

Marital Conflict, Emotional Distress, and Coping Mechanisms among Married Couples in Mbarara City

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Abstract

Introduction: Marital conflict is a struggle, clash, strife, disagreement, or quarrel between husband and wife and sometimes with other members of the household over opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, or goals. The relationship between marital conflicts and emotional distress among married couples in Mbarara City is not certain. The available coping mechanisms used by married couples to overcome marital conflicts in Mbarara City are not clear. Therefore, the study sought to assess the relationship between marital conflict, emotional distress, and the available coping mechanisms among married couples in Mbarara City.

Methods: A cross-sectional study design using a quantitative method of data collection to assess social issues like marital conflict, emotional distress, and coping mechanisms was carried out with the aid of pre-coded questionnaires. Proportional sampling techniques were used to recruit married couples. The data was analyzed using Stata version 15.1. Descriptive and correlational studies were conducted.

Results: Of the 298 participants, 149 (50%) were females, equaling 149 (50%) were males. The mean time spent in marriage was 17.8 and a standard deviation of 10.21 for men and 17.8 and a standard deviation of 10.29 for females. The study also found that negotiation skills have a positive and significant correlation with stress ($r = 0.154$). Physical assault has a significant positive correlation with anxiety and depression ($r = 0.115$ and $r = 0.190$ for anxiety and depression, respectively). Injury as a marital conflict indicator has a significant positive correlation with depression ($r = 0.283$). Sexual coercion has a significant positive correlation with stress, anxiety, and depression ($r = 0.225$, $r = 0.144$, and $r = 0.230$ for stress, anxiety, and depression, respectively). The study also found that the most common coping mechanisms used by married couples were problem-focused coping mechanisms.

Conclusion and recommendations: The study concluded that both men and women had marital relations that showed negotiation skills, and there was low physical assault among married couples but high sexual coercion among married couples. The study concluded that more males utilised problem-focused coping mechanisms compared to females to resolve marital conflicts. The study recommends that awareness of effective communication among married couples should be emphasised to resolve marital conflict. And policymakers should set strict laws to govern people with families, while married couples should seek guidance and counselling from local religious leaders in cases of marital misunderstanding.

Keywords: Marital Conflicts, Emotional Distress, Stress, Anxiety, Coping Mechanisms

Introduction

This study investigated the relationship between marital conflicts, emotional distress, and the available coping mechanisms among married couples in Mbarara City. Statistics indicate that roughly 45% of all marriages that break down within 30 years are due to marital conflict. Accordingly, emotional distress is a state of psychological suffering characterised by lost interest, sadness, hopelessness, restlessness, and

feeling tense (Drapeau, Marchand, & Beaulieu-Prévost, 2012). This study is therefore intended to explore the relationship between marital conflict and emotional distress among married couples in Mbarara City, southwestern Uganda. Emotional distress, if not taken care of by the individual, will in the long run lead to damage to the body organs and the body system as a whole (Schröpfer, Schmidt, Kus, Koob, & Coenen, 2021). Marital conflict generally in Africa leads to at least 1/3 of the cases of divorce. Marital conflict rates in the U.S., for example, are at 50% for first marriages, which are 2.5 times more likely to end in divorce. In Nigeria today, the rate at which marital couples experience divorce and re-marriage is quite alarming. Globally, of all the types of conflicts, marital conflict is one of the most sought-after types because it affects the core of society, which is the well-being of the family (Tasew & Getahun, 2021). Though various scholars have defined marital conflicts through different lenses, they generally contend that such conflicts must take place within the confines of marriage.

The challenge of marital conflict has taken centre stage on the international social development platform. Therefore, the study sought to assess the relationship between marital conflict, emotional distress, and the available coping mechanisms among married couples in Mbarara City. In Nigeria today, the rate at which marital couples experience divorce and re-marriage is quite alarming. The relationship between marital conflicts and emotional distress among married couples in Mbarara City is not certain.

Significance of the study

Marital conflict, emotional distress, and the available coping mechanisms among the married in Mbarara City are issues worth investigating. Marital conflict generally in Africa leads to at least 1/3 of the cases of divorce. The available coping mechanisms used by married couples to overcome marital conflicts in Mbarara City are not clear. What is the relationship between marital conflict and emotional distress among married couples in Mbarara City? Thus, the results will be of importance to various stakeholders involved in handling marital conflict and emotional distress. The study also found that the most common coping mechanisms used by married couples were problem-focused coping mechanisms.

Literature Review

According to estimates, marital discomfort is experienced by around 20% of married couples at any particular point in time. For instance, research findings suggest that over 20% of married couples are now facing mental hardship. (Abdullah et al., 2017) Research findings indicate that there is a growing prevalence of marital conflict, and this upward trajectory is expected to persist. At this juncture, it is uncertain how this phenomenon influences patterns of emotional suffering among identical societies. Marital conflict within the context of marriage has been seen to elicit negative behaviour, particularly among mothers, consequently influencing the behaviour of their offspring. The conflicting wants and interests of spouses are central to the occurrence of marital conflict. Emotional discomfort is a pervasive issue that can impact individuals across all age groups, social strata, and occupational backgrounds. Research findings indicate that there is a rising prevalence of marital conflict, and this upward trajectory is expected to persist.

