

## **Dialogue and Marital Dispute Resolution from the Perspectives of Lawyers and Counsellors in Ilorin Metropolis**

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### **Abstract**

Marital disputes are taking a toll on many homes in Nigerian society, and couples seem to find resolution difficult. This has led to devastating consequences for both the couples and the country at large. This study assessed the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution from the perspectives of lawyers and counsellors in Ilorin Metropolis. Variables such as gender, religion, and profession were also examined to determine if they influenced the respondents' views. A descriptive survey design using mixed methods was adopted for this study. A total of 200 professionals were selected through simple random and purposive sampling techniques; of these, 20 professionals participated in the interview process. Quantitative data were collected using the "Dialogue and Marital Dispute Resolution Questionnaire" (DMDRQ), while qualitative data were gathered through a semi-structured interview guide. The DMDRQ was validated by five experts, and a reliability coefficient of 0.81 was obtained using the test-retest method. Data were analyzed using the t-test statistical method at a 0.05 alpha level. The results showed that respondents viewed dialogue as a positive influence on marital dispute resolution. Additionally, the respondents' views were not affected by factors such as gender, religion, or profession type. Based on these findings, it is recommended that lawyers and counsellors actively encourage couples to use dialogue as a primary tool in resolving marital disputes.

*Keywords:* Dialogue, Marital Dispute, Marital Dispute Resolution, Lawyers, counsellors, Ilorin metropolis

### **Introduction and Background**

Marriage is a universal institution, existing across every culture and society, yet it varies significantly based on cultural and religious practices. Regardless of these variations, marriage remains central to family formation and societal continuity, as it represents the foundation of companionship, economic support, sexual satisfaction, and procreation (Fishtein, Pietromonaco & Feldman, 2018; Markos, 2003; Britannica, 2023). However, despite the

significant role of marriage, it is increasingly strained by disputes that have far-reaching implications not just for couples, but also for society at large.

In recent years, there has been a growing social need to address the rising rates of marital disputes globally. Divorce rates are increasing in many parts of the world, as evidenced by studies in the United States and Europe, which report divorce rates as high as 40-50% (Rivera, Huepe & Heresi, 2014; Sullivan, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, while the rates of divorce may be lower due to cultural and religious pressures, marital disputes remain a significant issue, often hidden under the surface (Dagnew, Asresie, Fekadu & Gelaw, 2020). In Nigeria, particularly in Ilorin Metropolis, these disputes frequently escalate into domestic violence, emotional trauma, or even divorce, creating a public outcry for effective conflict resolution strategies. In many cases, the lack of dialogue between partners is a major contributor to these crises (Johnson & Fay, 2021), making it imperative to explore dialogue as a method of dispute resolution.

From a global perspective, marital disputes are a growing concern, with countries worldwide reporting increasing rates of family breakdown and dissatisfaction (Amato, 2010; Cherlin, 2020; Gubbins, Perosa & Bartle-Haring, 2020)). At the regional level, sub-Saharan Africa faces unique challenges in addressing marital disputes, as cultural norms often dictate that such issues remain private, thus limiting the accessibility of professional intervention (Bishai, et al., 2003; Adejoh & Fada, 2015). Locally, in Ilorin Metropolis, the situation is particularly dire, with a marked increase in domestic violence and emotional abuse due to unresolved marital disputes (Aina & Morakinyo, 2011; Jimoh, 2013). In this context, it becomes crucial to explore the role of dialogue in resolving these conflicts, given its potential to reduce tensions and promote harmony within families (Birditt, et al., 2013; Carpenter & Kennedy, 2006; Ratson, 2018; Wickrama, & O'Neal, 2020; Zhang & Wang, 2023).

