

## Effect Of Emotional Intelligence Training On Couples' Attitude To Marital Stress

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### **Abstract**

*This study investigated the effect of Emotional Intelligence on the attitude of couples to marital stress. The general objective of the study is the presentation of Emotional Intelligence as a viable tool in tackling not only marital but all forms of stress. The study adopted an experimental design using purposive and random sampling methods. Pair of thirty (30) married couples totalling sixty (60) subjects participated in the study. The participants were placed into experimental and control groups. Gender and academic qualification were the independent variables of the study. The research instrument, a self-developed and validated Marital Stress Attitude Inventory (MSAI) was administered and couples' scores determined their assigned group. It was administered on the experimental and control groups before and after the Emotional Intelligence Training. Six hypotheses were formulated and tested. The hypotheses were analysed using One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), and Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA). The post-test result of data revealed that there was a significant difference in the attitude of Couples in the Experimental group due to Emotional Intelligence Training, irrespective of gender and academic qualification, as against those of the control group who did not record any significant difference in their attitude to marital stress. The highest mean attitude score recorded by the group that was exposed to Emotional Intelligence Training implied that the attitude of Couples to marital stress can be changed with Emotional Intelligence Training.*

**Keywords:** *Emotional Intelligence, Attitude, Couples, Marital Stress.*

### **Introduction**

Success is inevitably associated with stress (Akinboye, 2002). Stress occurs in all spheres of human life, including work, family, marriage, religion, etc (Azubuike, 2005). Marital stress sometimes arises from unsuccessful performance of necessary number of tasks to achieve marital gratification for satisfactory relations (Azubuike, 2005). There is a high increase in reports of marital stress leading to divorce and even death (Ezeilo, 2005). This calls for a solution for which this work is aimed at.

Top causes of marital stress include matters of affection, expectations, sexual satisfaction, promiscuity and extra-marital affairs, differences in parental and family upbringing and backgrounds, friends, in-laws and family members, parenting functions, styles and roles, authority and decision-making, special ethnic and inter-ethnic differences, resources, incomes and finances, religion and spirituality, education and occupation, among other things. (Azubuike, 2005)

Several researches have revealed the relationship between parents' marital stress

and severe physical and mental disorder, problem, delinquency and behaviours, including poor academic performance in children. Marital stress has caused marital schism, which is the severe marital discord and competition between couples for the loyalty and affection of their children, Divorce, physical and emotional illnesses, anger, bitter frowning, depressed resigned looks in view of painful or traumatic complete breakdown are some of the effects of husband-wife relationship stress (Azubuike, 2005; Ezeilo 2005).

In spite of several coping and management approaches and methods that have been propounded as panacea to marital stress, the unfortunate truth is that there seems to be no much success as revealed by the rate of divorce resulting from marital stress in our contemporary society. This is because marital stress is not only caused by extraneous factors but also by factors inherent in the marital life itself, as observed by Ezubuike (2005). It is in the light of this fact that this study aimed to proffer the solution that would make couples cope with marital stress without leading to the observed consequences that include divorce and death.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general objective of this study is the provision of basis for the incorporation of Emotional Intelligence in tackling the menace of marital stress. The purpose was translated into the following specific objectives such as to:

- (i) examine the attitude of married couples to marital stress;
- (ii) apply Emotional Intelligence Training to couples' attitudes to marital stress;
- (iii) Find out the effect of Emotional Intelligence Training in relation to couples attitude to marital stress;

- (iv) Find out the effects of Emotional Intelligence Training on the attitudes of couples to marital stress based on gender; and
- (v) Find out the effect of Emotional Intelligence Training on the attitudes of couples to marital stress based on academic qualification.

### *Hypotheses:*

The following null hypotheses were tested:

1. There will be no significant effect of Emotional Intelligence Training on couple's attitude to marital stress.
2. There will be no significant effect of gender on couple's attitude marital stress.
3. There will be no significant effect academic level on couple's attitude to marital stress.
4. There will be no significant interaction effect of emotional intelligent training and gender on attitude of couples to marital stress..
5. There will be no significant interaction effect emotional intelligence training and academic qualification on attitude of couples to marital stress..
6. There will be no significant interaction effect of Emotional Intelligence Training, gender and academic qualification on attitude of couples to marital stress.

### **Conceptual framework**

#### ***Stress***

Stress refers to the subjective experience of discomfort and tension. It is a pressure from an adverse force or influence that imposes unusual demand on an organism. Stress occurs when there are demands on the person which far exceeds the person's adjustive resources (Azubuike, 2005). It is

an ineffective and unhealthy reaction to change. It is the body's response to any undesirable mental, physical, emotional, social or environmental demand (Akinboye, 2002). A stressor describes any stimulus that causes stress response in an individual. Stress results from failure to adequately cope with stressor. Events and situations to which people must adjust to are known as stressors. It could also be seen as any event or situation that causes a change in an individual.

