

Demographic Differences in Sources of Marital Conflicts Among Public Secondary School Teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria—Implications for Counselling

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Abstract:

Marital conflict is a pervasive challenge that can negatively affect personal wellbeing, family stability, and professional effectiveness, particularly among teachers who experience high occupational demands. This study examined demographic differences in sources of marital conflict among public senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, it investigated whether school type, gender, and school location influence the extent to which lack of communication, behavioural problems, and insufficient time with spouse serve as sources of marital conflict. The study adopted a survey research design, sampling 366 teachers through a multi-stage technique, with 342 valid responses analyzed. Data were collected using a self-constructed

instrument, the *Teachers' Sources of Marital Conflict and Management Strategies Scale (TSMCMSS)*, and analyzed using independent samples t-test, and ANOVA to test the three hypotheses in the study. Findings revealed no significant demographic differences in any of the sources of marital conflict examined. It was concluded that communication breakdown, behavioural issues, and limited spousal time are universal stressors affecting teachers' marital relationships. The study highlights the need for counselling interventions focusing on communication skills, stress management, behavioural adjustment, and work–family balance. It recommends that counsellors collaborate with school administrators to provide structured marital support programmes to enhance teachers' marital satisfaction, promote family wellbeing, and improve professional productivity.

Keywords: Marital conflict, Teachers, Communication, Behavioural problems, Work–family balance, Counselling.

Introduction

Marriage remains one of the most significant social institutions across societies because it influences personal wellbeing, family stability, and social development. In most cultures, including Nigeria, marriage is expected to provide emotional support, companionship, and social security for couples and their children. However, when instability and disharmony occur within marriage, the consequences extend beyond the couple to affect children, extended family members, and society at large [1]. Although marriage is often entered with expectations of happiness and mutual fulfilment, everyday pressures and unmet expectations frequently introduce tensions that may grow into serious conflicts if not properly managed.

Scholars generally agree that conflict is not entirely abnormal in marriage. Differences in opinions, interests, values, and expectations are inevitable when two individuals share intimate living arrangements. According to Akinade, marriage brings together individuals from different backgrounds who must learn to live, grow, and adjust together [2], [3]. When this process of adjustment fails, conflict and crises may emerge. Marital conflict therefore involves more than occasional disagreements; it refers to persistent incompatibilities and poorly managed disputes that disrupt marital harmony and weaken emotional bonds between spouses.

Studies have consistently shown that communication breakdown is one of the most common triggers of marital conflict. When couples fail to communicate effectively, misunderstandings increase, emotional distance widens, and resentment accumulates over time. Ordu observed that ineffective communication, silence, and negative use of words often signal deeper marital tensions that may eventually lead to separation if not addressed [4]. Similarly, Greatman and Jones reported that lack of communication significantly predicts marital dissatisfaction and marital dissolution. Effective communication skills such as active listening, empathy, and respectful dialogue therefore remain central to marital stability.

Behavioural problems within marriage also contribute significantly to conflict. Negative criticism, aggression, resentment, and intolerance often damage self-esteem and trust between partners. Undiyandeye and Reaman noted that excessive criticism and personal attacks tend to escalate conflict rather than resolve it, resulting in emotional withdrawal and retaliatory behaviours. Ibeh et al. further describe marital conflict as strains arising from problematic interaction patterns among couples living together, often leading to emotional and psychological distress within the home.

Another major source of marital conflict is inadequate time spent together by spouses. Modern occupational demands frequently limit opportunities for couples to maintain emotional connection and shared experiences [5]. Akinade identified lack of time with spouse as one of the most pervasive causes of marital conflict, as partners often feel neglected or emotionally disconnected when quality

interaction reduces. When couples are constantly preoccupied with work or external commitments, opportunities for communication and intimacy diminish, thereby increasing the likelihood of misunderstandings and conflict.

These challenges are particularly relevant in occupations characterized by high workload and emotional demands, such as teaching. Teaching involves extensive responsibilities beyond classroom instruction, including lesson preparation, marking assignments, administrative duties, and participation in school-related activities. Briggs described teaching stress as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when job demands exceed available resources and coping capacity. Teachers frequently carry work responsibilities home, reducing time available for family interaction and increasing emotional exhaustion.