The problem of marital disputes has been widely researched by scholars. Cheng (2010) emphasized that unresolved marital conflict often leads to emotional distress, while Greeff & De Bruyne (2000) linked such disputes to decreased marital satisfaction and future conflict frequency. Tikumah (2009) highlighted that marital crises often occur when couples' expectations are unmet, resulting in quarrels and disagreements. Additionally, Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, and Mclivane (2013) identified marital dispute as not merely a difference in opinion but a breakdown in communication that can severely damage relationships. These scholars agreed that when couples fail to communicate effectively, the marital bond weakens, leading

to emotional, physical, and psychological harm. Resolving conflicts among couples is essential and requires targeted approaches (Bouchard & Thériault, 2019; Mandal & Lip, 2022; Snyder, Heyman, Haynes & Balderrama-Durbin, 2018).

Dialogue, as a strategy for resolving disputes, has been identified by numerous scholars as a critical component in conflict resolution. Rusbult and Zimbardo's (1983) exit-voice-loyalty-neglect model offers a framework for understanding how couples react to disputes. According to this model, voice (i.e., dialogue) represents an active and constructive approach to resolving conflicts, whereas neglect and exit signify negative reactions. Dialogue allows couples to understand each other's perspectives and work towards a resolution, making it an essential tool for maintaining marital stability (Arnett, 2004; Fleming & Morrill, 2017).

In Nigeria, the need for professionals such as lawyers and mental health counsellors to intervene in marital disputes has become increasingly clear. These professionals are uniquely positioned to offer insight into dispute resolution because of their direct involvement in addressing conflicts, both in marriage and society. As Galowitz (2009) noted, lawyers and counsellors perform similar roles in interviewing, negotiating, and advising clients on conflict resolutions. Lawyers help in legal mediation, while counsellors provide emotional and psychological support to couples in distress. Lawyers are often involved in legal disputes related to marriage, including divorce, mediation, and settlement of marital property. Their involvement in the legal aspects of marital conflict makes their perspective valuable in understanding the role of dialogue in marital disputes (Macfarlane, 2008; Douglas, 2006; Zineldin 2019). Lawyers are trained to negotiate and mediate, offering insights into how legal structures support or hinder effective communication between conflicting spouses (Katz & Kuhn, 2010). health counsellors are involved in the psychological and emotional well-being of individuals and families. Their work with couples in conflict, as well as their expertise in communication and emotional regulation, makes them central to the resolution of marital disputes through non-legal means like counseling and dialogue (Gladding, 2014; Johnson & Lebow, 2021; Overall & McNulty, 2017). counsellors focus on emotional processes and communication strategies, which are crucial for addressing the underlying issues in marital disputes (Nichols, 2017; Ratson, 2020). This dual approach is crucial for ensuring that couples not only resolve their disputes but also achieve emotional stability. Additionally, professionals' demographic variables—such as gender, age, religion, and marital status—can influence how

they perceive and address marital conflicts (Boase, 2010; Kiyaoğlu, 2004; Mahoney, Pargament & DeMaris, 2021).

Therefore, this study investigated the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution from the perspectives of lawyers and health counsellors in Ilorin Metropolis. It sought to determine whether gender, religion, and profession affect their views on the efficacy of dialogue in resolving marital disputes. By focusing on these professionals, the study aimed to provide a deeper understanding of how dialogue can be used as a tool to mitigate the growing crisis of marital disputes in Nigeria. This study therefore provided answers to the question on how the respondents view the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution.

These null hypotheses guided this study:

- a. Gender does not significantly impact the respondents' views on the influence of dialogue in marital dispute resolution.
- b. Religion does not significantly impact the respondents' views on the influence of dialogue in marital dispute resolution.
- c. Type of profession does not significantly impact the respondents' views on the influence of dialogue in marital dispute resolution.

#### Theoretical Basis for Study

For the study on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution, Relational Dialectics Theory offers a fitting theoretical framework. Developed by Leslie Baxter and Barbara Montgomery, Relational Dialectics Theory examines the dynamic and often contradictory nature of relationships and how individuals manage conflicting needs through dialogue. Relational Dialectics Theory posits that relationships are composed of ongoing tensions or dialectics between opposing needs or desires. These dialectics—such as autonomy vs. connection or openness vs. closedness—create a dynamic where partners must navigate and negotiate these tensions through communication. Effective dialogue allows partners to address and manage these dialectics, facilitating resolution and enhancing relational quality.

