

Influence of Conflict Resolution Styles on Marital Stability among Married Individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church, Kitengela, Kajiado County, Kenya

Flora Nduta Njui, Dr. Rose Gichuki, Fr. Hubert Pinto

Department of Counselling Psychology, Catholic University of Eastern Africa

Institute of Youth Studies, Tangaza University College, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

Abstract: Conflict is normal in close relationships like marriage. For the marital relationship to be stable, it is important to understand the cause of the conflict, the conflict resolution behavior and its impact on the marital relationship. Data was collected from 106 females and 94 males aged between 20 and 60 years at St. Monica Catholic Church, Kitengela County Assembly Ward in Kajiado County, Kenya using the Thomas Kilmans Conflict resolution styles questionnaire. The study used a descriptive correlational research design, data collected through stratified and random sampling and analysed by use of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Results showed that the conflict resolution styles; accommodation, collaboration, competition, compromise, avoidance have a significant effect on the marital relationship. Collaboration was also correlated with the highest relationship stability while Avoidance showed a negative correlation suggesting that the continued use may result in reduced marital stability. There was a very slight difference in the ratio of conflict resolution patterns used by male and female. Results showed that children and money were the most common causes of conflict among couples and age at marriage was correlated with marital stability. The study recommends that conflict resolution skills are important in the stability of marital relationship and should be incorporated in premarital counselling in churches and other institutions. There is also need to create awareness to groups and families periodically on conflict and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Marriage, conflict, marital conflict, marital stability, conflict resolution styles

I. INTRODUCTION

Intimacy in marriage is associated with vitality to many individual's wellbeing. Individuals enter into marriage with certain expectations, wants, needs and beliefs (Davies, P. T. (2010). When these expectations are not met, disagreements occur which culminate into fighting, quarrelling, maltreatment, emotional stress, neglect, lack of affection, divorce and separation (Falcke, Wagner, & Mosmann, 2013). This is a concern for institutions and churches like St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, who offer support to married individuals and families when they encounter serious conflict.

Marital discord and instability have serious effects on children, husbands and wives as well as on the general society (Dimkpa, D., & Maciver, J. (2012). Marital discord and instability may lead to distress, depression and negative

attitude in parents, which in turn affects parenting styles and interaction with the children. A home environment that is characterized by quarreling, nagging and disagreement has deleterious effects on both parents and children (Sinha & Sharma, 2001).

Conflict is one of the most prevalent social challenges for families the world over, varies between countries, cultures and economic conditions, and is experienced at every level of society (Dimkpa & Maciver, 2012).

In Africa, the traditional African family was keen to impart its members with various skills, key of which was to manage emotions in their relationship (Nyairo & Kamaara, 2010). The head of the family demonstrated and guided the couple on how to resolve differences, confirming that conflict was there during the time of our ancestors. The focus of conflict resolution was to maintain the family growth and stability. These traditions are no longer in practice due to urban migration, working and living away from the family of origin. It is therefore, important for premarital counselors today to help couples realise the inevitability of conflict, its causes and how it can be resolved amicably without escalating to levels being experienced in many relationships today.

The objective of the study was therefore, to establish the conflict resolution styles and their influence on marital stability among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church, Kitengela, Kajiado, guided by the following specific objectives:-

- I. To determine the causes of conflict among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County.
- II. To determine conflict resolution styles used by married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County.
- III. To establish the conflict resolution styles used by men and women among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County.
- IV. To examine whether age at marriage influenced the use of conflict resolutions styles among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela.

- V. To determine how each conflict resolution style influenced marital stability among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County.

II. METHODS

Research Design

A research design is a scaffold for denoting association of constructs. It delineates each formula from the assumption to the breakdown of data (Bhattacharjee, 2012). This is a descriptive cross-sectional study. The research design was appropriate to establish conflict resolution styles and marital stability among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County, at one point in time.

