

Deceitfulness and forgiveness on the marital satisfaction of Teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria: Implications for Marital Counselling

Derine K. Akpan, Gertrude J. Udoh, and Inwang E. Udom

Department of Guidance and Counselling

Faculty of Education

University of Uyo, Uyo, Nigeria

Correspondence: myderken@gmail.com 09067294845

Abstract

This study examined the influence of deceitfulness and unforgiveness on the marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria, with implications for marital counselling. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. The population comprised 5,202 secondary school teachers, from which a sample of 520 married teachers was selected using multi-stage sampling techniques. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Red Flags and Marital Satisfaction of Secondary School Teachers Questionnaire (RFMSSSTQ), which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.92 for deceitfulness, 0.93 for unforgiveness, and 0.96 for marital satisfaction. Mean, standard deviation, and independent samples t-test were used for data analysis at the 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that teachers who experienced high levels of deceitfulness and unforgiveness reported significantly lower marital satisfaction compared to those with low levels of these behaviours. The independent t-test analysis showed significant differences for deceitfulness, $t(507)=14.67$, $p<0.05$, and unforgiveness, $t(507)=12.79$, $p<0.05$. The study concluded that deceitfulness and unforgiveness are critical relational red flags that negatively influence marital stability and satisfaction among secondary school teachers. Recommendations include the establishment of school-based marital counselling programmes, integration of conflict resolution and forgiveness modules into teacher preparation curricula, and the organisation of regular workshops on marital health for educators.

Keywords: Counselling, Deceitfulness, Marital, Satisfaction, Unforgiveness,

Introduction

Marriage is universally recognised as a foundational social institution that establishes a formally sanctioned union between two individuals, guided by culturally defined norms, roles, and expectations. It represents a committed partnership typically founded on mutual love, trust, respect, and shared responsibilities (Cherlin, 2014). Within the Nigerian socio-cultural context, marriage extends beyond the personal relationship between two individuals to represent a formal alliance between families and kinship groups (Adebowale *et al.*, 2020). In Akwa Ibom State, marriage holds deep cultural, religious, and communal significance, serving as a socially recognised bond that connects families, clans, and communities.

Marital satisfaction, define as the subjective evaluation of one's marriage encompassing dimensions such as emotional intimacy, communication quality, mutual respect, and overall fulfilment, is a critical determinant of psychological well-being, emotional stability, and social functioning (Lawrence *et al.*, 2019). For secondary school teachers, whose professional responsibilities demand sustained emotional regulation, patience, and interpersonal competence, marital satisfaction assumes particular significance. Teachers operate within contexts characterised by heavy workloads, limited resources, economic pressures, and rising institutional demands, and these occupational stressors frequently spill over into their marital lives (Bassey & Umoh, 2021).

Despite the acknowledged importance of marriage, contemporary Nigerian society has witnessed increasing reports of marital dissatisfaction linked to negative relational behaviours. Two such behaviours that have received insufficient empirical attention, particularly among educators, are deceitfulness and unforgiveness. Deceitfulness in marital relationships refers to the deliberate act of misleading or manipulating one's partner through lies, concealment of information, or distortion of the truth (Levine, 2018). It involves behaviours such as withholding relevant information, providing false explanations, secret-keeping, or intentionally misrepresenting facts for personal benefit. Within marriage, deceitfulness represents a significant violation of relational trust and transparency, which are essential elements for sustaining marital satisfaction.

Unforgiveness, conversely, refers to a persistent emotional state in which one partner holds onto resentment, anger, or hurt resulting from a spouse's wrongdoing, without releasing the offense or seeking reconciliation (Asamoah *et al.*, 2016). Within marital relationships, unforgiveness is often expressed through persistent conflicts, emotional withdrawal, and ineffective communication between spouses. When couples harbour unforgiveness, they experience lower levels of satisfaction, partly due to the belief that forgiveness reduces accountability or signals weakness (Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2015).