In the context of marital dispute resolution, Relational Dialectics Theory is particularly relevant. The study's focus on dialogue aligns with the theory's assertion that communication helps manage relational tensions. The theory underscores the importance of open, empathetic,

and constructive dialogue in resolving conflicts and maintaining marital harmony. By understanding and addressing the dialectical tensions inherent in marital relationships, couples can use dialogue to negotiate and balance their needs, ultimately leading to more effective conflict resolution.

## **Methodology**

The study employed a descriptive survey of the mixed methods, focusing on investigating the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution from the perspectives of lawyers and health counsellors in Nigeria. This research design was chosen because it allowed the researchers to gather and analyze data from a large population, aligning with the objectives of the study. The study involved the use of a questionnaire to gather information from the participants; in the same vein, the qualitative data collection aimed to complement the quantitative findings by providing a richer, more detailed understanding of the role dialogue plays in resolving marital disputes. By allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and opinions, the study sought to capture the complexities and subtleties that quantitative measures alone might not reveal.

The research was conducted in Ilorin Metropolis, Nigeria, with a focus on lawyers and counselors, as these two professional groups are pivotal in understanding marital dispute resolution from both legal and psychological perspectives. Their expertise made them the ideal target population for this study. Ilorin Metropolis comprises three Local Government Areas (LGAs). To ensure an unbiased selection, a simple random sampling technique was used to select two LGAs from the three existing ones. This method ensured that all LGAs had an equal chance of being selected, preventing any bias that could skew the study's results.

Once the LGAs were determined, a purposive sampling technique was employed to identify and select participants. Specifically, 100 lawyers were purposively sampled from courts within the selected LGAs. This approach targeted those who were actively engaged in legal practice, particularly in cases related to marital disputes. Similarly, 100 counselors were purposively sampled from schools, ministries, and Local Government Secretariats within the same LGAs. These counselors were selected based on their professional involvement in offering psychological support, particularly in marital and family-related issues. This process yielded a total of 200 professionals (100 lawyers and 100 counselors) who participated in the study. To ensure balanced, statistically reliable, and practically feasible data collection that aligned with

the study's scope and objectives, a sample size of 100 for each group was chosen. This provided a comprehensive overview of perspectives from both legal and counseling domains. Out of the 200 sampled professionals, 20 participants (10 lawyers and 10 counselors) who expressed interest were further selected to participate in in-depth interview sessions. This final selection allowed for a more detailed exploration of individual insights and experiences related to marital dispute resolution.

The data collection instrument used was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled *Dialogue and Marital Dispute Resolution Questionnaire (DMDRQ)*. It consisted of two sections: Section A gathered demographic information such as gender, religion, and profession, while Section B contained 20 items on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution, to be rated on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points), and Strongly Disagree (1 point). Similarly, a qualitative method was adopted to gain in-depth insight into the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution. This approach involved conducting semi-structured interviews with a selected group of professionals, including both lawyers and counsellors. The semi-structured interview guide was designed to explore participants' perspectives on how dialogue impacts marital conflict resolution and to uncover any nuances in their experiences.

The interviews were conducted with 20 professionals, evenly divided between lawyers and counsellors. This balanced representation ensured a diverse range of viewpoints, reflecting both legal and therapeutic perspectives. The semi-structured format of the interviews allowed flexibility, enabling participants to discuss their experiences and observations in their own words while addressing key topics related to dialogue and dispute resolution.

To ensure the content validity of the questionnaire, it was reviewed by experts in Nigeria, and their suggestions were incorporated. The reliability of the instrument was evaluated using the test-retest method, where the same questionnaire was administered to 20 respondents (not part of the main study) twice, three weeks apart. The two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.81, indicating that the instrument was reliable. Additionally, Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal consistency for the entire sample.