The frequency of marital disputes encountered by individuals in a married relationship Nevertheless, the current findings fail to demonstrate the specific mechanisms via which marital conflict contributes to the escalation of emotional distress, which is the primary focus of this work. Even in cases where marriages do not culminate in divorce, a significant number of them are marked by emotional turmoil. Numerous methodologies and tactics are anticipated to mitigate the diverse ramifications of emotional anguish. Marital discord has the potential to result in unfavorable consequences. When relationship conflict is characterized by health and productivity, it provides individuals with a chance to gain insights into alternative perspectives and diverse experiences of the world. A comprehensive examination of the aforementioned data strongly supports the notion that emotional anguish is a significant obstacle faced by married couples in Uganda. Marital discord might result in unfavorable consequences for the given

information (Aaron, Fadale, Harrington, & Born, 2011). The etiology of marital conflict and emotional discomfort within married couples exhibits considerable variability and often includes a multifaceted interplay of circumstances.

Methodology

Questionnaires were employed as a means of gathering data pertaining to marital conflict, emotional discomfort, and coping strategies. The study aimed to assess the incidence of various types of marital conflict experienced by married individuals residing in Mbarara City. The tools utilized were as follows: The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS) is a widely used tool in the field of social sciences to measure and assess interpersonal conflict and aggression within relationships. The scale in question has 38 questions that were originally established by Straus (1979) to investigate marital conflict. According to the study conducted by Feng et al. (2021), the research project included individuals who were married and residing inside the confines of Mbarara city. The participants in this study consisted of married couples residing in the Kakiika division, Mbarara City North, Mbarara City. The current investigation employed a cross-sectional research design, utilizing a quantitative approach to gather data, in order to evaluate social concerns such as marital conflict, emotional discomfort, and the coping strategies that are accessible. The study conducted by Ball et al. (2021) employed the Pearson correlation coefficient to assess the association between markers of marital conflict and emotional distress. The determination of the sample size of the respondents was conducted using the Yamane (1967) methodology. The research was centered on a cohort of 386 individuals who were married, consisting of both males and females, resulting in a total of 193 couples. The study sent invitations to married couples to partake and provide fundamental details. The data underwent analysis using Stata version 15.1. The incidence of marital conflict and coping techniques among married couples was assessed using frequencies and percentages. The researcher employed a stratified sampling methodology to choose a sample based on the couple's place of residence, namely within the Kakiika division. The researcher obtained approval for her study from the Directorate of Graduate Training, Research, and Innovation. The statistical measures of central tendency and dispersion were calculated for the frequency of occurrences of marital conflict indicators. Specifically, the mean and standard deviation were determined. Subsequently, a proportional sampling approach will be employed to extract a representative sample from the Kakiika division in a manner that maintains proportionality.

Results

The data was obtained through fieldwork, wherein a total of 386 questionnaires were sent to a sample of 193 couples. A total of 298 questionnaires were completed and deemed valid for inclusion in the study as representative of the target population. The study utilized a response rate of 77.2% from participants to derive results, conclusions, and recommendations.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of Demographic characteristics of respondents

Characteristic	Male (n=149)	Female (n=149)	Total (n=298)
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Age Category, years			
20-30	7 (2%)	21 (7%)	28(9%)
31-40	38 (13%)	50 (17%)	88(30%)
41-50	57 (19%)	48 (16%)	105(35%)
51-60	25 (8%)	24 (8%)	49(16%)
61 and above	22 (7%)	6(2%)	28(9%)

Level of education			
Never went to school	1 (0.35%)	1 (0.35%)	2(1%)
Primary	21 (7%)	24 (8%)	45(15%)
O level	47 (16%)	54 (18%)	101(34%)
A level	21 (7%)	29 (10%)	50(17%)
Certificate	12 (4%)	2 (1%)	14(5%)
Diploma	25 (8%)	21 (7%)	46 (15%)
Degree	19 (6%)	14 (5%)	33(11%)
Masters and above	3 (1%)	4 (1%)	7(2%)
Religious affiliation			
Catholic	57 (19%)	67 (23%)	124 (42%)
Protestant	72 (24%)	67 (23%)	139(47%)
Muslim	5 (2%)	4 (1%)	9(3%)
Others	15 (5%)	11 (4%)	26(9%)
	M(SD)	M (SD)	
Time spent in marriage	17.8(10.21)	17.8(10.29)	

Note: M= Mean, SD = Standard deviation, n = frequency

Out of the total sample size of 298 participants, an equal distribution of 149 individuals (50%) identified as females, while the remaining 149 individuals (50%) identified as men. The majority of the participants (34%) possessed an O' level as their highest level of education. Among these participants, 47 (16%) were males and 54 (18%) were females. Additionally, 50 (17%) participants had an A-level education, with 21 (7%) being male and 29 (10%) being female. Furthermore, 46 (15%) participants had a diploma education, consisting of 25 (8%) males and 21 (7%) females. Moreover, 33 (11%) participants had a degree as their highest level of education, with 19 (6%) being male and 14 (5%) being female, predominantly male. Comparatively, 12 (4%) participants had a certificate as their highest level of education, while only 2 (1%) had no formal education. Lastly, 7 (2%) participants had a master's degree or higher.

(Table 1).

Among the participants, the largest proportion, specifically 139 individuals (47%), identified as Protestants. Of this group, 72 individuals (24%) were male and 67 individuals (23%) were female. Additionally, 124 participants (42%) identified as Catholics, with 57 males (19%) and 67 females (23%) falling into this category. A smaller subset of 26 individuals (9%) belonged to other religious affiliations such as Adventist and Pentecostal, consisting of 15 males (5%) and 11 females (4%). Lastly, a minority of 9 participants (3%) identified as Muslims, with 5 males (2%) and 4 females (1%) falling into this category.