Research further shows that occupational stress often spills over into marital relationships. Pond and Green reported that job dissatisfaction and workplace stress frequently influence marital satisfaction within households [6]. Richmond similarly observed that teachers may unintentionally transfer workplace attitudes and frustrations into family interactions, thereby contributing to domestic conflicts. Smith also noted that when teachers consistently bring occupational stress into their personal lives, marital tension may increase, sometimes leading to relationship breakdown.

Despite these challenges, marital conflict is not uniform across all individuals or contexts. Demographic and environmental factors often shape how conflicts arise and are experienced within marriage. Gender roles, workplace environments, and living conditions influence expectations, responsibilities, and stress levels within families. For instance, male and female teachers may experience occupational and domestic responsibilities differently due to cultural role expectations, potentially influencing how conflict manifests in their marriages.

Similarly, school location and type may expose teachers to varying levels of professional pressure and social challenges. Teachers working in urban areas may face overcrowded classrooms and increased administrative demands, while those in rural areas may encounter different forms of stress such as resource limitations or long commuting distances [7]. Such differences may indirectly affect marital relationships by influencing stress levels, available family time, and emotional wellbeing.

In Rivers State, anecdotal reports and community observations suggest increasing cases of marital tensions, separation, and divorce among married couples, including teachers. Many families experience recurring conflicts related to communication problems, behavioural incompatibilities, and insufficient time together due to occupational pressures. Yet, despite growing concerns about marital instability, empirical research examining demographic differences in sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in the state remains limited.

Existing studies often examine marital conflict generally without adequately exploring how occupational and demographic contexts influence specific conflict sources among teachers. Consequently, counselling interventions designed to support married teachers may lack context-specific evidence needed for effective guidance. Since teachers play critical roles in educational development and societal progress, marital instability among them may also indirectly affect professional effectiveness and overall wellbeing.

Counselling professionals have a significant role to play in supporting couples to develop communication skills, emotional understanding, and effective conflict management strategies. However, successful counselling interventions depend on accurate knowledge of the sources and patterns of conflict experienced by target populations. Understanding whether marital conflict sources differ based on gender, school type, or school location will provide valuable insights for designing counselling programmes suited to teachers' realities [8], [9].

It is against this background that the present study examines demographic differences in sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria, with particular attention to lack of communication, behavioural problems, and insufficient time spent with spouse. By

identifying how these conflict sources vary across demographic contexts, the study aims to provide evidence-based implications for counselling interventions targeted at improving marital stability and professional wellbeing among teachers.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine demographic differences in sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria, and to discuss the implications for counselling practice. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. Determine differences in the extent to which lack of communication among spouses constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school type.
- ii. Determine differences in the extent to which behavioural problems constitute sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on gender.
- iii. Determine differences in the extent to which lack of time spent with a spouse constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school location [10].

Hypotheses

- i. There is no significant difference in the extent to which lack of communication among spouses constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school type.
- ii. There is no significant difference in the extent to which behavioural problems constitute sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on gender.
- iii. There is no significant difference in the extent to which lack of time spent with a spouse constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school location.

Methodology

Design: This study adopted a survey research design. Survey design involves collecting data from a selected sample of a population without manipulating study variables, with the aim of describing existing conditions or relationships among variables (Thom-Otuya & Enyindah, 2005). The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to obtain teachers' views and experiences regarding sources of marital conflict as they naturally occur, without any form of experimental control. Participants were therefore allowed to express their opinions and experiences freely in response to the questionnaire items.

Population and Sample: The population of the study comprised all teachers in public senior secondary schools across the twenty-three (23) Local Government Areas of Rivers State, totaling 7,619 teachers. Using the Fluid Survey online sample size calculator, a sample size of 366 teachers was determined as adequate for the study. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select participants from the population in stages to ensure fair representation across the study area.