Location of the Study

The study was done at St. Monica Catholic Church, in Kitengela, Kajiado County. This is a parish under the Archdiocese of Ngong in the geographical unit of Kajiado. Kajiado County has a population of 687,312. The indigenous community are the Maasai. However, due to urban migration and its proximity to Nairobi, there is a high population of people from all parts of the country. It is served by the Nairobi Namanga Highway and is about thirty minutes by road from Nairobi City (Kenya Bureau of Statistics, 2017). It is host to government and private institutions, schools, hospitals, banks and robust with business and social activities. St. Monica Catholic church is located in the middle of Kitengela town.

Target Population

Two hundred (200) married individuals participated in the study. These are the individuals appearing the marriage register at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela. Target population refers to all individuals, classes or items that the scientist aims to collect data from and draw conclusions from (Orodho, 2010). The Church has five outstations, St. Monica, St. Bakhita, Enkaciti, St. Paul and St. Eugene. The outstations are also subdivided into Small Christian Communities for ease of reaching out and bringing services to the community, zoned out to ensure that all families are included and involved in the spiritual and community functions of the church. Each outstation is composed of the various church groups e.g. The Choir, The Health Club, The Catholic Women Association, Catholic Men Association and The Marriage Encounter group among others. The leaders of these groups were approached with the approval of the Parish Priest. However, participation was voluntary for all individuals.

Sampling Technique

Two sampling techniques were used to sample the respondents. Stratified sampling is used when the whole population is divided into a number of mutually exclusive sub-units as explained by Selvam (2017). The study population was divided into five outstations (strata) namely St. Monica, St. Bakhita, Enkaciti, St. Paul and St. Eugene. From these

strata, the respondents were selected proportionally according to their respective numbers using simple random sampling which is the basic method used in surveys. Random sampling was used to collect data from 106 females and 94 males aged between 20 and 60 years at St. Monica Catholic Church, Kitengela County Assembly Ward in Kajiado County, Kenya.

Data Collection Methods and Instrument

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data. A questionnaire presents considerable advantage in administration and offers potentiality for easy accumulation of data. Questions 1 to 8 consisted of a set of structured questions about participant's background, to provide meaningful answers to the accompanying study questions (Gravetter & Forzano, 2018). The next section was the Conflict Resolution Scale by Thomas and Kilman, which was the main instruments for collecting primary quantitative data on conflict resolution styles. Question 9 to 26 competing questions (11), (12), (13), Accommodating questions (10), (19), (21), Compromising questions (16), (18), (20), Avoiding questions (9), (22), (23) and Collaborating questions (14), (15), (17). Question 27 to 33 measured marital stability. Each scale was added to give the score. Higher scores indicate the conflict management style mostly used.

III. RESULTS

Causes of argument among married individuals

Respondents were asked what their main cause of argument was in marriage. Results are shown in the table below..

Table 4.2 Causes of Conflict

Item	Male (F)	Male (%)	Female (F)	Female (%)
Children	30	15	46	23
Money	26	13	34	17
Friends	4	2	8	4
Making major decisions	4	2	4	2
Unmet expectations	2	1	6	3
Alcohol/drugs	2	1	6	3
Relatives	4	2	4	2
Household tasks	0	0	6	3
Infidelity	2	1	4	2
Sex	2	1	4	2
Leisure time	0	0	2	1
Total	76	38	124	62

Among the respondents, 76, (38%), indicated that their greatest challenge was children. Of these, 46 were women and 30 were male. Money 60 (30%) of the respondents argued over money 13 of whom were male and 17 female. About 12(6%) indicated that they argued about friends. Eight of these were women while four were men. Another 12(6%) argued over making major decisions, with an equal number of

men and women. Six (3%) women and one (1%) argued over unmet expectations. Alcohol and drugs were a point of argument for 6 (3%) women and 2 (1%) men. Four men and four women 8 (4%), disagreed over relatives while six (3%) women and no me were concerned about household tasks. The concern for infidelity was picked by 4 women (2%) and 2 men (1%), sex by four women (2%) and 2 men (15) and two women (1%) and no men argued over leisure time.