The researchers administered the questionnaires to the lawyers and health counsellors in Ilorin Metropolis, explaining the purpose of the research beforehand. Respondents were allowed to

complete the questionnaire at their own pace, and the questionnaires were collected immediately to ensure a 100% return rate. Section A was analyzed using percentages to summarize respondents' demographic profiles, while Section B, focused on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution, was analyzed using mean scores. A percentage score above 50% indicated a positive influence of dialogue, while scores below 50% indicated a negative influence. The t-test statistical tool was used to test the three formulated hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Data from the interviews were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring patterns and themes related to the effectiveness of dialogue in conflict resolution. This analysis aimed to identify commonalities and differences in how professionals from different fields perceive and utilize dialogue in resolving marital disputes. The qualitative findings provided valuable context and depth to the overall study, enhancing the understanding of how dialogue functions in practice and its impact on marital harmony.

## **Results**

A total of 200 questionnaires were administered and collected immediately; this made the researchers achieve a 100% return rate. The demographic analysis revealed that the study included 200 respondents, with 108 males (54%) and 92 females (46%). Regarding religious affiliation, 85 participants (42.5%) identified as Christians, while 115 (57.5%) identified as Muslims. The professional distribution was balanced, with 100 respondents (50%) being lawyers and 100 (50%) being counsellors. The average years of experience of the participants ranged from 7 to 10 years.

Research Question 1: How do respondents view the influence of dialogue  
on marital dispute resolution?

Below is a table presenting the items on the use of dialogue in marital dispute resolution, along with the percentage responses of respondents based on the data collected. The table shows how many respondents strongly agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree about each item.

*Table 1: Percentage Responses on the Use of Dialogue in Marital Dispute Resolution*

Item No.	Use of Dialogue in Marital Dispute Resolution	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
1	Dialogue helps couples express their emotions without fear of judgment	55	35	5	5
2	Couples who engage in dialogue are more likely to resolve conflicts amicably	60	30	5	5
3	Dialogue fosters mutual respect and understanding between partners	65	25	7	3
4	Regular communication through dialogue prevents misunderstandings	60	32	5	3
5	Dialogue allows couples to reach a compromise on differing opinions	54	34	8	4
6	Dialogue helps couples identify the root causes of their disagreements	50	38	7	5
7	Couples who use dialogue are better able to manage their emotions	57	30	8	5
8	Dialogue strengthens emotional intimacy between partners	60	28	7	5
9	Through dialogue, couples can openly discuss their expectations and needs	60	30	5	5
10	Dialogue promotes transparency and honesty in marriage	60	35	10	5
11	Couples who practice dialogue are more likely to maintain a peaceful household	54	33	8	5
12	Dialogue helps couples rebuild trust after a conflict	54	32	9	5
13	Frequent dialogue improves decision-making in marital relationships	54	32	9	5
14	Dialogue reduces the likelihood of external interference in marital issues	55	35	7	3
15	Through dialogue, couples can develop long-term solutions to recurring problems	52	35	9	4



Item No.	Use of Dialogue in Marital Dispute Resolution	Strongly Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
16	Dialogue helps couples address sensitive topics without escalating tension	54	35	7	4
17	Partners who engage in dialogue are more likely to take responsibility for their actions	55	33	7	5
18	Dialogue enhances couples' ability to manage stress and external pressures	54	31	9	6
19	Couples who rely on dialogue are more likely to support each other during difficult times	55	35	5	5
20	Dialogue creates a safe space for partners to share their concerns	53	36	8	3