This research is grounded in two complementary theoretical frameworks: Conflict Theory and the ABC-X Family Stress Theory. These frameworks offer unique yet interrelated perspectives for comprehending the influence of deceitfulness and unforgiveness on the marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria. Conflict Theory, originally advanced by Karl Marx (1848) and later adapted by Collins (1975) to explain family systems, posits that human relationships are often characterised by conflict due to competition over scarce resources such as power, attention, affection, and control. This theory posits that marital dissatisfaction frequently arises from inequalities, domination, and unresolved power struggles between partners (Randall & Bowen, 2012). This perspective is essential for our study since it redirects attention from individual personality traits to the relational power dynamics associated with marital distress.

The theory's notion of the family as an arena of power struggle elucidates how deceitfulness in one partner can swiftly escalate into a collective marital crisis. Collins' concept of resource competition elucidates how unmanaged tension related to financial secrecy or emotional manipulation may infiltrate a relationship, fostering a cycle of blame and defensiveness that impedes collaborative problem-solving. This theoretical perspective posits that proficient marital satisfaction encompasses not only practical communication abilities but also emotional and relational dimensions of power sharing.

Moreover, the notion of perceived inequity is essential. A marriage characterised by perceived imbalance may produce reactive behaviours—such as financial deception to assert control, or persistent unforgiveness as a mechanism of retaliation. From this perspective, marital counselling extends beyond conventional communication advice; it facilitates couples in addressing underlying power imbalances, enabling discussions about grievances without the risk of personal affront or emotional overwhelm. This hypothesis offers a compelling elucidation for the emotional intensity surrounding deceit and unforgiveness in marriages. Nevertheless, it predominantly emphasises the power and conflict aspects. To comprehensively grasp the coping process, it is essential to incorporate a stress management perspective.

Hill's ABC-X Family Stress Theory (1958) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how families and couples respond to stressful events. Hill posited that marital stress results from the interaction among a stressor event (A), the family's resources (B), the perception of the event (C), and the outcome or crisis (X). This theory posits that the impact of a stressor is not absolute but depends on the interplay of available resources and the meaning attached to the event. The ABC-X model is especially valuable for elucidating the mechanisms by which couples respond to deceitfulness and unforgiveness. It positions the choice to seek therapy not as a concession of inadequacy, but as a strategic employment of resources. From this perspective, the duration, expense, and effort invested in marital counselling are evaluated against the expected long-term advantages: diminished emotional discord, enhanced trust, and improved marital stability. This viewpoint elucidates the rationale behind a couple's involvement, indicating that they engage because they believe the benefits of the service outweigh its costs. The ABC-X theory, which prioritise resource assessment and perception, may be complemented by Conflict Theory's emphasis on power dynamics.

Collectively, these ideas offer an extensive framework. Conflict Theory elucidates the mechanisms and rationale of marital distress, demonstrating that counselling services must confront foundational power patterns to achieve efficacy. The ABC-X Family Stress Theory elucidates the rationale for participation, positioning counselling as a strategic, resource-maximising endeavour. This study posits that addressing deceitfulness and unforgiveness enhances marital satisfaction by concurrently addressing the dysfunctional power dynamics

within couples (Conflict Theory) and equipping them with coping strategies necessary for attaining relational well-being (ABC-X Model).

Empirical evidence has established significant associations between deceitfulness, unforgiveness, and marital outcomes. Nwachukwu and Eze (2019) found that deceitfulness in marriage undermines trust and reduces marital satisfaction. Regarding unforgiveness, Chukwu and Opara (2016) revealed that unforgiveness significantly reduces marital satisfaction and weakens emotional intimacy among couples. However, despite these findings, there remains a significant gap in the literature regarding how deceitfulness and unforgiveness specifically influence marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria. This geographical and professional context is unique, characterised by specific cultural norms, occupational stressors, and limited access to marital counselling services. The present study addresses this gap by empirically examining the influence of these two critical red flag behaviours on teachers' marital satisfaction, offering implications for marital counselling practice.