Conflict Resolution Styles Deployed by Married Individuals

The second objective was to examine the patterns or sets of behavior deployed when a person encounters a conflict situation with their spouse. Data collected by using the Conflict Resolution Scale by Thomas and Kilman showed that married individuals utilized the conflict resolution styles; accommodation, collaboration, competition, compromise, avoidance with significant effect on the marital relationship. The results of each behavior pattern of the married individuals are shown below.

I. Competing Conflict Resolution Style

Competing involves domination or imposition of power, or pushing one’s agenda to win. A competitor does not consider the feelings, views or goals of the other but will attempt to achieve his/her goals at the expense of the other. The goal is to win or succeed in achieving the desired outcome when pitted against that of the other (Thomas and Kilmann, 2008). The competitor takes all and the partner loses all. Competition can be used when the result is very important or urgent decisions have to be made, however, if frequently used in marriage it can breed resentment and escalate the conflict even further, and could deteriorate the relationship further and cause instability. Figure 4.2 below presents the results.

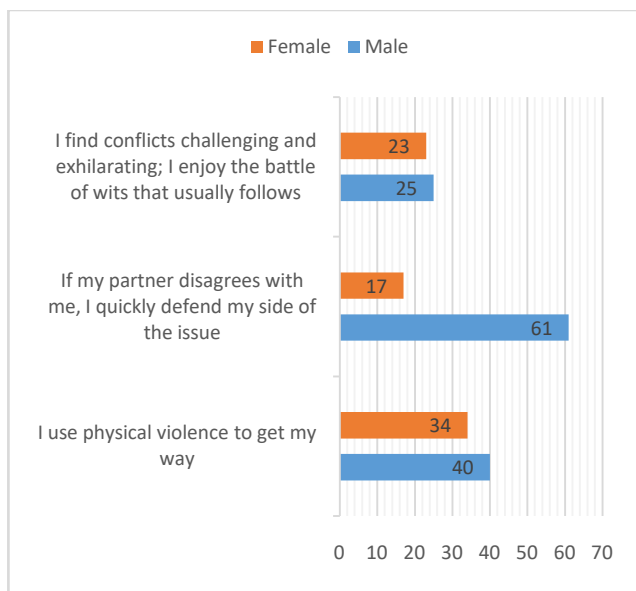


Figure 4.2 Competing Conflict Resolution Style

Overall, 37% of female and 63% of males used competing conflict resolution style. These statistics show that (24%) 48

of the respondents composed of 23 married men and 25 women said they found conflicts challenging and exhilarating and enjoyed the battle of wits that usually followed; (39%) 78 respondents composed of 17 men and 61 women stated that when there is disagreement, they quickly defended their side of the issue; while (37%), 74 respondent with 34 females and 40 males used physical violence to get their way. These results indicate a competing conflict resolution style.

II. Accommodating Conflict Resolution Style

To establish the use of accommodating conflict resolution style to resolve conflict in their marriage, participant’s response is indicated in Figure 4.3. The study results are presented in Figure 5 below.