Instrumentation: Data were collected using a self-developed instrument titled *Teachers' Sources of Marital Conflict and Management Strategies Scale (TSMCMSS)*. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A obtained demographic information of respondents, while Section B contained items measuring sources of marital conflicts. Responses to items in Section B were structured on a modified four-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. To ensure the validity of the instrument, copies of the questionnaire were subjected to face and content validation by three experts in counselling and measurement and evaluation. Their suggestions and corrections were incorporated before final administration of the instrument. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study involving 30 public senior secondary school teachers in Bayelsa State who were not part

of the main study. Responses obtained were analyzed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability technique, yielding reliability coefficients of .83, .87, and .89 for the instrument's subscales, indicating satisfactory internal consistency.

Method of Data Collection and Analysis: The researcher, with the assistance of two trained research assistants, administered 366 copies of the questionnaire to respondents in selected schools. Out of the questionnaires distributed, 342 copies were properly completed and returned, representing a high retrieval rate, and were subsequently used for data analysis. Data collected were analyzed using independent samples t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were employed to test the null hypotheses at the .05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the extent to which lack of communication among spouses constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school type.

Table 1: *One-Way ANOVA for lack of communication as a source of marital conflict among Senior Secondary School Teachers based on school type*

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	435.762	2	234.612	13.324	.321
Within Groups	4327.433	339	15.211		
Total	4763.195	341			
$\alpha = 0.05$					

In Table 1, the hypothesis was tested at a significance level of .05. $F(2, 339) = 13.324$, the p -value was found to be .321. From the result, the p -value is greater than the significance level (p -value > .05). Based on this result, the null hypothesis is retained [11]. This means that, as hypothesised, there is no significant difference in the extent to which lack of communication among spouses constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school type.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the extent to which behavioural problems constitute sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on gender.

Table 2: *Independent Sample t-test for behaviour problems as sources of marital conflict among Senior Secondary School Teachers in Rivers State based on gender*

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Male	139	61.57	8.36	340	.105	.675	Not Significant
Female	203	61.70	9.10				
$\alpha = 0.05$							

In Table 2, the t-value of -.105 and the significant value (p-value) of .675 at a significance level of .05 is $.675 > .05$. From the result, the p-value is greater than the significance level ($p\text{-value} > .05$); this means that the hypothesis is not rejected. This affirms that there is no significant difference in the extent to which behavioural problems constitute sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on gender [12].

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the extent to which lack of time spent with a spouse constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school location.

Table 3 *Independent Sample t-test for lack of time with spouse as sources of marital conflict among Senior Secondary School Teachers in Rivers State based on school location*

School Location	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Urban	212	60.89	8.21	340	3.980	.589	Not Significant
Rural	130	60.72	8.94				
$\alpha = 0.05$							

In Table 3, the t-value of -3.980 and the significant value (p-value) of .589 at a significance level of 0.05 is $.589 > 0.05$. From the result, the p-value is greater than the significance level ($p\text{-value} > .05$); this means that the hypothesis is not rejected. This affirms that there is no significant difference in the extent to which lack of time spent with a spouse constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school location.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings focuses on the extent to which demographic factors influence major sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State, particularly communication problems, behavioural issues, and lack of time spent with spouses. Beyond presenting statistical outcomes, it is important to interpret these findings within the realities of teachers' professional and social contexts, as well as in relation to previous empirical studies [13].

The first hypothesis revealed that there was no significant difference in the extent to which lack of communication among spouses constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school type. This suggests that communication challenges occur similarly among teachers irrespective of the type of public school in which they work. In other words, teachers experience communication breakdown in marriage regardless of institutional differences between schools. This finding aligns with the work of Troupe (2018), whose longitudinal study showed that destructive communication patterns, particularly heated arguments, consistently predict marital conflict over time across different social contexts. Similarly, Gonzalez and Campbell (2017) found that ineffective communication between spouses contributes significantly to family instability and negatively affects child outcomes. These studies support the idea that communication problems are universal marital challenges rather than problems confined to specific occupational or institutional settings [14].

