



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18246569>

**Evaluating the Impact of Domestic Violence and Communication Gap as Correlates of Martial Instability on Secondary School Students Academic Achievement in South East, Nigeria**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the impact of domestic violence and communication gap as correlates of marital instability among couples in South East Nigeria. The research reveals that domestic violence and communication gap are significant predictors of marital instability, with a significant proportion of couples experiencing physical, emotional, and psychological abuse. The study found that communication gap is a major contributor to marital instability, as couples who fail to communicate effectively are more likely to experience conflicts and relationship breakdown. Domestic violence, on the other hand, was found to have a devastating impact on marital stability, with victims of abuse experiencing low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. The study also reveals that cultural and socio-economic factors, such as patriarchy and poverty, contribute to the prevalence of domestic violence and communication gap among couples in South East Nigeria. The research concludes that addressing domestic violence and communication gap is crucial to promoting marital stability and reducing the risk of relationship breakdown among couples in the region. The study recommends that couples should prioritize effective communication and conflict resolution skills, while also seeking support from counselors, therapists, and support groups to address domestic violence and promote healthy relationships. Additionally, the study calls for policy interventions and community-based initiatives to address the cultural and socio-economic factors that contribute to domestic violence and communication gap among couples in South East Nigeria. Overall, the study provides valuable insights into the complex issues surrounding domestic violence and communication gap, and highlights the need for a comprehensive approach to promoting marital stability and reducing the risk of relationship breakdown among couples in the region.*

**Keywords:** Domestic Violence, Communication Gap, Marital Instability, Academic Achievement, Secondary School Students, Socio-Cultural Factors

**INTRODUCTION**

Marriage, recognized as a social relationship between a man and a woman was instituted religiously, established legally, and traditionally is the smallest unit of the society. Its main goal is for companionship, socialization, pleasure, partnership and procreation for continued existence. Burke, (2020) explained marriage as the coming together of a man and a woman to raise a family and to meet the satisfaction of security and enjoying affection and companionship. (Akinade, 2019) posited that marriage is a socially, legally, culturally and religiously approved intimate relationship between a man and woman and a means of unity that connect between a man and a woman who aim to share a life together for establishing a family.

Marital instability, which simply refers to the interpersonal difficulties within the marital relationship, has many causative factors. Dessislav (2020) opined that the family is the most basic unit of society, the building block for national development and stressed that just as there cannot exist any society without families or home, there cannot be sustainable development without stable families or home. Oyafunke, Falola and Salau, (2014) referred to marital instability as the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation, desertion or divorce. Unfortunately, many children today are faced with

the challenges of multiple divorces or separations within their families. Parents who divorce, often go on to remarry or form other intimate relationships have higher incidence of failure (Amato, 2021). The author maintained that marital instability has become a challenge associated with the contemporary family institution. This however, is not to say that marital instability had never once occurred in marital situation of the past but that the rate at which marital instability occurs in our present society is quite alarming and this might be as a result of economic hardship prevalent to the society. According to (Garba, 2018), the problem of marital instability can be traced to the rapid growth rate of urbanization and industrialization in Nigeria in which husband and wife labor to present food on the table for the children.

Domestic violence encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, emotional, sexual, and economic abuse. The impact of domestic violence extends beyond the immediate victims, affecting children, families, and communities at large. The prevalence of marital instability highlights the need for comprehensive research and interventions to address this complex societal problem.

Furthermore, communication gap among the couples are essential if togetherness is to grow and develop. Communication gap within marriages therefore, play a crucial role in shaping relationship dynamics and can either mitigate or exacerbate issues such as domestic violence (Adamu & Temesgen, 2022). Effective communication fosters understanding, empathy, and conflict resolution, which are essential components of healthy relationships. On the other hand, poor communication characterized by aggression, avoidance, or manipulation can contribute to escalating tensions and lead to increased instances of domestic violence. Understanding the interplay between communication gap and domestic violence is essential for developing targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

In the context couples in Nigeria, examining the intersection of domestic violence and communication gap becomes particularly relevant due to the unique stressors and societal norms that influence marital dynamics in this population. Teachers, as educators and role models, face multiple pressures related to their professional responsibilities, societal expectations, and personal relationships. These pressures can impact their communication patterns within marriages and contribute to marital instability, including instances of domestic violence.

Research has shown that domestic violence can have severe consequences, including physical injuries, mental health issues, and even death (Adegbite & Ajuwon, 2023). Most importantly, a teacher's mental stability is very important and crucial for an effective teaching output. Understanding the prevalence and impact of domestic violence among specific populations, such as couples in secondary schools, is crucial for developing targeted interventions and support services to address their unique needs.