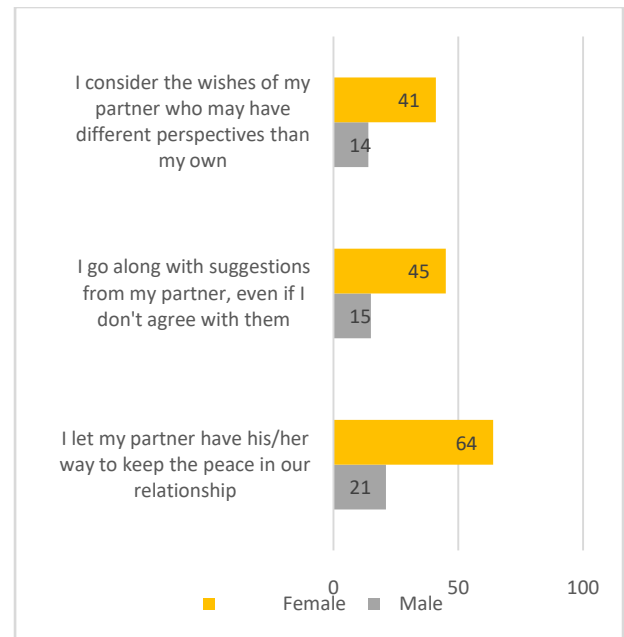


Figure 4.3 Accommodating Conflict Resolution Style

The study findings indicate that 55 respondents (27%) of whom 45 were female and 15 male considered the wishes of their partner even if they had different perspectives of their own. Sixty respondents (30%) composed of 45 females and 15 males indicated that they went along with suggestions from their partner, even if they didn't agree with them, while 85 respondents, (43%) composed of 64 females and 21 males, let their partner have their way to keep the peace in their relationship. Overall 75% female and 25% male use accommodating conflict resolution style.

III. Compromising Conflict Resolution Style

Figure 4.4 shows the results of compromising conflict resolution style.

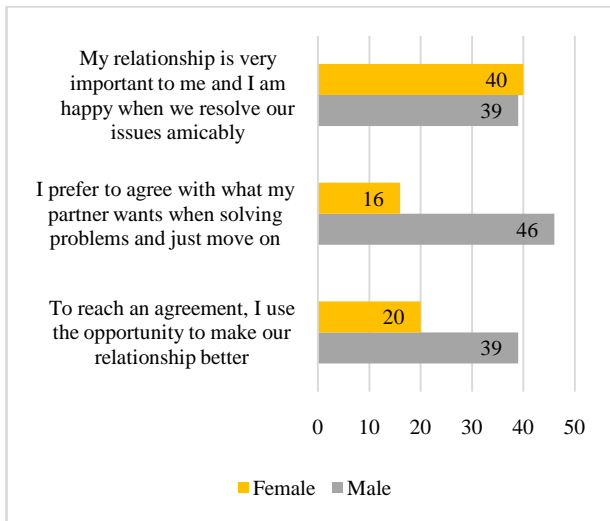


Figure 4.4 Compromise Conflict Resolution Style

From the results, 40% of respondents which is 40 females and 39 males indicated that their relationship is very important and they were happy when they resolve their issues amicably. 31%, 16 females and 46 females stated that they usually had a stimulating exchange of ideas, while 29% composed of 20 females and 39 males indicated that to reach an agreement, they used the opportunity to make their relationship better, therefore compromising to reach a win/win result. The overall result indicate that 62% males and 38% females used the compromising conflict resolution style.

IV. Collaborating Conflict Resolution Style

Collaborating conflict resolution style involves working together on common issues. The results displayed in figure 4.5 indicate that overall, 64% of female and 36% of male use collaborative conflict resolution style.

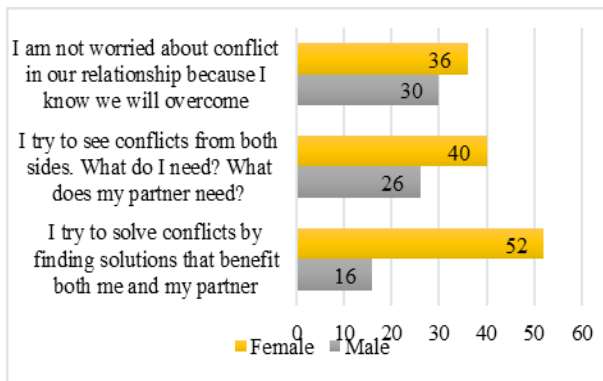


Figure 4.5 Collaborating Conflict Resolution Style

Sixty-six (33%) composed of 36 females and 30 males said they were not worried about conflict in their relationship because they knew they would overcome any situation. Sixty six, (33%) composed of 40 females and 26 males tried to view conflict by understanding their needs and those of the partner, while another 68 respondents (34%) composed of 16 males and 52 females tried to see conflict

from both sides and looked for solutions that benefitted them both.