Statement of the Problem

Marriage, a fundamental social institution, is increasingly challenged in contemporary Nigerian society by unresolved marital issues. Despite the availability of marital counselling resources and relationship advice platforms, many married secondary school teachers experience difficulties in maintaining satisfying marital relationships, leading to emotional distress and tension within their unions. The study identifies red flag behaviours such as deceitfulness and unforgiveness as major contributors to poor communication, relational conflict, and strained partnerships.

Marital satisfaction is essential for psychological well-being, emotional stability, and effective social functioning, especially among secondary school teachers whose profession requires emotional regulation and interpersonal competence. In Nigeria, teachers face heavy workloads, limited resources, economic pressures, and rising institutional demands, which often spill over into family life and increase marital conflicts and maladaptive behaviours (Bassey & Umoh, 2021). Deceitfulness and unforgiveness among spouses may intensify marital stress, resulting in emotional breakdown, separation, divorce, and mental health challenges.

Differences in spouses' expectations regarding trust, transparency, and conflict resolution often create tension, particularly when deceptive behaviours persist or forgiveness is withheld. These unresolved differences may lead to perceptions of inequity, power imbalance, and emotional strain, further threatening marital stability. Although couples who receive marital counselling often manage marital challenges more effectively, few Nigerian studies have examined how specific marital red flags particularly deceitfulness and unforgiveness—jointly influence marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers. Existing studies largely address

marital dissatisfaction in general terms without considering the unique occupational, socio-cultural, and economic realities of teachers. This gap limits the effectiveness of counselling interventions. Therefore, this study seeks to provide evidence-based insight into how deceitfulness and unforgiveness influence marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers and the implications for marital counselling interventions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how deceitfulness and unforgiveness influences marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria, with implications for marital counselling. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Determine the influence of deceitfulness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers.
2. Determine the influence of unforgiveness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does deceitfulness influence marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria?
2. How does unforgiveness influence marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant influence of deceitfulness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant influence of unforgiveness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Methodology

The research utilises a descriptive survey design to examine the influence of deceitfulness and unforgiveness on the marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria. A descriptive survey study examines the relationship between variables to determine if they are associated, without attempting to establish causality, while describing existing conditions as they naturally occur (Nworgu, 2015). The research population consisted of 5,202 secondary school teachers employed in public secondary schools within Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria, as obtained from the Planning, Research and Statistics Unit of the State Secondary Education Board (SSEB, 2024/2025 academic session).

A sample of 520 married secondary school teachers was selected from the study area. A multi-stage sampling technique was utilised to choose participants for this investigation. At the

first stage, the sample size was determined using Nwana's (1995) guideline of 10 percent. At the second stage, systematic random sampling was used to select five LGAs. At the third stage, proportionate sampling was used to select schools. Finally, simple random sampling (balloting) was used to select respondents of which 509 questionnaires was used due to alteration in the process.

The principal tool for data collection was a researcher-developed instrument named the Red Flags and Marital Satisfaction of Secondary School Teachers Questionnaire (RFMSSSTQ). The questionnaire was distributed to married teachers to gather insights into their experiences of red flag behaviours and their level of marital satisfaction. Married teachers were directed to express their levels of agreement or disagreement using a four-point rating scale: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1.

The RFMSSSTQ's reliability was evaluated by the Cronbach Alpha statistical approach. A pilot test was performed with an additional sample of thirty married teachers from the study area who were not included in the main study to evaluate the internal consistency of the instrument. Cronbach Alpha scores of 0.92 for deceitfulness, 0.93 for unforgiveness, and 0.96 for marital satisfaction are deemed satisfactory for assessing reliability, signifying that the items in the questionnaire consistently measure the same underlying constructs. The data acquired from the RFMSSSTQ was analysed using mean and standard deviation for research questions and the independent samples t-test for hypotheses at the 0.05 significance level. This investigation assessed the nature and intensity of the influence of deceitfulness and unforgiveness on the marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers.