To curb marital instability, effective communication gap are essential in navigating conflicts and addressing underlying issues within marriages (Hombrados-Garcia & Ozcan, 2022). Couples who employ healthy communication gap, such as active listening, empathy, and assertiveness, are better equipped to resolve conflicts amicably and maintain marital stability. Conversely, communication patterns characterized by defensiveness, criticism, or stonewalling can contribute to relationship breakdowns and increase the risk of domestic violence. Also educational initiatives and counseling interventions play a vital role in promoting awareness and providing support to individuals affected by domestic violence (Edukugho, 2023). Schools can serve as safe spaces for teachers and students to access resources, guidance, and counseling services related to domestic violence and relationship issues. By fostering open dialogue and promoting healthy communication gap, educational institutions can contribute to preventing and addressing domestic violence among couples and their families.

Uwakwe (2018) stated that communication is the bedrock of all interpersonal relationships and involves a meeting between individuals who are constantly conscious of each other for an intentional sharing of emotions, ideas, values, feeling and general experience. Marital communication refers to the verbal and nonverbal exchange of information between spouses. It is the process of sending and receiving messages between husband and wife as they interact in the marriage relationship (Nnadozie, 2014). It helps the partners to know, share and understand a lot of things in common which includes: their thoughts, emotions, past experiences and weaknesses within and outside the relationship. Nnadozie (2014) believes that effective marital communication is the live-wire that links husband and wife together, strengthens the bond of relationship and so propels all activities in the family. Marital communication has been studied most widely in the context of heterosexual relationships. The researcher views marital communication based on character traits (such as trust, love, oneness of mind, and honesty in marital relationship and courage in the lives of family members) as well as style of communication (The use of more expressive,

tentative and polite language by women than men, especially in the situation of conflict) can lead to family stability. Family stability is referred to as a family that has a good marriage relationship where the married couples love one another, think alike, share common goals, interest, joy and work out problems together (Eze, 2012).

In addition to addressing immediate concerns related to marital instability, it is crucial to consider broader societal factors that contribute to marital instability and relationship conflicts (Margelisch et al., 2021). Economic pressures, cultural norms, and gender inequalities can intersect to create challenging environments for couples, including couples in secondary schools. Policy interventions and community initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, economic empowerment, and social support networks can contribute to reducing the prevalence of marital instability and fostering healthier relationships.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of marital instability among couples in south east, Nigeria which remains a critical area requiring further exploration. While existing studies have shed light on the prevalence and impact of domestic violence and lack of communication in various contexts, there are specific gaps that need to be addressed in this particular population. Psychosocial factors influencing marital instability arises from the way couple observe situations in marriages in respect to their feelings, thoughts, exposure, qualification, belief, culture and personality. Therefore, the problem of marital instability among couples in Nigeria needs immediate attention. Communication therefore, is very essential in stabilizing marriage, communicating effectively enables the couple to resolve conflicts amicably. Research has shown that, style of communication is very pivotal for married couples. Marital conflict like violence and other domestic abuses negatively affects spouse's smooth relationship, career and the life of their children. Family and domestic violence this, defined as those abusive behaviors in which one individual gains power over another individual. Marital instability is a major problem among Nigerian couples. There are many factors that are responsible for marital instability and marital adjustment in Nigeria. Without understanding it is nearly impossible to solve conflicts that can lead to numerous family problems, including excessive family conflicts, lack of communication gap, ineffective problem solving skill, lack of intimacy, weak emotional bonding as well as marital maladjustment. Many yell and shout on their families, while some others use withdrawal style by keeping their feelings to themselves.

One key gap is the limited understanding of the unique stressors and challenges faced by teachers within the Nigerian educational system. Teachers often experience high levels of work-related stress, which can intersect with personal and family dynamics, potentially contributing to marital conflicts and instances of domestic violence. Examining these stressors about communication gap and domestic violence among teachers can provide valuable insights into the underlying factors contributing to marital instability in this population.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to ascertain the relationship which exists among domestic violence and communication gap and marital instability among couples. Thus, the study specifically seeks to:

1. Examine the influence of domestic violence on marital instability among couples in Southeast Nigeria.
2. Ascertain the influence of communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria.
3. Determine the influence of domestic violence and communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

The study will be guided by the following research question.

1. What is the influence of domestic violence on marital instability among couples in Southeast Nigeria?
2. What is the influence of communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria?