V. Avoidance Conflict Resolution Style

Figure 4.6 below indicates that individuals used avoidance style.

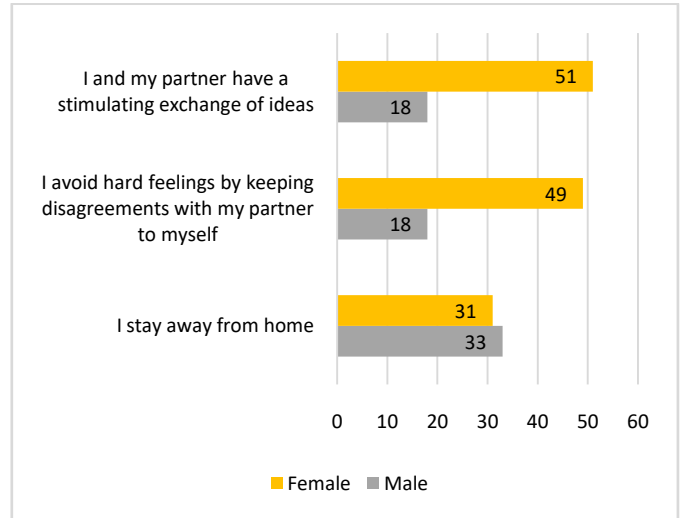


Figure 4.6 Avoiding Conflict Resolution Style

69 of the married individuals (34%), composed of 51 females and 18 males indicated that they had stimulating exchange of ideas with their partner. 67 married individuals (34%) composed of 49 females and 18 males avoided hard feelings by keeping disagreements with their partners to themselves, while 64 married individuals (32%) composed of 31 females and 33 males responded that they stayed away to avoid conflict with their spouse, 66% females and 34% males deployed this style.

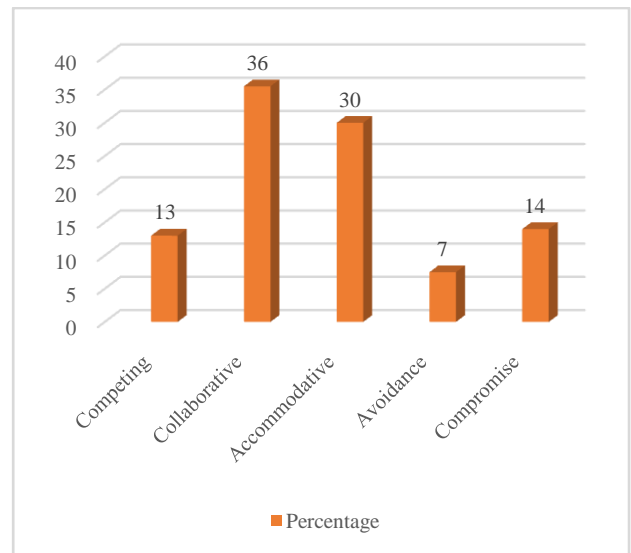


Figure 4.7 Summary of Conflict Resolution Styles

Figure 4.7 shows a summary of the usage. Married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela,

Kajiado County utilized different conflict resolution styles when they encountered disagreements in their marital relationship. 71 respondents (36%), used the collaborative conflict resolution style, 60 (30%) used accommodating conflict resolution style, 28 (14%) used Compromise conflict resolution style, while 26 (13%) used competing conflict resolution style and finally, 15 (7%) used avoidance.

Awareness of these styles and their effect on the relationship before conflict arises can help partners reduce and or manage their way through a conflict situation. Understanding and observing the style being used within the relationship can also help partners to successfully navigate through conflict with the least amount of stress. Understanding the partners and own conflict style may also help to understand the progression of the conflict situation to avoid escalation.

Conflict Resolutions Styles used by Gender

The third study objective was to examine whether conflict resolution styles used by gender influence marital stability at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County.

