore advocated for marital counseling. Current research may guide marital counselors in ways to reduce marital dissatisfaction using conflict resolution strategies. Mboya et al. (2016) argued that people using the collaborative style have higher concerns for the needs of others than their own needs. Marital satisfaction is the happiness, patterns of interactions, and fulfilment the couple experience. To maintain healthy family relations, appropriate conflict resolution programs are necessary.

Conflicts are natural to marital relations, and they emanate from varying personal values, relationships, and resource issues (Tamm & Tōugu, 2022). Couples may view conflicts as either positive or negative based on the outcome of the conflict resolution and emotional experiences.

Outcomes of the conflict resolution process are rarely discussed. The aim of this research was to find out how collaboration conflict resolution style influences couples' marriage satisfaction among couples in Nairobi City County.

Unresolved conflicts in marriage relationships can account for abuse, divorce, and separation among couples. Odudu (2018) explained those persistent marital conflicts impact children's adjustments negatively and can lead to other mental health issues. Therefore, conflicts require amicable resolutions, if marital relationships are to remain functional and probably alleviating divorce. Resolving conflicts brings marital satisfaction

This study posited that marriage dissatisfaction can be alleviated through proper conflict resolution among couples. While research highlights the importance of conflict resolution skills as buffer for long-term marital satisfaction, local research exploring the relationship between collaboration conflict resolution styles and marital satisfaction are limited. The target population constituted couples in 858,926 households (57% of total households) identified during the 2019 census (KNBS, Vol. I. 2019). According to (KIPPRA, 2021), 57% of households consist of a married couple.

According to Sheykhi (2020), the global divorce rates have increased from 12% in 1960 to 44% in 2017. Divorce rates in Kenya, particularly in Nairobi County, have been rising significantly, as evidenced by court records. Kamomoe et al. (2021) quoting National Police service (2018) data, indicated that by the 1st quarter of the year 2018, the following 21,573 divorce cases, 34,272 separations, and 71 homicides had been recorded in Nairobi County alone. Kamomoe et al. (2021) further suggested that 15% of marriages end up in divorce in Kenya.

This study aimed to establish whether couples in Nairobi City County use collaboration conflict resolution style and how the use may influence marital satisfaction. The research contributed to a deeper understanding of how effective conflict management can sustain healthy marital relationships. Marital satisfaction can be maintained in relationships through effective conflict management (Du Plooy & De Been, 2018). Maintaining healthy marital relationships through proper conflict resolutions may minimize divorce cases. The study objectives were to establish

level of use of collaboration conflict style among couples, to measure level of marital satisfaction among couples, and to determine the relationship between collaboration conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction among couples in Nairobi City County, Kenya. It is hypothesized that there is no statistically significant relationship between collaboration conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction among couples.

Methodology

A correlational research design was employed to examine the relationship between collaboration conflict resolution style and marital satisfaction. The study was conducted among 858,926 households with married couples in Nairobi County. A sample size of 400 households was derived using Yamane's formula (1967). Stratified and simple random sampling were used to sample sub-counties and households respectively. Some 200 men and 200 women across all ages were purposely selected from the sampled households to ensure balanced gender representation. Research followed administrative boundaries (Dagorretti, Embakasi, Kamukuiji, Kasarani, Kibra, Langata, Makadara, Mathare, Njiru, Starehe, and Westlands) tabulated in the census report by (KNBS, 2019). Sampling of households was proportional to population households in each sub-county. Data was gathered using a standardized questionnaire. Conflict resolution strategies was measured using the modified Conflict Resolution Strategies Scale (CRSS) adopted from the Kilmann conflict mode instrument (1974), while the modified Marital Satisfaction Index (MSI) was used to measure marital satisfaction. Pearson Correlation coefficient was utilized to test the correlation between study variables.

Results

Table 1 Level of Use of Collaboration Conflict Resolution Style

Collaboration Resolution Style	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low Level	25	6.3	3	12	9.28	2.101
Moderate Level	181	45.3				
High Level	194	48.5				
Total	400	100.0				

Table 1 indicates that a higher percentage of participants (48.5%) exhibited a high level of utilization of the collaborative conflict resolution strategy, 45.3% had a moderate level, while 6.3% had a low level of use of collaboration conflict resolution style. The least score was 3, while the highest score was 12. The average level of use of the collaborative conflict resolution approach among the respondents was indicated by the mean score of 9.28 (SD = 2.101), which suggests a moderate level of use. These findings suggest that couples are more likely to use a conflict resolution style that takes into consideration each couple's point of view.

The collaborative conflict management style is also known as problem-solving and works to resolve problems so that everyone wins, placing maximum focus on both groups' concerns. Mboya, Kiplagat and Yego (2016) commented that people using the collaborative style have high concerns for the needs of others than their own needs. Mboya et al. (2016) carried out a research to establish strategies for conflict management to avert unrest among students. Collaboration CRS was rated as the best for handling school unrests. Study population consisted of members from schools' management boards, principles, teachers, and students in varying proportions. This research has established a positive correlation between collaboration CRS and couples' marital satisfaction.