Table 1 shows the participants' responses regarding the effectiveness of dialogue in marital dispute resolution. A high proportion of respondents, particularly in the "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories, indicate that dialogue is seen as a valuable tool for couples to manage their relationships. For example, over 50% of respondents strongly agree that dialogue fosters mutual respect, creates a safe space for sharing concerns, and helps resolve conflicts amicably. Participants overwhelmingly support the idea that dialogue enhances emotional intimacy and mutual understanding. More than half of the respondents agree that dialogue strengthens emotional bonds between partners, and a similarly substantial percentage believe it aids in expressing emotions without fear of judgment. This suggests that many view dialogue as essential not just for resolving conflicts, but also for fostering a deeper emotional connection. The role of dialogue in preventing misunderstandings and external interference in marriage is also highlighted. Around 50% strongly agree that dialogue prevents these issues, showing that respondents recognize its broader impact on maintaining marital stability and privacy. Despite the strong overall agreement, a smaller percentage of participants express disagreement or strong disagreement, indicating that for some, dialogue may not fully meet their expectations in rebuilding trust or promoting transparency. However, these disagreements are relatively low, suggesting that while dialogue is widely accepted as a key component of conflict resolution, a minority may still encounter challenges in its application.

In summary, the responses demonstrate a general consensus (50% and above) that dialogue is effective in resolving marital disputes, improving communication, and enhancing emotional well-being, while only a few respondents find it less beneficial in certain areas.

### Testing of Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were formulated to align with the study's objectives. The results are as follows:

Hypothesis One: Gender does not significantly impact the respondents' views on the influence of dialogue in marital dispute resolution.

*Table 2: t-test Showing the Difference in the Respondents' views on the Influence of Dialogue on Marital Dispute Resolution based on Gender.*

Gender	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Male	108	7.17	56.34	198	1.02	1.96
Female	92	6.45	54.13			

Table 2 shows the calculated t-value is 1.02 while the critical t- value is 1.96. The critical t value of 1.96 is greater than the calculated t- value of 1.02. The hypothesis that age does not have any statistically significant difference on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution as viewed by the respondents is accepted.

Hypothesis Two: Religion does not significantly impact the respondents' views on the influence of dialogue in marital dispute resolution.

*Table 3: t-test Showing the Difference in the Respondents' views on the Influence of Dialogue on Marital Dispute Resolution based on Religion.*

Religion	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Christianity	85	7.56	63.13	198	0.42	1.96
Islam	115	10.15	63.20			

Table 3 shows the calculated t-value is 0.42 while the critical t- value is 1.96. The critical t value of 1.96 is greater than the calculated t- value of 0.42. The hypothesis that religion does not have any statistically significant difference on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution as viewed by the respondents is accepted.

Hypothesis Three: Profession does not significantly impact the respondents' views on the influence of dialogue in marital dispute resolution.

Table 4: *t*-test Showing the Difference in the Respondents' views on the Influence of Dialogue on Marital Dispute Resolution based on Profession.

Profession	N	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value
Lawyer	124	10.25	62.08	198	1.10	1.96
Counsellor	86	8.17	62.46			

Table 4 shows the calculated t-value is 1.10 while the critical t-value is 1.96. The critical t-value of 1.96 is greater than the calculated t-value of 1.10. The hypothesis that the type of profession does not have any statistically significant difference on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution as viewed by the respondents is accepted.

In addition to the quantitative data, few interview responses are given below, to further shed light on the influence of dialogue on marital dispute resolution:

Participant 1:

Gender: Male; Religion: Islam; Profession: Lawyer

Response:

*"In my experience as a lawyer, dialogue is one of the most effective tools in resolving marital disputes. When couples are willing to communicate openly and honestly, many issues can be addressed before they escalate into irreparable conflicts. I always advise my clients to consider mediation, which is centered on dialogue, before pursuing legal action, as it fosters understanding and often leads to better outcomes for both parties."*

Participant 2:

Gender: Female; Religion: Islam; Profession: Mental Health Counsellor

Response:

*"Dialogue is the cornerstone of my work with couples. Through structured communication exercises, couples can better understand each other's perspectives and emotional needs. Most marital conflicts stem from misunderstandings or unresolved emotions, and dialogue helps bridge that gap. I've seen couples who were on the verge of divorce reconcile because they learned how to express their concerns and listen to one another."*