3. What is the influence of domestic violence and communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria?

### RESEARCH METHOD

The study adopted a descriptive research design. A descriptive survey research is a research design in which data are collected from a sample of a population with a view to find out the relative opinion, beliefs, attitude and status of that population about a phenomenon (Nworgu, 2015). The design will be used because it sought to establish the relationship that exists between variables; domestic violence and communication gap of married couples in Southeast Nigeria. This design was selected due to its capacity to gather structured data efficiently from a sizable sample, enabling the extrapolation of findings to the wider population of married couples in South East, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher titled: Domestic Violence, Communication and Marital Instability Questionnaire (DCMIQ).

The study will use a survey design, administering questionnaires to a sample of married couples in South East Nigeria. The questionnaire will include questions on demographics, domestic violence, marital instability and communication styles. The study population will consist of married couples in South East, Nigeria. The sample size will be determined using a formula for estimating sample size, and participants will be selected using a stratified random sampling technique.

The study ensured that the data collection instruments are valid and reliable. The questionnaire will be pilot-tested before administration, and the FGD and IDI guides will be pre-tested with a small group of participants. Data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, where themes and patterns will be identified and coded. The study will ensure that participants' rights and confidentiality are protected. Informed consent will be obtained from participants before data collection, and participants will be assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Research Question 1

1. What relationship exists among domestic violence, communication gap and marital instability among married couples in Southeast Nigeria?

**Table 1:** The relationship exists among domestic violence, communication gap and marital instability among married couples in Southeast Nigeria.

Range of scores	N	%	Remarks
8-24.5	140	17.2	No risk factor
25-40	674	82.8	Risk factor

Table 1 shows that 674(82.8%) of the respondents with the scores ranging from 25 to 40 indicated that domestic violence affects married couples while 140(17.2%) of the respondents whose score ranged between 8 and 24.5 indicated that marital instability affects married couples in South East, Nigeria.

#### Research Question 2

What is the influence of communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria?

**Table 2:** The influence of communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria

Range of scores	N	%	Remarks
8-24.5	169	20.8	Not a risk factor
25-40	645	79.2	Risk factor

Table 2 shows that 645(79.2%) of the respondents with the scores ranging from 25 to 40 indicated that a marital instability is a risk factor for married couples in south east, Nigeria, while 169 (20.8%) of

the respondents whose score ranged between 8 and 24.5 indicated that poor communication style is a risk factor for married couples.

### Research Question 3

What is the influence of domestic violence and communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria?

**Table3:** The influence of domestic violence and communication gap as correlates of marital instability on secondary school students' academic achievement in Southeast Nigeria

Range of scores	N	%	Remarks
8-24.5	210	25.8	No risk factor
25-40	604	74.2	Risk factor

Table 3 reveals that 604(74.2%) of the respondents with scores ranging from 25 to 40 indicated that marital dysfunction i.e. marital instability and domestic violence affects married couples in south east Nigeria, while 210(25.8%) of the respondents whose scores ranged between 8 and 24.5 indicated that communication styles is not a marital instability risk factor of married couples in South East, Nigeria.

### Findings and Conclusions

Findings from the study show the majority (82.8) of the married couples in south east indicated that lack of intimacy is a marital instability risk factor. Most of the married couples in south east revealed that poor attitude/habits marital instability risk factor and most of the married couples in south east, Nigeria 604(74.2%) showed that irresponsibility is a marital instability risk factor.

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that marital instability among married couples in South East Nigeria is strongly influenced by interpersonal and behavioural factors. The majority of respondents (82.8%) identified lack of intimacy as a major risk factor, indicating that emotional and physical closeness play a critical role in sustaining marital relationships. In addition, most married couples acknowledged poor attitudes and habits as significant contributors to marital instability, suggesting that negative behaviours and unhealthy lifestyles undermine marital harmony. Furthermore, a substantial proportion of respondents (604; 74.2%) identified irresponsibility as a key risk factor, highlighting the importance of commitment, accountability, and shared responsibilities in marriage. Overall, the study demonstrates that deficiencies in intimacy, responsible behaviour, and positive attitudes significantly increase the likelihood of marital instability among couples in the South East.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Marital Counseling and Education:** Government agencies, religious bodies, and non-governmental organizations should organize regular premarital and marital counselling programmes focusing on intimacy, communication, and responsible marital roles.
2. **Promotion of Responsible Behavior:** Couples should be encouraged through workshops and community programmes to develop responsible attitudes toward financial management, childcare, and mutual obligations within marriage.
3. **Improvement of Couple Communication:** Married couples should be sensitized on the importance of effective communication and emotional bonding as strategies for enhancing intimacy and reducing marital conflict.
4. **Support Services for Couples:** Community-based family support centres should be established or strengthened to provide professional guidance and intervention for couples experiencing marital challenges.

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