The mean duration of marriage for both men and females was found to be 17.8 years, with a standard deviation of 10.21 years for males and 10.29 years for females. The range of marital duration was from a minimum of 1 year to a high of 51 years for both genders.

(Table 1)

Prevalence of Marital conflict among married couples in Mbarara City in the past year

The study examined marital disputes and evaluated them based on four indicators: negotiating skills, physical assault, injury, and sexual coercion.

This section provides an analysis of the frequency of marital disputes experienced by couples who are married. The findings displayed in Table 2

Table 2 Prevalence of Marital conflict among married couples in Mbarara City

Marital Conflict	Gender						Times of occurrence	
	Total (n=298)		Male (n=149)		Female (n=149)		M	SD
	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)	Yes n(%)	No n(%)		
Negotiation								
I showed my partner I cared even though we disagreed	289(97%)	9(3%)	145(97%)	4(3%)	144(97%)	5(3%)	4	6.72
I agreed to try a solution to a disagreement my partner suggested	282(95%)	16(5%)	141(95%)	8(5%)	141(95%)	8(5%)	5	6.04
My partner showed care for me even though we disagreed	281(94%)	17(6%)	141(95%)	8(5%)	140(94%)	9(6%)	4	6.58
My partner explained his or her side of a disagreement to me	278(93%)	20(7%)	140(94%)	9(6%)	138(93%)	11(7%)	6	6.24
My partner showed respect for my feelings about an issue	275(92%)	23(8%)	138(93%)	11(7%)	137(92%)	12(8%)	7	7.48
I showed respect for my partner's feelings about an issue	273(92%)	25(8%)	136(91%)	13(9%)	137(92%)	12(8%)	7	7.81
I said I was sure we could work out a problem	273(92%)	25(8%)	135(91%)	14(9%)	138(93%)	11(7%)	5	5.98
My partner agreed to try a solution I suggested	272(91%)	26(9%)	137(92%)	12(8%)	135(91%)	14(9%)	6	6.57
I explained my side of a disagreement to my partner	271(91%)	27(9%)	134(90%)	15(10%)	137(92%)	12(8%)	4	6.11
My partner suggested a compromise to a disagreement	269(90%)	29(10%)	133(89%)	16(11%)	136(91%)	13(9%)	6	6.41
I stepped out of the room or house or yard during a disagreement	264(89%)	34(11%)	133(89%)	16(11%)	131(88%)	18(12%)	4	6.01
I suggested a compromise to a disagreement	261(88%)	37(12%)	128(86%)	21(14%)	133(89%)	16(11%)	6	6.55
I accused my partner of being a lousy lover	258(87%)	40(13%)	128(86%)	21(14%)	130(87%)	19(13%)	4	6.18
I insulted or swore at my partner	252(85%)	46(15%)	129(87%)	20(13%)	123(83%)	26(17%)	4	5.62
Physical Assault								
I destroyed something belonging to my partner	245(82%)	53(18%)	126(85%)	23(15%)	119(80%)	30(20%)	3	4.5
I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner	245(82%)	53(18%)	130(87%)	19(13%)	115(77%)	34(23%)	4	5.10
I threw something at my partner that could hurt	230(77%)	68(23%)	118(79%)	31(21%)	112(75%)	37(25%)	2	3.35

I threatened to hit or throw something at my partner	228(77%)	70(23%)	119(80%)	30(20%)	109(73%)	40(27%)	3	4.2
I felt physical pain that still hurt the next day because of a fight	216(72%)	82(28%)	101(68%)	48(32%)	115(77%)	34(23%)	2	3.96
I slapped my partner	207(69%)	91(31%)	119(80%)	30(20%)	88(59%)	61(41%)	2	4.62
I beat up my partner	199(67%)	99(33%)	119(80%)	30(20%)	80(54%)	69(46%)	1	3.41
My partner passed out from being hit on the head in a fight with me	196(66%)	102(34%)	117(79%)	32(21%)	79(53%)	70(47%)	1	3.28
I passed out from being hit on the head by my partner in a fight	174(58%)	124(42%)	74(50%)	75(50%)	100(67%)	49(33%)	1	3.66
I slammed my partner against a wall	172(58%)	126(42%)	106(71%)	43(29%)	66(44%)	83(56%)	1	2.82
I twisted my partner's arm or hair	170(57%)	128(43%)	102(68%)	47(32%)	68(46%)	81(54%)	1	2.47
I choked my partner	154(52%)	144(48%)	80(54%)	69(46%)	74(50%)	75(50%)	1	3.56
Injury								
My partner needed to see a doctor because of a fight with me, but did not	211(71%)	87(29%)	116(78%)	33(22%)	95(64%)	54(36%)	2	4.02
I had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with my partner	206(69%)	92(31%)	100(67%)	49(33%)	106(71%)	43(29%)	1	2.71
My partner had a sprain, bruise, or small cut because of a fight with me	206(69%)	92(31%)	114(77%)	35(23%)	92(62%)	57(38%)	2	4.23
I needed to see a doctor because of a fight with my partner, but I didn't	197(66%)	101(34%)	92(62%)	57(38%)	105(70%)	44(30%)	2	4.79
I used a knife or gun on my partner	168(56%)	130(44%)	87(58%)	62(42%)	81(54%)	68(46%)	2	4.82
My partner had a broken bone from a fight with me	153(51%)	145(49%)	96(64%)	53(36%)	57(38%)	92(43%)	1	3.42
I had a broken bone from a fight with my partner	141(47%)	157(53%)	64(43%)	85(57%)	77(52%)	72(48%)	1	3.66
Sexual Coercion								
I made my partner have sex without a condom	281(94%)	17(6%)	140(94%)	9(6%)	141(95%)	8(5%)	11	10.94
I insisted on sex when my partner did not want to	271(91%)	27(9%)	142(95%)	7(5%)	129(87%)	20(13%)	5	6.59
I accused my partner of being a lousy lover	254(85%)	44(15%)	134(90%)	15(10%)	120(81%)	29(19%)	3	5.4
I used force to make my partner have sex	251(84%)	47(16%)	135(91%)	14(9%)	116(78%)	33(22%)	4	6.65
I used threats to make my partner have sex	233(78%)	65(22%)	123(83%)	26(17%)	110(74%)	39(26%)	4	5.98