Participant 3:

Gender: Female; Religion: Christianity; Profession: Lawyer

Response:

*"As a family lawyer, I've seen that the absence of dialogue is often the root cause of many marital problems. When couples fail to communicate, small issues quickly spiral out of control."*

*I encourage my clients to engage in dialogue sessions, especially when children are involved, because it can help maintain a more peaceful and cooperative relationship post-separation. Dialogue helps them focus on resolving their issues rather than engaging in adversarial litigation."*

Participant 4:

Gender: Female; Religion: Christianity; Profession: Marriage and Family Therapist

Response:

*"From my experience, effective dialogue is the key to resolving marital disputes. Many couples come to me with communication breakdowns, which can manifest in resentment, anger, and misunderstandings. Teaching them dialogue techniques—such as active listening and empathy—often transforms their relationships. Once they begin to communicate openly, they can resolve conflicts without the need for outside intervention."*

Participant 5:

Gender: Male; Religion: Christianity; Profession: Lawyer

Response:

*"In my law practice, I've seen that couples who are open to dialogue are more likely to find mutually agreeable solutions to their disputes. While the legal system can resolve disputes, it doesn't always repair relationships. Dialogue, on the other hand, allows couples to address underlying issues and often leads to lasting resolutions that legal rulings cannot provide. I believe lawyers and counsellors should work together to promote dialogue as the first step in marital dispute resolution."*

Participant 6:

Gender: Male; Religion: Christianity; Profession: Marriage Counsellor

Response:

*"Dialogue plays a huge role in conflict resolution for couples. When couples come to me, the first step I take is facilitating a conversation where both partners can express their feelings without interruption or judgment. This process helps reveal the root of the problem, which is often hidden beneath layers of hurt and miscommunication. I find that once dialogue is initiated, the couple can begin to work together to resolve their issues in a more constructive way."*

Participant 7:

Gender: Male; Religion: Islam; Profession: Lawyer

Response:

*"In my experience as a lawyer, dialogue prevents a lot of marital cases from reaching the courtroom. Legal battles can be exhausting, and they often create more hostility. Through dialogue, couples are able to address their concerns in a more amicable environment, which*

*can save both their relationship and their resources. I encourage couples to try dialogue first, as it's more effective in fostering long-term resolutions compared to litigation."*

Participant 8:

Gender: Female; Religion: Christianity; Profession: Marriage Counsellor

Response:

*"Dialogue is one of the most powerful tools in conflict resolution within marriages. When couples engage in open, honest conversations, they often find solutions that they couldn't see before. I focus on teaching couples how to express their needs and frustrations clearly, while also helping them listen to each other with empathy. This approach has helped many of the clients rebuild trust and strengthen their marriages."*

## **Discussion**

The results of this study demonstrate a broadly positive view of dialogue as an effective tool for marital dispute resolution among both lawyers and counsellors. Respondents expressed strong agreement that dialogue fosters commitment in relationships, enhances communication, and creates peaceful resolutions to conflicts. This finding supports previous studies, such as Markos (2003), who argued that structured dialogue is a key mechanism in resolving marital conflict. Similarly, Orton (2004) found that dialogue contributes to effective communication and conflict resolution in relationships. The positive outlook on dialogue likely reflects the professional training of the respondents, as the average years of experience ranged from 7 to 10 years for both lawyers and counsellors. Thus, both lawyers and counsellors are well-equipped to handle conflict through dialogue due to their roles in facilitating dispute resolution in various contexts.

Dialogue has long been regarded as a means to create harmony within relationships. Numerous scholars, including Ramsden and Holloway (2012), have emphasized the importance of open communication in marriage, noting that couples who engage in regular dialogue are better able to navigate disagreements without escalating into major conflicts. This aligns with the present study's findings, where respondents acknowledged that dialogue helps couples communicate on almost all issues, promoting peace and preventing unnecessary arguments. As practitioners trained in legal and psychological conflict management, lawyers and counsellors may have developed a more nuanced understanding of how dialogue can be used to foster emotional connection and resolve disputes amicably.