A plausible explanation for the present finding may lie in the uniform nature of professional and social pressures faced by teachers across public schools in Rivers State. Regardless of school type, teachers operate within similar educational policies, administrative expectations, and socio-economic realities. Many teachers face large class sizes, administrative pressures, limited instructional resources, and financial constraints, all of which may contribute to emotional exhaustion that spills into marital communication patterns. Consequently, communication challenges at home are less likely to differ based on school type and more likely to reflect shared occupational stress and broader societal pressures

affecting married couples generally. Furthermore, cultural expectations surrounding marriage communication in Nigerian society may also contribute to this uniformity [15]. Many couples struggle with open emotional expression due to traditional norms that sometimes discourage vulnerability or constructive dialogue between spouses. Thus, communication breakdown may persist across demographic groups irrespective of workplace differences.

The second hypothesis indicated that there was no significant gender difference in the extent to which behavioural problems constitute sources of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State. This finding suggests that negative behavioural patterns within marriage, such as anger, intolerance, criticism, or emotional withdrawal, are experienced similarly by both male and female teachers. This result corresponds with the findings of Aduke, who reported no significant demographic differences in sources of marital conflict among couples studied in Nigeria, indicating that conflict sources often cut across demographic categories. Similarly, Greatman and Jones found minimal differences among teachers regarding sources of marital conflict across varying marital and personal characteristics.

One possible explanation for this finding is the changing nature of gender roles within contemporary Nigerian families. Increasingly, both husbands and wives participate actively in income generation and share family responsibilities. As both partners face occupational stress and economic pressures, behavioural reactions such as irritability, impatience, and emotional exhaustion may be displayed by either partner [16]. Consequently, behavioural problems in marriage may no longer be seen as gender-specific but rather as shared responses to common stressors.

In addition, teaching as a profession imposes similar emotional and psychological demands on both male and female teachers. Both genders experience classroom management challenges, administrative expectations, and workload pressures. These shared occupational experiences may contribute equally to emotional strain, which may manifest at home in behavioural patterns that trigger conflict irrespective of gender.

Another plausible interpretation is that modern marital conflicts increasingly arise from situational pressures rather than personality or gender-linked behavioural tendencies. Financial strain, parenting responsibilities, and career demands may produce emotional tension in both spouses, leading to behavioural reactions that fuel conflict regardless of gender differences.

The third hypothesis showed that there was no significant difference in the extent to which lack of time spent with spouse constitutes a source of marital conflict among public secondary school teachers in Rivers State based on school location. This indicates that teachers experience time-related marital pressures similarly whether they work in urban or rural school locations [17]. This finding is consistent with Watson, who reported that teachers frequently experience marital tensions because occupational demands consume much of their time and emotional energy, thereby reducing spousal interaction. Dillon et al. similarly found across multiple cultures that insufficient time spent together significantly predicts marital conflict regardless of contextual differences.

A plausible explanation for this similarity across locations is that teaching responsibilities often extend beyond official school hours regardless of geographical setting. Teachers commonly take work home, prepare lesson notes, mark scripts, and attend meetings or extracurricular activities. Thus, the teaching profession itself, rather than school location, may be the dominant factor reducing available marital time. Additionally, technological and administrative expectations now affect teachers across both urban and rural environments. Tasks such as preparing examination records, responding to school communications, and meeting curriculum deadlines increasingly demand teachers' time outside school hours, thereby affecting marital interaction uniformly. Socio-economic pressures may also contribute to this outcome [18]. Many teachers engage in additional income-generating activities after school hours to supplement earnings, further reducing time available for family interaction regardless of location. Consequently, insufficient spousal time may be a profession-wide challenge rather than one determined by school location.

Overall, the findings of this study suggest that communication problems, behavioural challenges, and insufficient time with spouses are widespread sources of marital conflict among teachers, and these issues appear to cut across demographic differences examined in this study. It is therefore pertinent to examine the counselling implications of these findings.

Counselling Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study have important implications for counselling practice, particularly within educational settings where teachers operate under demanding professional conditions that may indirectly affect their marital relationships. Since the study revealed that lack of communication, behavioural problems, and insufficient time with spouse are major sources of marital conflict among teachers, and that these factors do not significantly differ across demographic categories examined, counselling interventions should focus on universal marital adjustment strategies rather than targeting specific demographic groups alone [19].