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, n = frequency

The negotiation skills that were found to be most commonly observed among participants included demonstrating care towards the partner despite having differing opinions (97% agreement, n=289), being willing to attempt a solution proposed by the partner to resolve a disagreement (95% agreement, n=282), displaying care towards the partner even in the presence of disagreement (94% agreement, n=281), and providing an explanation of one's perspective during a disagreement (93% agreement, n=278). The negotiating techniques that were seen to be least prominent among participants were engaging in insulting or cursing at their spouse (85% of participants), accusing their partner of being a bad lover (87% of participants), and offering a compromise to resolve a disagreement (88% of participants) (252, 258, and 261, respectively).

The physical assault indicators that were most commonly observed in the study included participants engaging in destructive behavior towards their partners' belongings (82%, n=245) and participants making threats to hit or throw objects at their partners (82%, n=245). It is worth noting that male participants exhibited higher rates of engaging in destructive behavior (85%, n=126) and making threats (87%, n=130) compared to female participants. The physical assault indication that was seen with the lowest frequency was the occurrence of a participant sustaining a broken bone as a result of a conflict with their spouse, with a total of 141 cases representing 47% of the sample. Among these cases, females accounted for the majority, with 77 instances, constituting 52% of the total.

The injury indicators that were most commonly observed in the study were sprains, bruises, or small cuts resulting from physical altercations with a partner. Among the participants, 206 individuals (69%) reported experiencing such injuries, with females comprising the majority at 106 individuals (71%). Conversely, 206 individuals (69%) reported their partners sustaining sprains, bruises, or small cuts as a result of fights, with males accounting for the majority at 114 individuals (77%).

The sign of sexual coercion that was most commonly reported by participants was engaging in sexual intercourse without using a condom, with a majority of 281 participants (94%) acknowledging this behavior. Notably, female participants exhibited a higher prevalence of this indicator, with 141 individuals (95%) reporting engaging in this behavior.

Level of emotional distress among married couples.

This section provides an overview of the descriptive data about the degree of emotional distress measures, as well as the association between markers of marital conflict and emotional distress scales including depression, anxiety, and stress.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of emotional distress among married couples

	Male (n=149)			Female (n=149)			Total (n=298)		
	M	SD	S.E	M	SD	S.E	M	SD	S.E
Stress, Total Score	5.8	1.54	0.13	5.7	1.72	0.14	5.7	1.63	0.09
Depression, Total Score	6.3	1.87	0.15	6.2	1.99	0.16	6.2	1.93	0.11
Anxiety, Total Score	5.2	1.36	0.11	5.1	1.52	0.12	5.1	1.44	0.08

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, S.E = Standard Error of the mean

The mean stress score for men was 5.8, while for females it was 5.7. The standard deviation for males was 1.54, and for females it was 1.72. Both males and females had a maximum stress score of 7 and a lowest stress score of 0. The mean Depression score was 6.3 for males and 6.2 for females, with standard deviations of 1.87 and 1.99 for males and females, respectively. The depression scores ranged from a minimum of 0 to a high of 8 for both males and females. The mean Anxiety score for males was 5.2, while for females it was 5.1. The standard deviation for males was 1.36, and for females it was 1.52. The Anxiety scores ranged from a minimum of 0 to a high of 6 for both males and females.

Table 4 Pairwise correlations matrix of Marital Conflicts and Emotional Distress among Married Couples (n=298)

	Marital Conflicts Indicators			
	Negotiation	Physical Assault	Injury	Sexual Coercion
Emotional Distress				
Stress, Score	0.154**	0.113	0.111	0.225***
Anxiety, Score	0.096	0.115**	0.104	0.144**
Depression, Score	0.024	0.190**	0.283***	0.230***

Note: *** p<.01, ** p<.05, * p<.1

There exists a statistically significant positive association between negotiation abilities and stress, as indicated by a correlation coefficient of 0.154. There exists a statistically significant positive link between physical assault and anxiety and depression, with correlation coefficients of 0.115 and 0.190 for anxiety and depression, respectively. There exists a noteworthy positive link ($r = 0.283$) between injury as a marital conflict indicator and Depression. There exists a statistically significant positive link between sexual coercion and stress, anxiety, and depression, as indicated by the correlation coefficients of 0.225, 0.144, and 0.230 for stress, anxiety, and depression, respectively. Table 4.