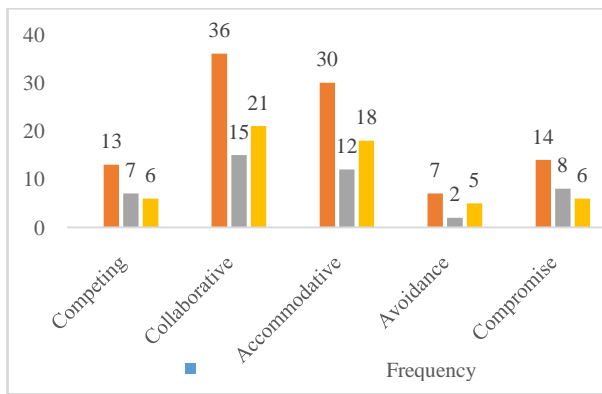


Figure 4.8 Conflict Resolution Styles by Gender

Seventy-one respondents, (36%), of the married individuals used the collaborative conflict resolution style, comprised 15% male and 21% female. Accommodating conflict resolution style had 30% (60), comprised of 12% male and 18% female. Compromise 14% (28), comprised of 8% male and 6% female, while competing 13% (26), comprised 7% male and 6% female. Avoidance had 7% (15) comprised 2% male and 5% female. The relationship between the use of conflict resolution styles by gender and marital stability is shown in Table 4.3 below.

Table 4.3 Correlation of Marital Stability and Conflict Resolution Styles

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.317a	4	0.004
Likelihood Ratio	4.39	4	0.02
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.433	1	0.01
N of Valid Cases	200		

The relationship showed a statistically significant relationship between the conflict resolution styles used by men and women and marital stability. $X^2(3) = 4.317, p < .05$ confirming that the conflict resolution behavior patterns used during marital conflict may be different for men and women (Birditt, Brown, Orbuch, & Mcilvane, 2010).

Age at Marriage and its influence on Marital Stability

Statistics showed that a majority of the respondents, 120 men and women at St. Monica Catholic Church, Kitengela, got married between 26 and 30 years of age, 30 between 20 and 25 years, 23 between 31 and 35 years of age, 15 between 36 and 40 years of age and 5 respondents married at the age of 40 years. These results are displayed in Table 4.4 below.

Table 4.4 Age at Marriage and Marital Stability

Age at marriage		
	F	%
Less than 20	7	4
20-25	30	15
26-30	120	60
31-35	23	11
36-40	15	7
Over 40	5	3
Total	200	100

Given that older people were more stable, it is possible that age played a role in influencing marriage stability. Lehrer and Chen (2013) found that women who marry in their late twenties or after, disproportionately make matches that would normally be unexpected but the marriages were successful and stable. A chi-square test presented below in Table 4.5 was run to determine if a relationship existed between age and marital stability.

Table 4.5 Correlation of Age at Marriage and Marital Stability

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	21.629a	4	0.003
Likelihood Ratio	22.131	4	0.04
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.745	1	0.388
N of Valid Cases	200		

The results indicate that the relationship between age and marital stability was statistically significant, $X^2(4) = 15.612, p < .05$. This suggests that age had an influence on marital stability. The findings also concur with Glenn, Uecker, and Love (2010), that later marriage lead to increased marital survival. Marriages contracted during the teens are known to be highly unstable, a result that has been interpreted as a maturity effect where there is a greater likelihood of mistaken expectations in marriages. Those who marry late do so when

they have completed schooling, which is a stabilizing factor (Mahapatra, 2012).

Influence of Conflict Resolution Styles on Marital Stability

The study also sought to examine how the conflict resolution styles used by married individuals influenced marital stability. Respondents were requested to indicate how they related with their partners using a marital stability scale. 148 (74%) respondents indicated a stable marital relationship with the partner. Of these, 38 respondents (19%) stated that they would do anything to make their marriage succeed while 36 (18%) had fun with their partner, 25 (13%) calmly discuss issues with the partner and 26 (13%) are able to work on projects together with the partner. However, 23 (12%) of the respondents felt that their relationship could be in trouble though they still got along well. Fifty two respondents indicated an unstable marital relationship, of which 27 (14%) stated that divorce had crossed their mind in the past three years, 17 (8%) had given up on their marital relationship, while 8(4%) had in the recent past, discussed divorce or separation with a close friend. The results are demonstrated in Table 4.6 below.