Results

Research Question 1: How does deceitfulness influence marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Table 1: Summary of mean, and standard deviation on the influence of deceitfulness on martial satisfaction of secondary school teacher.

Variable	Marital Satisfaction Group	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	SD Error
Deceitfulness	Low Marital Satisfaction	265	2.05	0.66	0.04
	High Marital Satisfaction	244	1.33	0.42	0.03

Table 1 shows that respondents with low marital satisfaction recorded a higher mean score of 2.05 (SD=0.66) on deceitfulness, while those with high marital satisfaction recorded a

lower mean score of 1.33 (SD=0.42). This indicates that higher levels of deceitfulness are associated with lower marital satisfaction.

Research Question 2: How does unforgiveness influence marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria?

Table 2: Summary of Mean, and Standard Deviation on the Influence of unforgiveness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teacher.

Variable	Marital Satisfaction Group	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	SD Error
Unforgiveness	Low Marital Satisfaction	265	2.40	0.56	2.40
	High Marital Satisfaction	244	1.72	0.64	1.72

Table 2 shows that respondents with low marital satisfaction recorded a higher mean score of 2.40 (SD=0.56) on unforgiveness, while those with high marital satisfaction recorded a lower mean score of 1.72 (SD=0.64). This indicates that higher levels of unforgiveness are associated with lower marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1: There is a significant influence of deceitfulness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Table 3: Summary of Independent Samples t-test Analysis on the Influence of Deceitfulness on Marital Satisfaction of Secondary School Teachers

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	t	df	p-value	sig
Deceitfulness	Low Marital Satisfaction	265	2.05	0.66	14.67	507	.000	.000
	High Marital Satisfaction	244	1.33	0.42				

Table 3 shows a significant difference in mean scores of deceitfulness between teachers with low and high marital satisfaction, $t(507)=14.67$, $p=0.00$. Since $p<0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that deceitfulness significantly influences marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis 2: There is significant influence of unforgiveness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria.

Table 4: summary of independent t-test analysis on the influence of unforgiveness on marital satisfaction of secondary school teachers

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t	df	p-value	Sig.
Unforgiveness	Low Marital Satisfaction	265	2.39	0.55	12.79	507	.000	.000
	High Marital Satisfaction	244	1.71	0.64				

Table 4 shows a significant difference in mean scores of unforgiveness between teachers with low and high marital satisfaction, $t(507)=12.79$, $p=0.00$. Since $p<0.05$, the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that unforgiveness significantly influences marital satisfaction.

Discussion of Findings

Deceitfulness and Marital Satisfaction

The findings reveal that deceitfulness is a major negative predictor of marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers. Teachers with low marital satisfaction recorded a higher mean score (2.05) on deceitfulness compared to those with high marital satisfaction (1.33). The t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference ($t=14.67$, $p<0.05$).

Deceitfulness in marriage, including behaviours such as lying, withholding information, and emotional dishonesty, undermines trust and weakens the foundation of marital relationships. It leads to breakdown in communication and erodes emotional intimacy, as partners struggle to trust each other or feel safe expressing themselves. For teachers whose professional responsibilities demand emotional regulation, the presence of deceit at home undermines both personal well-being and professional effectiveness. This finding is consistent with Nwachukwu and Eze (2019), who found that deceitfulness undermines trust and reduces marital satisfaction.

The findings indicate that unforgiveness significantly influences marital satisfaction. Teachers with low marital satisfaction recorded a higher mean score (2.40) on unforgiveness compared to those with high marital satisfaction (1.72). The t-test confirmed a statistically significant difference ($t=12.79$, $p<0.05$).