The Coping Mechanisms Used by Married Couples to Overcome Marital Conflicts in Mbarara City

This component of the study aimed to ascertain the coping methods employed by married couples in order to mitigate marital disputes. The findings are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5 Coping Mechanisms Used by the Married Couples to Overcome Marital Conflicts in Mbarara City
Note: n = frequency

The predominant coping mechanisms employed by married couples were problem-focused strategies, such as engaging in discussions with friends, and family members, and occasionally seeking assistance from a professional counsellor. Among the participants, a total of 254 individuals (85%) reported using these coping mechanisms, with male participants exhibiting a higher prevalence at 133 individuals (89%) compared to females at 121 individuals (81%). This particular social network served as a robust mechanism for couples to navigate and manage the aftermath of interpersonal conflicts inside their relationships. The utilization of a method facilitated the engagement of couples in constructive dialogue on their issues, with the support of trusted individuals such as friends, family members, and professional counselors. This collaborative approach empowered couples to make well-informed decisions, therefore mitigating the adverse effects of stress and depression.

Subsequently, a designated period was allocated, along with a specific objective, to address a disparity in participation rates between male participants, accounting for 139 individuals (92%), and female participants, comprising only 116 individuals (78%). This particular approach facilitated the couples in critically evaluating their issues with a rational mindset devoid of any biases. Ultimately, the parties involved successfully achieved dispute resolution using a non-aggressive and unbiased approach.

The emotional-focused coping mechanism, characterized by difficulties in sleeping, an irritated or melancholy mood, and feelings of exhaustion, was reported by 242 individuals, accounting for 81% of the total sample. Among the participants, males exhibited a higher utilization rate of this coping mechanism, with 128 (86%) reporting its usage, compared to 114 (77%) of females. However, this approach proved to be ineffective in resolving the disagreement due to its reliance on individuals' emotional responses.

The copying mechanisms that were least often employed were indulging in a warm bath, reading a novel, participating in relaxing activities, and taking deep breaths, with a frequency of 217 (73%). Conversely, a higher proportion of individuals reported utilizing coping strategies such as prioritizing sufficient sleep, consuming a nutritious diet, increasing water intake, and engaging in regular exercise,

with a frequency of 241 (81%). This was the least utilized as it entailed contemporary tactics like reading books, and relaxing which was not a widespread culture among the residents of Kakiika.

Discussion

The present study examined marital conflict among couples residing in Mbarara city, focusing on many key issues, namely, denial skills, physical assault, injury, and sexual coercion. The findings from each thematic category demonstrate the extent to which marital conflict is prevalent.

Prevalence of Marital conflict among married couples of Mbarara City in the past year The frequency of marital conflict within married couples will be reflected by the proportion of respondents who acknowledged possessing a certain habit, as well as the proportion of respondents who reported not possessing any particular habit.

The findings indicate that couples encounter marital conflict while employing distinct strategies for denial. This study found that individuals of both genders acknowledged the presence of marital conflict, however employed distinct strategies to mitigate its impact. One of the essential negotiating skills was demonstrating empathy and concern, particularly in instances where the couple had disputes. Within the context of familial relationships, it is not uncommon for a husband and wife to experience disagreements or conflicts about many aspects of their lives. These areas of contention may include financial matters, parenting decisions, job aspirations, the growth and development of the family unit, as well as interactions with extended family members from both sides. However, individuals may perceive these familial duties at varying degrees, leading to potential conflicts. If left unaddressed, this argument has the potential to escalate and place significant pressure on the couple's relationship. This study suggests that couples may encounter difficulties in allocating time, finding suitable circumstances, or accessing external assistance to address their conflicts. Consequently, to preserve the overall welfare of the family, individuals engage in their daily routines and feign concern, concealing their inner emotional distress. As a result, these factors may have a detrimental impact on their physical well-being, emotional state, and cognitive functioning. This conclusion pertains to the research conducted by Field (Chiamaka et al., 2020), which demonstrates that conflict becomes detrimental when individuals direct their "weapons" to one other rather than focusing on resolving the underlying problem. Failure to address these concerns might potentially create a conducive environment for the manifestation of repressed anger through many subtle means, including but not limited to verbal abuse, silent withdrawal, overt criticism, threats, and the employment of sardonic and degrading remarks. These techniques tend to undermine the stability of the marital relationship.

Another skill related to negation is attempting a proposed solution to address a disagreement put forth by one's partner. In the context of interpersonal relationships, it is plausible that a pair may encounter a divergence of opinions, leading one partner to propose a potential resolution as a means of resolving the disagreement. One individual within a partnership may choose to experiment with the proposed solution put forth by their counterpart, leading to a situation where they may strive to satisfy their partner's desires, even if they are experiencing emotional distress. As a result, this phenomenon perpetuates a persistent perception of connectedness or consensus, ultimately contributing to heightened marital problems. This finding pertains to the research conducted by Abdullah et al. (2017), which examined conflict management strategies. The study revealed that the most commonly employed tactics in conflict management among married couples involved engaging in behaviors aimed at preventing tension, which falls within the category of avoidance strategy. This measure was implemented to promote the long-term sustainability and achievement of marital relationships.