One major implication is the need for counsellors to prioritize communication skill development among married teachers. Communication breakdown remains a major trigger of marital conflict, and counsellors working in schools and communities should design intervention programmes that train couples in active listening, emotional expression, conflict negotiation, and constructive dialogue. Workshops and marital enrichment programmes organized through schools, churches, and community organizations can help teachers develop communication habits that reduce misunderstandings and emotional distance between spouses. The findings also imply that counsellors must address behavioural patterns that escalate marital tensions. Teachers experiencing occupational stress may unknowingly transfer frustration, irritability, or emotional withdrawal into their family interactions. Counsellors should therefore incorporate stress management techniques, emotional regulation strategies, and anger management skills into marital counselling programmes. Helping teachers recognize how workplace pressures influence their behaviour at home can improve emotional awareness and promote healthier marital interactions.

Another important implication relates to time management and work–family balance. Since insufficient time spent together emerged as a major conflict source across school locations, counsellors should guide teachers and their spouses in developing practical strategies for protecting family time despite occupational pressures. Counselling interventions may include training in time scheduling, prioritization of marital activities, and deliberate creation of shared recreational or bonding opportunities. Couples can be helped to see quality time together as an investment in marital stability rather than a luxury [20]. The results further suggest that counselling services within schools should extend beyond student concerns to include teacher wellbeing programmes. Educational authorities and school administrators can collaborate with professional counsellors to establish staff counselling units or periodic marital and family wellness seminars for teachers. Such institutional support may help teachers cope better with work stress and prevent spillover effects into family life.

Another counselling implication is the need for preventive counselling approaches rather than waiting until conflicts become severe. Premarital and marital enrichment counselling programmes targeting teachers can equip couples with conflict resolution skills before conflicts escalate into crises. Counsellors may partner with teacher unions, professional associations, and religious bodies to provide periodic relationship education seminars.

The findings also highlight the importance of culturally sensitive counselling practices. Counsellors should consider prevailing cultural norms surrounding gender roles, communication styles, and marital expectations in Nigerian society when designing interventions. Encouraging mutual respect, shared responsibilities, and emotional openness within culturally acceptable frameworks may increase the effectiveness of counselling outcomes [21]. In addition, counsellors should advocate for policies that support teachers' work–life balance. While counsellors may not directly change institutional structures, they can collaborate with educational stakeholders to promote teacher-friendly schedules, reasonable workload distribution, and support systems that reduce excessive occupational pressure.

Finally, the findings underscore the need for continuous professional development for counsellors in marital and family therapy. Given that occupational stress increasingly influences marital relationships, counsellors should strengthen their competence in work–family counselling approaches to effectively support teachers experiencing marital conflict. On the whole, the study implies that counselling interventions targeting communication improvement, behavioural adjustment, and work–family balance can significantly enhance marital stability among teachers. Addressing these issues not only improves family wellbeing but may also positively influence teachers’ professional effectiveness, emotional health, and productivity within the school system.

Conclusion

The present study examined demographic differences in sources of marital conflict among public senior secondary school teachers in Rivers State, Nigeria, with particular focus on lack of communication, behavioural problems, and insufficient time with spouse. The findings revealed that none of the demographic factors considered (school type, gender, and school location) significantly influenced the extent to which these factors serve as sources of marital conflict. This suggests that marital conflict among teachers is largely influenced by shared occupational stress, relational dynamics, and universal challenges of balancing work and family life, rather than by demographic differences. The study underscores that communication breakdown, negative behavioural patterns, and limited spousal interaction remain critical stressors affecting marital harmony. These findings indicate that teachers, regardless of gender, school type, or school location, face similar pressures that strain their marital relationships. The research also highlights the broader implication that occupational stress in the teaching profession can spill over into the home environment, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to support marital wellbeing and professional effectiveness simultaneously.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

Counsellors, in collaboration with school administrators, should develop and implement workshops and training programmes to improve communication skills among married teachers. Techniques such as active listening, constructive dialogue, and emotional expression should be central to these programmes.

Teachers should be guided to manage workplace stress effectively to prevent its negative spillover into their marital relationships. Counselling programmes should include emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and anger management strategies to help couples manage behavioural triggers of conflict.

Both teachers and their spouses should be encouraged to prioritize quality time together despite occupational demands. Schools and counsellors should advocate for schedules and policies that provide adequate time for family engagement and reduce excessive workload pressure.

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