Table 4.6 State of Marital Stability

Marital Stability	(F)	%	Mean	Std. Deviation
Stable Marriage				
I and my partner laugh together	36	18	3.87	0.431
I and my partner calmly discuss something	26	13	3.15	0.379
I and my partner work together on a project	26	13	2.95	0.425
I will do all I can to see that my marriage succeeds	38	19	3.16	0.464
Sometimes I think our marriage might be in trouble even though we get along very well	22	11	3.08	0.363
Total	148	74	16.21	2.062
Unstable Marriage				
I and my partner have discussed divorce or separation with a close friend	8	4	1.03	0.38
The thought of getting a divorce or separation has crossed my mind in the past three years	28	14	3.01	0.444
I have given up on my relationship	16	8	1.86	0.401
Total	52	26	5.90	1.225

The results above indicate that 38 (19%) of the respondents would do all they could to ensure their marriage succeeded, (M=3.16, SD= 0.464). On the other hand, 17 (8%) of the respondents indicated that they had given up on their relationship (M=1.86, SD=0.401). 148 (74%) indicated that they considered their marital relationship stable, while 52 (26%) indicated instability in their marriage.

To establish the extent or magnitude of the relationship between the variables, the study used Pearson correlation coefficient. A positive coefficient means that there is a positive relationship between the variables, while a negative coefficient means that there is a negative relationship between variables. A zero coefficient on the other hand means that there is no association (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).

The study dependent variable (marital stability) was correlated with independent variable (conflict resolution style). The results indicate a positive correlation between marital stability and competing conflict resolution style (r = 0.490). This means that increased use of competing conflict resolution style will result to increased marital stability. Table 4.7 below indicates the correlation result.

Table 4.7 Correlation of Marital Stability and Conflict Resolution Styles

CRS		Marital Stability	CRS
Competing	Pearson Correlation	1	0.49
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	0.49	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Accommodating	Pearson Correlation	1	0.48
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	0.48	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Compromising	Pearson Correlation	1	0.57
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	0.57	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Avoidance	Pearson Correlation	1	-0.64
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	-0.64	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Collaborating	Pearson Correlation	1	0.74
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	0.74	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	200	200

Pearson correlation coefficient was used to measure the conflict resolution styles with marital stability. Accommodating conflict resolution style showed a positive (0.48) with marital stability. This means that most the married individuals who used accommodating conflict resolution style generally experience marital stability. Marital stability and compromising conflict resolution style showed a positive correlation (0.570). Collaboration conflict resolution style and marital stability (r = 0.740) results in overall marital stability. However, avoidance conflict resolution style correlated with marital stability showed a negative correlation of (r = - 0.640). Continually avoiding conflict leads to bottled up feelings, irritation, frustration, anger, or rage, creating more anxiety. It

often leads to stress and further conflict and therefore, marital instability.

IV. DISCUSSION

Causes of Argument among Married Individuals

Couples in Kitengela had disagreements in their marital relationship. Respondents who felt problems with money was a cause of conflict were 61 (30%). Both men and women face challenges that lead to financial problems. According to Dew & Huston, (2012), when spouses are not able to resolve contrasting, money demands or have conflicting goals for spending or saving, disagreements tend to arise. The other causes of strife in marriage in Kitengela included 12 (6%), who indicated that they argued about friends, 12 (6%) argued over making major decisions, with an equal number of men and women, six (3%) women and one (1%) argued over unmet expectations. Alcohol and drugs were a point of argument for six (3%) women and two (1%) men. 4 men and 4 women 8 (4%), disagreed over relatives while six (3%) women and no men were concerned about household tasks. The concern for infidelity was picked by 4 women (2%) and 2 men (1%), sex by four women (2%) and 2 men (15) and two women (1%) and no men argued over leisure time. Buckwell, (2010), stated that marriage is positively associated with a large number of outcomes, when both parties are not open for discussion He also confirms that marriage is associated with cognitive, mental and physical health for adults, earnings, emotional and physical well-being. Talking about them often leads to a stronger, happier marriage.