The third skill of denial involves the partner elucidating their perspective on the argument to their spouse. In instances of dispute within the partnership, it was customary for one partner to endeavor to articulate their perspective on the disagreement to their spouse, to foster comprehension and mitigate the potential for more conflict. Typically, individuals engage in the act of presenting their perspective during a disagreement to assert their correctness. However, it is noteworthy that when attempting to elucidate the other viewpoint, the other party may also articulate their stance, hence exacerbating the conflict in instances when a mutually agreeable resolution remains elusive. To mitigate the occurrence

of more conflicts, it is advisable for one spouse to actively engage in attentive listening and adhere to the explanation provided by the other partner, even if they find the explanation unsatisfactory. This observation aligns with the research conducted by Ademiluka (2019), which highlights the significance of effective conflict management in mitigating adverse consequences on both the relationship and the individuals involved. Couples engaged in the practice of attentively listening to their partners' explanations of disagreement, especially in cases when they did not necessarily endorse or agree with the viewpoints expressed. This behavior was motivated by a desire to circumvent potential negative consequences or ramifications within the relationship.

The last negotiation skill was the demonstration of respect by one's partner for their spouse's emotional response to a particular matter. This score is the minimum level at which spouses demonstrate an appreciation for their partners' emotional experiences during a quarrel in their marital relationship. Amid a fight between two individuals in a romantic relationship, both parties demonstrated a mutual display of respect toward one another's perspectives and emotions on the underlying issue that precipitated the conflict. This study highlighted the inevitability of marital conflict in each married relationship. However, the crucial factor is in the manner in which the conflict is managed, as it ultimately defines the resilience and durability of the partnership. This aligns with the conclusions made by Verstraeten et al. (2021), which indicate that Conflict is an inherent aspect of all interpersonal relationships; however, the specific domains of conflict tend to shift as partners deepen their commitment to one another. The other negotiation talents were not elaborated upon beyond what is presented in Table 2 due to their lack of substantial significance.

Within the context of physical attack, couples encountered marital conflict, however, their responses varied. One of the responses seen was the act of destroying an item that was owned by the individual's romantic relationship. When confronted with marital disagreement, spouses may exhibit varying reactions that serve as manifestations of the emotional distress they are experiencing. Engaging in the destruction of their spouses' possessions is a retaliatory response they exhibit as a means of seeking retribution. According to the findings of this study, it was observed that males tend to engage more frequently in the act of destroying their spouses' property as a means of alleviating emotional distress resulting from conflicts within their marital relationships. This observation aligns with the research conducted by Chiamaka et al. (2020), which documented that married individuals exhibit diverse responses to marital conflict, encompassing both negative and positive patterns. In the present investigation, it was observed that couples exhibited a negative response to conflict situations by engaging in the act of trashing their partners' possessions. The results of the study revealed that males had a higher propensity for engaging in harmful behavior compared to females, as seen by the significantly higher percentages reported in Table 2.

The results of the study indicated that in response to a quarrel, couples tended to engage in aggressive behavior by hurling objects at their spouse with the potential to cause harm. This finding suggests that couples residing in Mbarara City are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors towards one another when conflicts are not effectively and quietly addressed. Based on the research findings, it is observed that male partners have a higher propensity to engage in physically harmful behavior against their spouses, such as throwing objects, in comparison to their female counterparts. The present study conducted by Bammeke and Eshiet (2018) highlights the potential consequences of marital disputes, specifically emphasizing the occurrence of severe unpleasant reactions. These reactions encompass several negative behaviors such as marital disengagement, verbal hostility, nonverbal hostility, personal threats, physical anguish, personal insult, and defensiveness.

Couples also reported experiencing lingering bodily discomfort the following day as a result of a conflict they engaged in with their respective spouses. This finding suggests the presence of significant marital discord among the couples, leading to instances of disagreement and altercation. The impact was found to be more pronounced among female spouses as compared to their male counterparts. This observation suggests that instances of friction between spouses within a household, leading to physical altercations, tend to have a detrimental impact on the weaker partner, impeding their personal

development. Kyomuhendo and Nassanga (2020) state that...Conflict may escalate from a mere divergence in viewpoints to the development of hostility, apathy, armed conflict, and even physical altercations resulting in bodily harm. Nevertheless, the mismanagement of these arguments might potentially impede the personal development of individuals within the family unit.

In the present investigation, individuals of both genders indicated instances of experiencing a sprain, bruise, or minor laceration as a result of engaging in physical altercations with their respective romantic partners. The research demonstrates that marital disputes arising from arguments among married couples in Mbarara city have led to physical altercations, resulting in the manifestation of injuries like as bruises, minor lacerations, and sprains. The lack of effective management of misunderstandings between spouses can undermine the resilience and contentment of the relationship. The aforementioned conclusion pertains to the research conducted by Elizabeth and Ariela (2020), whereby it was shown that unproductive or unhealthy conflicts might have detrimental effects on all parties involved. The presence of persistent unresolved conflict has the potential to generate significant levels of tension within both domestic and professional environments. The erosion of relationships can significantly diminish their strength and enjoyment, and may even induce physical discomfort or distress in individuals.

The survey revealed that couples utilized a knife or pistol on their spouses as a result of marital disagreement. This observation suggests that when spouses encounter a disagreement inside the family unit, they often experience a loss of emotional regulation, resulting in the utilization of destructive tactics during the altercation. The results of the present study align with the research conducted by Ayvazoglu et al. (2015), which demonstrated that a conflict becomes detrimental when participants direct their "weapons" on each other rather than focusing on resolving the underlying problem.