Unforgiveness in marriage leads to persistent resentment, emotional distance, and unresolved conflicts. For teachers who depend on their marital relationships for emotional support, the inability to forgive creates a hostile home environment. Unforgiveness leads to breakdown in communication and emotional disconnection, as partners dwell on past offenses

rather than working toward reconciliation. The finding aligns with Chukwu and Opara (2016), who found that unforgiveness significantly reduces marital satisfaction and weakens emotional intimacy.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, this study concludes that deceitfulness and unforgiveness are critical relational red flags that negatively influence marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Akwa Ibom North-West Senatorial District, Nigeria. These behaviours undermine trust, erode emotional intimacy, sustain conflict, and prevent emotional healing. For teachers, marital dissatisfaction may extend beyond the home, affecting job performance, classroom effectiveness, and professional relationships. Promoting honesty, transparency, and forgiveness is essential for sustaining satisfying and stable marriages among educators.

Implications for Marital Counselling

The findings have significant implications for marital counselling practice, particularly in addressing deceitfulness and unforgiveness as major predictors of marital dissatisfaction among married teachers. Counsellors should develop targeted interventions that promote honesty, forgiveness, ethical communication, conflict resolution, and trust-building through cognitive-behavioural and forgiveness-based therapeutic approaches. Premarital and marital counselling programmes should incorporate structured modules and assessment tools that identify unresolved conflicts, grievance patterns, and forgiveness capacities to enable personalised interventions and lasting behavioural change.

The findings also suggest the need to strengthen school-based counselling services to support teachers experiencing marital difficulties. School administrators, guidance counsellors, and educational authorities should organise workshops and professional development programmes on marital honesty, communication, forgiveness, and conflict management. Additionally, policies that integrate marital wellness initiatives into teacher welfare programmes are necessary, as stable marital relationships contribute to teachers' emotional well-being, professional effectiveness, and positive educational outcomes.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations were preferred

- i. Counselling Departments in schools and other facilities are recommended to offer emotional and professional support to help educators manage marital issues such as deceitfulness effectively.

- ii. Married teachers struggling with marital forgiveness in their marriages should seek for professional assistance from marriage counsellors, so as to be enlightened on the benefits of forgiving each other for mistakes and transgressions.
- iii. Counsellors should organise regular workshops on marital health for married educators to help them identify these marital challenges such as deceitfulness and unforgiveness, and to know when to seek professional help toward a harmonious family life.

References

- Adebowale, A. S., Oladipo, O. O., & Dipeolu, I. (2020). *Socio-cultural determinants of marital stability and family cohesion among Nigerian couples*. Journal of African Studies and Development, 12(3), 45-57.
- Asamoah, E., Osafo, J., & Agyemang, C. B. (2016). *Forgiveness, marital satisfaction, and psychological well-being among married couples*. Journal of Psychology in Africa, 26(5), 448-452.
- Bassey, M. I., & Umoh, J. E. (2021). *Occupational stress and marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Cross River State, Nigeria*. Journal of Educational and Social Research, 11(3), 112-122.
- Collins, R. (1975). *Conflict sociology: Toward an explanatory science*. Academic Press.
- Hill, R. (1958). *Families under stress: Adjustment to the crisis of war separation and reunion*. Harper & Row.
- Cherlin, A. J. (2014). *Marriage, families, and social change: Family patterns in global perspective*. Journal of Marriage and Family, 76*(1), 6-22.
- Chukwu, L., & Opara, I. (2016). *Forgiveness, reconciliation, and marital satisfaction among couples in Rivers State, Nigeria*. African Journal of Marriage and Family Studies, 4(2), 33-48.
- Collins, R. (1975). *Conflict sociology: Toward an explanatory science*. Academic Press.
- Lawrence, E., Yoon, J. S., Langer, A. & Ro, E. (2019). *Marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood*. Journal of Family Psychology, 33(4), 423-434.
- Levine, T. R. (2018). *Duped: Truth-default theory and the social science of lying and deception*. University of Alabama Press.

Marx, K. (1848). *The Communist Manifesto*. London.

Nwachukwu, F., & Eze, P. (2019). *Spousal deceit and its influence on marital satisfaction among married couples in Abia State, Nigeria*. International Journal of Family Studies, 7(1), 23-38.

Nworgu, B. G. (2015). *Educational research: Basic issues and methodology (3rd ed.)*. Wisdom Publishers.