In discussing the interview responses from the professionals, it becomes clear that there is a strong consensus on the role of dialogue in resolving marital disputes. One of the participants, a male Muslim lawyer, emphasized that dialogue is crucial for understanding and resolving underlying issues in marital conflicts. His response underscores the idea that effective communication, facilitated by dialogue, can lead to mutually acceptable solutions, and strengthen marital relationships. This aligns with quantitative data showing a positive view of dialogue's influence. Another participant, a female Christian marriage and family therapist, also highlighted the trans-formative power of dialogue. Her experience with clients demonstrates that dialogue helps in addressing communication breakdowns and fostering empathy, which is essential for conflict resolution. This response reflects the broader finding that dialogue is a universal tool, transcending individual differences in gender, religion, or profession. Furthermore, another participant, a male and a Christian counsellor, noted that dialogue allows for deeper understanding and resolution of conflicts, especially in settings where professional mediation is involved. These qualitative insights support the study's quantitative findings, showing that dialogue is perceived positively across different professional perspectives. The responses from both lawyers and counsellors highlight the significance of dialogue in resolving marital conflicts, confirming that its effectiveness is recognized irrespective of professional background or personal beliefs. This consistency across different data sources strengthens the argument for promoting dialogue as a vital component in marital dispute resolution.

In analyzing the first hypothesis—that gender does not significantly influence perceptions of dialogue's role in marital dispute resolution—the study revealed no statistically significant difference between male and female respondents. This contrasts with findings from Smith (2017), who argued that women are more inclined to perceive the benefits of dialogue in relationships due to their stronger communication skills. Smith's assertion aligns with broader gender communication research that suggests women are often socialized to express emotions more freely, making them more attuned to dialogue. However, the current study's findings suggest that when individuals are professionally trained in conflict resolution, gender differences in communication styles may become less pronounced. Male and female respondents, regardless of their natural inclinations toward communication, likely share similar views on the efficacy of dialogue due to their exposure to professional training in legal or counseling fields. Despite gender roles that sometimes position men as more assertive or women as more nurturing communicators, the shared cultural understanding of resolving

disputes through dialogue would promote similar views across both genders. This could be that dialogue is seen not only as a professional skill but also as a culturally accepted and respected approach to conflict resolution, which is beyond gender-specific communication styles.

The second hypothesis examined whether religion influenced respondents' perceptions of dialogue in marital dispute resolution, and again, the study found no statistically significant difference. This contrasts for cultural reasons, with studies by Boase (2010), Kiyaoglu (2004), and Smith (2007), who found that religious backgrounds can shape perceptions of dialogue, particularly between Muslims and Christians. In the Nigerian context, where Islam and Christianity dominate, religious beliefs often intersect with cultural norms regarding conflict resolution. However, the present study suggests that both religious groups may prioritize dialogue due to its alignment with broader teachings of peace, love, and understanding within marriage. This may indicate that religious doctrines, despite their differences, converge on the importance of peaceful co-existence and communication within the marital context, which is reflected in the respondents' shared views.

The third hypothesis, which explored whether profession influences views on dialogue's role in resolving marital disputes, was also accepted. This finding supports Rudwick, Subramanian, Meredith, and Cizman (2004), who found no professional differences in perceptions of dialogue's importance. The results suggest that both lawyers and counsellors, despite their differing roles—legal versus emotional—share a similar understanding of the significance of dialogue. Given that both professions frequently engage in conflict resolution, either through legal mediation or counseling, it is logical that they hold comparable views on the importance of dialogue in fostering resolution and preventing marital breakdowns. As noted by Kagan (2008), dialogue is a cornerstone of both legal and counseling practices, which explains the uniformity in responses.