Based on the research findings, it is evident that sexual coercion is prevalent among couples in Mbarara city, with a significant number admitting to engaging in non-consensual sexual activities without the use of condoms. Couples employ the usage of condoms as a means of managing the occurrence of unintended pregnancies and safeguarding against the transmission of HIV/AIDS to their partners. This finding suggests that the incidence of conflict is elevated in sexual relationships among married couples in comparison to other factors. The study conducted by Soomro et al. (2018) supports the findings, indicating that sexual disagreement is a significant source of marital conflict within the context of marriage. In certain instances, couples may tend to persistently request sexual activity from their partners despite their partners expressing a lack of desire or willingness. The observed phenomenon pertains to the manifestation of interpersonal discord among romantic partnerships residing in the urban area of Mbarara. Under typical conditions, sexual partners establish mutual consent before engaging in sexual activity. In situations where divergent viewpoints exist, the application of force often precipitates a state of conflict. The results of this study align with the research conducted by Leslie and Young (2015), which demonstrated that marital conflict has the potential to develop from minor verbal exchanges to more serious forms of physical violence and sexual coercion.

The occurrence of conflict within marital relationships in Mbarara city was observed through couples openly admitting to accusing their partners of being unsatisfactory in their intimate relationships. During a conflict, romantic partners engage in verbal exchanges that include hurtful and derogatory remarks, such as expressing unhappiness with their partners' sexual performance, indicating a manifestation of discontentment within their marital intimacy. This aligns with the findings of Ademiluka (2019), who identified physical and emotional violence, extramarital relationships, drunkenness, mental illness, and suspicion as the primary causes of marital conflict.

The level of emotional distress among married couples in Mbarara city

The prevalence of emotional discomfort among married couples in Mbarara city was found to be high among both males and females. These findings were seen about the scores measuring stress, sadness, and anxiety.

The stress levels experienced by couples were elevated due to the presence of unresolved issues that accumulated regularly. Both males and females consistently indicated a tendency to disregard any concerns that arose, opting instead to respond forcefully, hence exacerbating levels of stress. This finding aligns with the research conducted by Ayvazoglu et al. (2015), which suggests that individuals experiencing conflicts in external domains are more likely to direct their frustrations toward their relationships, resulting in heightened levels of stress and anxiety.

High levels of depression were found to be prevalent among married couples in Mbarara city. When stress levels escalate without the resolution of relationship difficulties, it has been observed that partners, particularly men, are more prone to experiencing long-term depressive symptoms. This phenomenon can be attributed to a tendency among men to exhibit lower levels of social support-seeking behavior in comparison to women. Based on the findings of Xiao et al. (2013), it has been shown that emotional distress and cognitive impairment in one spouse have a significant impact on the corresponding experiences in the other spouse. Furthermore, it has been identified that the presence of attention dysfunction serves as a crucial diagnostic criterion for emotional disorders, as the inability to focus is closely associated with the development of depression.

According to the findings, there was a modest level of anxiety observed among married couples in comparison to levels of stress and despair. In the pursuit of establishing and maintaining a strong bond, couples encounter many challenges in their daily lives, resulting in the emergence of disputes that often remain unresolved. This accumulation of unresolved conflicts generates significant stress inside the relationship, ultimately contributing to feelings of anxiety. As the levels of anxiety escalate, individuals tend to report higher levels of stress, which in turn might lead to the manifestation of depression. This is in agreement with (Fincham & Beach, 1999) who underlined that when conflict is not adequately managed, it may have bad ramifications for the relationship and the relational partners producing worry causing stress and despair.

Relationship between marital conflict and emotional distress among married couples in Mbarara city

There exists a strong positive association between negotiation abilities and stress. Couples have been shown to demonstrate concern for one another even in the presence of interpersonal conflicts. The individuals involved would proceed with the progression of their relationship without actively addressing or engaging in a comprehensive discussion to resolve the situation at hand. This resulted in each spouse experiencing unresolved conflict, leading to heightened levels of stress. The present discovery aligns with the assertion made by Elizabeth and Ariela (2020) that persistent unresolved conflict has the potential to induce stress in both domestic and professional environments. This phenomenon has the potential to undermine the resilience and contentment of interpersonal connections, and may even induce somatic distress or discomfort in individuals.

There exists a noteworthy positive link between physical assault and the presence of anxiety and depression. When couples quarrel, it is seen that they often engage in aggressive behaviors such as physical assault, including beating, slapping, hurling things to cause harm, and choking. Physical attacks often result in the development of persistent anxiety, which can then contribute to the onset of depression. Contrary to the aforementioned perspective, Aaron et al. (2011) argue that the etiology of marital conflict and emotional distress in married couples is multifaceted and encompasses a diverse range of circumstances. Some individuals attribute their psychological distress to a traumatic incident or occurrence, such as the loss of a family member. Conversely, some attribute their distress to factors such as occupational pressures, domestic circumstances, or physical illness.

There exists a noteworthy positive link between injury as a marker of marital conflict and the presence of Depression. When couples engage in conflicts, they may inadvertently cause physical harm to one another during altercations, resulting in fractures, sprains, bruises, and lacerations. When left untreated, these factors might contribute to the development of depression. This aligns with the findings of Manickam and Suhani (2014), who underscored the detrimental consequences that poorly handled conflict may have on both the relationship and the individuals involved.