Table 2 Level of Marital Satisfaction

Marital Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low Level	48	12.0	8	49	33.94	9.724
Moderate Level	160	40.0				
High Level	192	48.0				
Total	400	100.0				

Table 2 indicates that 48% of the respondents reported a high level of marital satisfaction, 40% reported a moderate level, and 12% reported a low level. The lowest possible score was 8, and the highest possible score was 49. The respondents' average level of marital satisfaction was moderate, as shown by the mean score of 33.94 (SD = 9.724). These statistics suggest that the majority of respondents were content with their marital life. These findings can be explained by the vulnerability-stress-adaptation (VSA) theory, which explains that adaptive behaviors are how

spouses adapt to challenges that come with marriage relationship such as different or conflicting opinions and therefore ensure that they are satisfied with their marriage over time. This research supports that conflict-solving act as a buffer for marital satisfaction as explained by Hanzal and Segrin (2015). The findings showed majority of those in marriage who used collaboration CRS are satisfied with their marriage.

Pearson Correlation was utilized to examine the relationship between collaboration conflict resolution and marital satisfaction because both variables were measured on an interval scale. The results are highlighted in Table 3.

Table 3 Relationship between Collaboration Conflict Resolution Style and Marital Satisfaction

		Marital Satisfaction
Collaboration	Pearson Correlation	.465**
Conflict Resolution	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	400

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson Correlation Coefficient findings established a significant moderate positive relationship between collaboration conflict resolution style and level of marital satisfaction, r_s (398) = .465, $p = .465$. Collaboration style enables the couples to engage in participative reasoning and cooperation in settling a conflict leading to increase in marital satisfaction. Further studies may be required to establish how marital satisfaction vary with gender differences.

These findings are supported by Njui et al., (2021) who showed that collaboration conflict resolution style was correlated with the highest level of marital stability. Current research showed that collaboration conflict resolution style correlates positively with marital satisfaction. Mboya et al. (2016) state that collaboration brings a win – win situation when collaboration conflict resolution is used, which may explain the positive correlation. Win- win experience by the couples explains results of increased marital satisfaction when collaboration conflict resolution strategy is used. The study is also supported by Ali and Saleem (2020) who posited that collaboration conflict resolution style is appropriate to resolve conflict. This research

supported use of collaboration conflict resolution in conflict resolution to sustain marriages and marriage satisfaction.

Discussion

Conflicts and conflict resolutions are innate and inevitable in any close relationship, especially marriage type (Odudu, 2018). Odudu further stated that conflicts impact negatively on children's adjustment and can lead to mental health issues. Functional marriages model and sustain good behavior in children. Increased separation and divorce rates may be alleviated through emphasis of appropriate use of conflict resolutions.

Findings established a significant moderate positive correlation between use of collaboration conflict resolution style and level of marital satisfaction, $r_s(398) = .465, p = .000$. The findings imply that an increase in use of collaboration conflict resolution style was correlated with an increase in levels of marital satisfaction. The alternative hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis was rejected in light of the data. These findings indicate that respondents who use collaborative conflict resolution style reported higher marital satisfaction than those who do not. These may be informed by the fact that collaborative conflict resolution style focuses on the needs of both couples and negotiation, thereby making both of them feel like winners. The findings support Ali and Saleem (2020) that collaborative conflict management is an effective method to resolve marital discords, leading to high marital satisfaction. The finding can be Mboya et al. (2016) explained these findings further when they posited that people using the collaborative style have higher concerns for the needs of others than their own needs. Giving preference to the partner's needs may bring calmness hence reduce discord.

This study suggests that resolving conflicts amicably may lead to marital satisfaction and good relationships in the family setup hence, supporting (Odudu, 2018). Marital dissatisfaction causes various adverse effects that include divorce, death, depression, and stress among others. This research establishes how collaboration conflict resolution can influence marital satisfaction positively, hence sustaining marriages. Functional marriages can model to children and sustain their good behavioral and psychological health while maintaining the well-being and productivity of the individuals in the marriage. The wellness of the family relationship will be

interpreted to mean individuals will be productive in their day-to-day life, which is a boost to the family and National economic factor.

Conflicts are natural and they emanate from varying personal values and beliefs. Conflicts are perceived as positive or negative based on the outcome of the conflict resolution (Tamm, & Tõugu, 2022). Research findings have established that collaboration conflict resolution style influences marital satisfaction positively. The use of collaboration conflict resolution style will help couples to view conflicts positively and hence less likely to develop marital dissatisfaction during conflict.

Conclusion

The study therefore concludes that couples who considers both their needs and those of their partners in conflict resolution were highly likely to have higher levels of marital satisfaction. This study agrees with Vulnerability- Stress- Adaptation theory which explains that individuals have adaptive behaviors and vulnerabilities to life challenges. How spouses respond to conflict will determine their adaptation to marital relationships. The findings from this study support the use of collaboration conflict resolution style as an adaptive behavior during conflict situations. Couples with this knowledge, though with different personality vulnerabilities as the theory posits, may carefully choose how to use collaboration style to resolve marital conflicts.

The findings established that use of collaboration conflict resolution style was positively correlated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. The study therefore recommends that couples adopt the use of collaboration conflict resolution style in resolving issues between them. The study further suggests that marriage helpers, pre- marital counselors, clergy, marriage and family policy makers and mediators can use the knowledge as a guide to developing conflict intervention programs for couples to resolve marital discords.

The findings will help couples to reflect on the appropriate conflict resolution styles so as to sustain or enhance their marital satisfaction irrespective of their personal vulnerabilities. The clergy who are mainly involved in preparing people for marriage will be more vigilant in preparing those intending to marry on ways to handle conflicts. Researchers and educators of marriage and family can now benefit from the finding of this research.

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