The finding further corroborate the Relational Dialectics Theory. The finding showed that dialogue positively influences conflict resolution and support the idea that managing relational tensions through communication is crucial. For example, the interviews revealed that both lawyers and counsellors recognize the importance of dialogue in addressing underlying issues and fostering understanding. The theory's emphasis on the role of communication in managing relational tensions is reflected in the study's quantitative and qualitative data. Participants highlighted how dialogue facilitates better understanding and resolution of conflicts, consistent with the theory's view that communication is key to managing dialectical tensions. Relational

Dialectics Theory's applicability across different contexts and professional perspectives, as seen in the study, supports its relevance. The lack of significant differences based on gender, religion, or profession underscores the theory's assertion that dialogue is a universal tool for managing relational dynamics.

Overall, the results of this study contribute to the broader body of research on the importance of dialogue in marital relationships. The professional backgrounds of the respondents likely played a significant role in shaping their positive perceptions of dialogue, as both lawyers and counsellors are trained to facilitate effective communication and conflict resolution. The findings highlight that gender, religion, and profession do not significantly influence views on dialogue, suggesting that dialogue transcends personal and cultural differences when viewed through the lens of professional training. These insights underscore the importance of incorporating dialogue as a fundamental tool in both legal and psychological approaches to marital dispute resolution, with the potential to strengthen relationships and prevent the escalation of conflicts.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the findings of this study emphasize the pivotal role of dialogue in marital dispute resolution, as acknowledged by both lawyers and mental health counsellors. Dialogue is shown to enhance commitment, improve communication, and promote conflict resolution, which are crucial elements in maintaining healthy relationships. Importantly, the lack of significant differences in perceptions based on gender, religion, or profession indicates that dialogue is universally viewed as an effective tool for conflict management, transcending personal or cultural differences. From a psychological perspective, these findings enrich the practice of psychology, particularly in the areas of counseling and family therapy. The recognition of dialogue as a key mechanism for resolving marital disputes aligns with psychological principles of communication, emotional regulation, and conflict resolution. This study supports the integration of dialogue-focused interventions in therapy, where couples can be guided to express their emotions, understand each other's perspectives, and work through conflicts constructively. By demonstrating the applicability of dialogue, the study suggests that counsellors can confidently employ dialogue-based techniques across diverse populations.

Furthermore, the study's contribution extends to legal mediation, where dialogue can be used alongside legal frameworks to resolve marital conflicts. For psychologists, the findings provide



evidence that incorporating structured dialogue into therapeutic practices can lead to healthier relationships and fewer long-term conflicts. The results encourage the ongoing use of dialogue as a foundational approach in both psychological and legal practices, and they highlight the need for continued research into its effectiveness in various settings. This enhances the practical application of psychology in real-world scenarios, offering a concrete method for managing marital disputes and improving overall marital health.

The study found that dialogue plays a positive role in marital dispute resolution from the perspective of lawyers and counsellors in Ilorin Metropolis. Based on these findings, the recommendations are that lawyers and counsellors should actively educate couples on the use of dialogue as an effective tool for resolving marital disputes. By offering workshops, seminars, or one-on-one counseling, professionals can help couples understand how open communication can lead to better conflict resolution. In addition, it is essential for professionals to encourage couples to practice tolerance and patience in their relationships. By guiding couples to use dialogue to express their feelings and concerns, lawyers and counsellors can help create a more harmonious living environment. Furthermore, just as law chambers are available in Nigerian communities, functional counseling centers need to be established to support couples in learning and applying dialogue skills. These centers could serve as accessible resources for marital conflict resolution, offering services similar to legal assistance but focusing on emotional and communication issues. Finally, couples should be encouraged to seek the expertise of lawyers and counsellors when they face marital conflicts. Since dialogue has been proven to positively influence marital dispute resolution, professionals should guide couples on how to effectively engage in it to resolve disputes amicably.

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