### ***Marital Stress***

Marital stress is the common factor that robs individuals, families and society of the happiness that is associated with the physical and mental health, harmony and social stability (Ezeilo, 2005). It is marital stress that brings about such statement to a partner to the other of "driving me crazy". More than being driven crazy, sometime it "kills" (Azubuike, 2005). Marital stress reveals itself in a partner's dreading to go home after a hectic day job because of the expectation of pain, misery and trouble at home. Marital stress brings about added difficulties for people at work and in all spheres of life. It causes disintegration and death, changes that impair the body's ability to fight infection, affect cognition and perception. It causes anger and fear. It affects problem-solving ability and performance, disorganizes behavior, and lowers coping ability and tolerance for other stresses. It causes ageing. When the husband-wife relationship is stressed, the emotional atmosphere in the family is tense. There is mistrust, fear, and sense of isolation, loss of feeling for closeness, sharing, intimacy and affection. Communication is impaired. It leads to withdrawal and irritability, depression and family crises. (Ezeilo, 2005).

### ***Marital Stressors***

Ezeilo (2005) classified the causes of marital stress into intra-personal and interpersonal causes. The intra-personal causes include: role conflict, language and communication, sex, and midlife crisis while the inter-personal factors include: biological factors, learning and development experiences, perceptions, attitudes and beliefs, motivations, and thinking, feeling and behavior. In the context of husband-wife relationship, perception or thought of the negative attitudes of the husband by the wife or the wife by the husband may act as stressors (Ezeilo, 2005).

The fact is that these marital stressors are natural in the sense that the difference in the couples' background, personality, upbringing, education, worldview and lifestyle makes the stressors inevitable. The two people in the marital relationship are not the same. Even identical twins have been known to have differences. Therefore the stress caused by these differences abound. It is only attitude emanating from the perception about them that would change their effect on couples.

### ***Emotional Intelligence***

Emotional Intelligence refers to the capacity for recognising our own feelings and those of others, for motivating oneself, and for managing emotions well in oneself and in our relationship (Goleman, 1998). There are basically three models of Emotional intelligence recognized by Mayer and Salovey (1997). The ability-based model views emotion as useful sources of information that helps one to make sense of and navigate the social environment (Salovey & Grewal, 2005). This model suggest that Emotional Intelligence has four abilities: perceiving emotion, using emotion, understanding emotion and managing emotion (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The

mixed model views Emotional Intelligence as a composite of a set of capabilities that enable an individual to manage self and others (Goleman, 1998). This model suggests that Emotional Intelligence consists of five components: self-awareness, managing ones emotion, moving others, empathy, and handling relationships (Goleman, 1995). The Trait model Defined Emotional Intelligence as the ability to sense, understand and effectively apply the power and acumen as a source of human energy, information, connection, and influence (Cooper & Ayman, 1997). This model suggests four areas of Emotional Intelligence application as: listening, love, choice, and freedom.

### ***Couples Attitude to Marital Stress***

Attitude determines behaviour. Attitude is a disposition towards a thing. Through the pre-test application of the instrument, it was discovered that the couples have a defeating and negative attitude about the marital stressors. If the attitude of the couples about marital stressors could be positively affected by Emotional Intelligence Training, then Emotional Intelligence Training would change the present story about consequences of marital stress in our contemporary society. The couples need to know, accept and respect their mutual natural, biological, social, religious differences. Emotional intelligence is about the recognition and acceptance of personal and others' emotional differences. With the training of the couples with the concept of emotional intelligence, appreciation and respect for the differences that cause marital stress replace fear, anger, threat, depression and other negative and destructive consequences of marital stress.

### **Method**

The research design used in this study was a pre-test/post-test control group experimental

design with a 223 factorial matrix. The study had two groups: the experimental and the control groups. The experimental group was exposed to Emotional Intelligence Training, while the control group was given a placebo (and later given the training after the research).

The population of the study comprised married couples in the Cross-Life Centre of the Old Catholic Apostolic Church (OCAC), Asokoro, Abuja, FCT, Nigeria. The study adopted an experimental design using purposive and random sampling methods. Thirty (30) couples, totalling sixty (60) subjects participated in the study. These participants were drawn from one hundred and twenty (120) couples who were given the pre-test instrument. The pre-test scores of the sixty (60) respondents revealed their high level defeating attitude to marital stress. The thirty (30) couples were then randomly stratified into experimental and control groups of fifteen couples per group through simple balloting.