There exists a notable positive association between sexual coercion and the experience of stress, anxiety, and depression. The findings presented in this study align with those published by Uçman (2012), which indicate that certain individuals involved in sex therapy exhibit a hesitancy in addressing the sexual difficulties faced by couples. The desire is to sustain the favorable consequences in marital relationships, such as employing strategies to influence the spouse who appears to be accountable for the sexual difficulties, as indicated by Uçman's research in 2012. Moreover, it has been shown that sexual dysfunctions are more frequently observed in marriages that have not been consummated (Uçman, 2012). Furthermore, the treatment of sexual difficulties has been found to contribute to an enhancement in marital satisfaction (Batur, 2016). These findings may serve as potential markers of the correlation between sexual and marital concerns.

The coping mechanisms used by married couples to overcome marital conflicts in Mbarara city.

The prevalent coping mechanisms employed by married couples mostly consisted of problem-focused strategies, including networking and occasional engagement with a professional counselor. Notably, male participants showed a higher propensity for utilizing these coping mechanisms compared to their female counterparts. This particular social network served as a robust mechanism for couples to navigate and manage the aftermath of interpersonal conflicts inside their relationships. The utilization of a process facilitated couples in engaging in constructive discussions on their issues, with the support of trustworthy individuals such as friends, family members, and professional therapists. This guidance enabled them to make well-informed decisions, ultimately leading to a reduction in levels of stress and despair. The present study revealed four conflict resolution styles, which align with the findings of Schaubhut (2007). Iranian women employed interactive strategies, such as engaging in mutual dialogues or seeking counseling, to effectively address and resolve disputes. If the aforementioned techniques proved to be effective, they proceeded with the same strategy.

Subsequently, a deliberate allocation of time and establishment of an objective was undertaken to address the issue of male participants exhibiting more leadership tendencies in comparison to their female counterparts. This particular approach facilitated couples in critically evaluating their issues with a rational mindset devoid of any biases. Ultimately, the parties involved successfully reached a resolution to their disagreement using non-aggressive and unbiased means. In the contemporary period, Dildar, Sitwat, and Yasin (2013) assert that marital conflict and emotional distress have emerged as significant concerns among couples, leading to the deterioration of family dynamics, marital dissolution, and the potential for adverse psychological and physical health outcomes. When couples encounter difficulty, they need to employ constructive coping mechanisms, such as adopting the mindfulness approach.

The third most often utilized coping technique among individuals, particularly males, was the emotionally focused strategy characterized by difficulties in sleeping, irritated or melancholy mood, and feelings of weariness. However, this approach proved to be ineffective in resolving the disagreement due to its reliance on individuals' emotions. Consistent with previous research, Dildar et al. (2013) observed that married couples who were dissatisfied with their relationship tended to employ the avoidance style more frequently compared to other coping techniques.

Relaxation activities, exercise, and maintaining a healthy diet were identified as the least often employed coping techniques. The utilization of this practice was minimal due to its reliance on contemporary methodologies such as engaging with literary works and engaging in leisure activities, which were not widely embraced within the Kakiika community. In the study conducted by Bayisa, Mohammed, and

Habtamu (2005), many strategies were identified as being employed to address the conflict. These strategies included acts of violence, engaging in discussions to address the situation, and seeking the intervention of elders, particularly in cases when husbands were involved. The primary conflict resolution strategies employed by spouses are seeking guidance from elders or relatives, engaging in open discussions to address the issue at hand, making the decision to temporarily leave their homes, and demonstrating patience and endurance in the face of the problem. Parkinson (2006) asserts that effective strategies for resolving disagreements and misunderstandings within marital relationships involve fostering open and honest communication, as well as cultivating shared interests and values. The most effective strategies for managing disputes are demonstrating mutual respect, fostering love and understanding, ensuring sexual satisfaction, nurturing a sense of togetherness, and transforming disagreements into opportunities for honesty and enhanced comprehension. According to the respondents' accounts, they utilized several coping strategies. Nevertheless, a significant number of participants in the study demonstrated the use of tolerance, third-party negotiation, and acceptance of decisions without seeking other options during periods of conflict. According to the findings of this study, it was observed that engaging in open and unrestricted conversations within the context of a romantic partnership can be advantageous in fortifying the institution of marriage. In a study conducted by Abeya, Afework, and Yalew(2012), it was shown that women exhibited diverse responses to instances of violence and conflict within the familial context. These responses encompassed various activities, such as actively seeking social support, physically removing themselves from the household, and engaging in self-protective behaviors, including retaliatory physical aggression.

Conclusion and recommendations

The prevalence of depression and anxiety, as well as stress levels, was found to be quite low among married couples. Hence, within the Kakiika district of Mbarara City, married couples are employing diverse coping strategies to address and resolve difficulties within their marital relationships. Therefore, it was determined that bargaining and physical attacks were the most significant indicators of coping strategies. Hence, it can be observed that there is a notable occurrence of marital disputes among married couples residing in Mbarara city. The importance of promoting efficient communication within marital relationships should be underscored as a means to address and resolve conflicts between spouses. Hence, via proficient communication, married couples may cultivate adept listening abilities and acquire the necessary tools to effectively address and resolve disputes within their marital relationship. The incidence of physical assault within married couples was relatively low, however, sexual coercion was shown to be more prevalent and often associated with marital disputes.

Authors' abbreviations

CK: Cathy Kyobutungi; OAT: Otwine Anne Tweheyo, NS: Nzamuhiki Stephen

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Authors' contributions

The authors of this manuscript made the following contributions to this manuscript Concept: CK, conceived the concept, Data collection; CK, OAT: Data analysis: First draft: CK, OATNS, Final revision: CK, OAT, NS Read and approved the final manuscript: CK, OAT,NS.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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