The study utilized self-designed Marital Stress Attitudes Inventory (MSAI) comprising a 25-items that contain marital stressors and could be used to measure attitudes to marital stress. It was administered on the experimental and control groups before and after the Emotional Intelligence Training. The preliminary test of validity of the instrument revealed a co-efficient value of 0.87 as an evidence of strong inter-rater reliability.

The hypotheses were analysed using One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), and Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA). The acceptance level of probability value for each test was fixed at 0.05.

## RESULT

Summary of Analysis of Covariance of Post-Test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress by Treatment, Gender and Academic Qualifications

| Source of Variation    | Sum of Square (SS) | Df  | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|------------------------|--------------------|-----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES             | 81.767             | 1   | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Pretest Attitude       |                    |     |                   |         |                   |
| Effects                | 25608.908          | 5   | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Treatment              | 25583.073          | 3   | 8527.691          | 219.567 | .000*             |
| Gender                 | 2.629              | 1   | 2.629             | .068    | .795NS            |
| Academic qualification | 1.818              | 1   | 1.818             | .047    | .829NS            |
| Two way interaction    | 227.365            | 7   | 32.481            | .836    | .560              |
| Treatment              | X                  |     |                   |         |                   |
| Gender                 | 11.963             | 3   | 3.988             | .103    | .958NS            |
| Treatment              | X                  |     |                   |         |                   |
| Academic Qualification | 216.211            | 3   | 72.070            | 1.856   | .143NS            |
| Gender                 | X                  |     |                   |         |                   |
| Academic Qualification | .501               | 1   | 0.0501            | .013    | .910NS            |
| Treatment              | .904               | 1   | 2842.904          | 3.602   | 0.063NS           |
| Gender                 | X                  |     |                   |         |                   |
| Academic Qualification | X                  |     |                   |         |                   |
| Explained              | 3573.156           | 92  | 38.839            |         |                   |
| Residual               | 29781.046          | 108 | 275.750           |         |                   |
| Total                  | 17277.413          | 108 | 159.976           |         |                   |

\*- Significant at  $P < .05$ ; NS – Not significant at  $P < .05$

### Result of Pre-test and Post-test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress

| GROUPS                 | ATTITUDE |                   |      |                    |      |           |
|------------------------|----------|-------------------|------|--------------------|------|-----------|
|                        | N        | Pre-Test mean (X) | S.D  | Post-Test Mean (X) | S.D  | Mean Gain |
| Emotional Intelligence | 30       | 3.50              | 1.10 | 2.28               | 1.20 | 1.22      |
| Control                | 30       | 2.24              | 1.00 | 2.22               | 0.92 | 0.02      |

**Result of Effect of Treatment on Post-Test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress**

| Source of Variation         | Sum of Square (SS) | df | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES Pretest Attitude | 81.767             | 1  | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Effects                     | 25608.908          | 5  | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Treatment                   | 25583.073          | 3  | 8527.691          | 219.567 | .000*             |

\* - Significant at  $P < .05$ **Result of Effect of Gender on Post-Test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress**

| Source of Variation         | Sum of Square (SS) | df | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES Pretest Attitude | 81.767             | 1  | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Effects                     | 25608.908          | 5  | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Gender                      | 2.629              | 1  | 2.629             | .068    | .795NS            |

NS – Not Significant at  $P < .05$ **Result of the Effect of Academic Qualifications on Post-Test Attitude of of Couples to Marital Stress**

| Source of Variation         | Sum of Square (SS) | df | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES Pretest Attitude | 81.767             | 1  | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Effects                     | 25608.908          | 5  | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Academic qualification      | 1.818              | 1  | 1.818             | .047    | .829NS            |

NS – Not Significant at  $P < .05$ **Result of the Effects of Treatment and Gender on Post-Test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress**

| Source of Variation         | Sum of Square (SS) | df | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES Pretest Attitude | 81.767             | 1  | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Effects                     | 25608.908          | 5  | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Treatment                   | X                  |    |                   |         |                   |
| Gender                      | 11.963             | 3  | 3.988             | .103    | .958NS            |

NS – Not Significant at  $P < .05$

**Result of Effect of Treatment and Academic Qualification on Post-Test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress**

| Source of Variation         | Sum of Square (SS) | df | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES Pretest Attitude | 81.767             | 1  | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Effects                     | 25608.908          | 5  | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Treatment                   | X                  |    |                   |         |                   |
| Academic Qualification      | 216.211            | 3  | 72.070            | 1.856   | .143NS            |

NS – Not Significant at P<.05

**Result of Effect of Treatment, Gender and Academic Qualification on Post-Test Attitude of Couples to Marital Stress**

| Source of Variation         | Sum of Square (SS) | df | Mean Squares (MS) | F       | Significance of F |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|----|-------------------|---------|-------------------|
| COVARIATES Pretest Attitude | 81.767             | 1  | 81.767            | 2.105   | .150              |
| Effects                     | 25608.908          | 5  | 5121.782          | 131.873 | .000              |
| Treatment                   | .904               | 1  | 2842.904          | 3.602   | 0.063NS           |
| Gender                      | X                  |    |                   |         |                   |
| Academic Qualification      | X                  |    |                   |         |                   |

NS – Not Significant at P<.05

**Multiple Classification Analysis of the Post-Test Attitude Scores of Subjects according to Treatment, Academic Qualification and Gender**

| VARIABLE CATEGORY             | N  | UNADJUSTED DEVIATION | ETA | ADJUSTED FOR INDEPENDENCE COVARIATES DEVIATION | BETA |
|-------------------------------|----|----------------------|-----|--|------|
| <b>TREATMENT</b>              |    |                      |     |  |      |
| Treatment                     | 30 | 1.52                 |     | 0.42   |      |
| <b>GENDER</b>                 |    |                      |     |  |      |
| Male                          | 15 | 0                    |     | -0.18  |      |
| Female                        | 15 | 0                    |     | -0.47  | .01  |
| <b>ACADEMIC QUALIFICATION</b> |    |                      |     |  |      |
| M.Sc/M.A                      | 5  | -.40                 |     | 0.13   |      |
| HND/B.Sc/B.A                  | 10 | .46                  |     | 0.17   |      |
| OND/NCE/SSCE                  | 15 | 0.42                 | .03 | 0.14   | 0.13 |
| MULTIPLE R <sup>2</sup>       |    |                      |     |  | .863 |
| MULTIPLE R                    |    |                      |     |  | .929 |

The result of the data analysis of hypothesis one revealed that there was a significant effect of Emotional Intelligence Training on Couples' attitude to marital stress. There was a significant difference between the treated group and the control group in the post-test score on the attitude of couples to marital stress ( $F=219.6$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) further indicated that the trained group had better and positive improvement than the control group.

The result of data analysis of hypothesis two showed that gender had no significant effect on couples' attitude to marital stress ( $F=.068$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). This means that there was no significant effect of gender on attitude of couples to marital stress. Hypothesis two is therefore accepted.

The result of data analysis of hypothesis three showed that there was no significant effect of academic qualification on couples' attitude to marital stress ( $F=0.047$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). This means that couples' attitude to marital stress has nothing to do with academic qualification. This hypothesis is therefore accepted.

The result of the data analysis of hypothesis four revealed there was no significant effect of Emotional Intelligence Training on attitude of couples to marital stress with respect to gender. The non-interaction effect revealed that attitude to marital stress had nothing to do with gender ( $F=0.103$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Thus, hypothesis four was accepted.

The result of the data analysis of hypothesis five showed that the interaction effects of treatment and academic qualification on couples' attitude to marital stress was non-significant ( $F=.013$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). On this basis, hypothesis five was accepted.

The result of the data analysis of hypothesis six showed that the interaction

effects of treatment, gender and academic qualification on couples' attitude to marital stress was not significant ( $F=3.602$ ,  $p>0.05$ ). Meaning there was no significant interaction effect of treatment, gender and academic qualifications on couples' attitude to marital stress. On this basis, the hypothesis was accepted.

The result of the data revealed that there was a significant difference in the attitude of Couples in the Experimental group due to Emotional Intelligence Training, irrespective of gender and academic qualification, as against those of the control group who did not record any significant difference in their attitude to marital stress.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The highest mean attitude score recorded by the group that was exposed to Emotional Intelligence Training implies that the attitude of couples to marital stress can be changed with Emotional Intelligence Training.

Emotional Intelligence is very relevant to marriage because it involves interpersonal relationship which is what marriage is about. Marriage is a relationship between two people. The post-test result of the experimental group after Emotional Intelligence Training reveals a change from negative and defeating attitude to marital stress. The ultimate effect of the change in attitude is revealed in understanding and acceptance of individual differences that cause marital stress.

Given the reliability and validity of the instrument used for the collection of the data of the study, the external validity for the study is high and therefore increases the generalizability of the findings.

### Recommendation

A healthy marriage gives birth to a healthy nation. It guarantees sanity and prosperity in the nation at large. It is hereby recommended that Emotional Intelligence Training should be part of the academic curriculum of educational institutions even at the basic and primary school educational level. It should be incorporated into the curriculum of all educational institutions as part of civil education.

The generalization of the result of this study notwithstanding, further researches are encouraged in other areas and department of the public and civil life to demonstrate practical result of the theorised conclusion of the effectiveness of Emotional Intelligence Training in changing the attitude to marital stress.

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