Conflict Resolution Styles Used by Married Individuals?

The findings suggest that married individuals in Kitengela experienced conflict in their relationship. According to the findings, (71), 36% of the married individuals in Kitengela, used collaborative conflict resolution style composed of 15% male and 21% female. These shows that 5% more females used the style. Those who used Compromise were 14% (28) comprised 8% male and 6% female. The competing conflict was indicated by (26) 13% of the participants with 7% male and 6% female. About 8% of the respondents comprised of 3% male and 5% indicated that they withdrew or avoided conflict situation in their marriage. This confirms the findings of Schyns and Hansbrough (2010), who observed that individuals used different types of styles when resolving conflict with different outcomes.

The population under study was 200 respondents composed of 53% (104) female and 47% (96) male. During conflict situations, 36% of the married individuals (71), used collaborative conflict resolution style composed of 15% males and 21% female. These shows that 5% more females used the style. Another 30% (60), of the married individuals used Accommodation 12% male and 18% female, also showing a higher score for females. Those who used Compromise were 14% (28), 8% male and 6% female. This shows a slightly higher preference for men for the Compromise conflict

resolution style. The competing conflict resolution was used by 13% (26) with 7% male and 6% female, also showing a slightly higher preference for men over women. 15 respondents, (7.5%) used the Avoidance conflict resolution style comprised of 2.5% male and 5% female

Age at Marriage and Marital Stability

To understand whether age at marriage influences marital stability among married individuals at St. Monica Catholic Church in Kitengela, Kajiado County, a chi-square test run also showed that age and marital stability were statistically significant, $\chi^2(4) = 15.612, p < .05$. Statistics showed that a majority of the respondents, 120 men and women at St. Monica Catholic Church, Kitengela, got married between 26 and 30 years of age, 30 between 20 and 25 years, 23 between 31 and 35 years of age, 15 between 36 and 40 years of age and 5 respondents married at the age of 40 years. Given that older people were most stable, it is possible that age played a role in influencing marriage stability confirming Mahapatra, N. (2012) who examined the relationship between age at marriage and the risk of divorce for couples and observe that age at marriage has an effect on the divorce rate.

Influence of Conflict Resolution Style on Marital Stability

Data collected among married individuals in Kitengela showed that (80%) of the respondents utilized constructive conflict resolution to manage conflict in their marital relationship. These results composed of 36% who used collaborative conflict resolution style, 30% accommodation and 14% compromise. Correlation coefficient was used to demonstrate the magnitude of the relationship between the variables, marital conflict resolution styles and marital stability.

Accommodating conflict resolution style had a positive correlation coefficient of (0.48), compromising conflict resolution style showed a positive correlation (0.570), Collaboration conflict resolution style showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.740$), competing conflict resolution style ($r = 0.490$). However, avoidance conflict resolution style showed a negative correlation of ($r = -0.640$). Among the five conflict resolution styles, Collaboration was correlated with the highest relationship stability confirming that it would be a preferred conflict resolution style for clinicians and educators of marital communication (Kamp Dush, C. M., & Taylor, M. G., 2012).

The main purpose of this study was to examine the conflict resolution styles used by married individuals and their influence on the stability of marital relationships. Results showed that married individuals used all the conflict resolution styles in their marital relationships. The analysis explicitly shows that each of the conflict resolution styles; competing, compromising, accommodating, collaborating, and avoiding predict relationship stability in close relationships. Of these collaboration was correlated with the highest relationship stability, confirming that its use is predictive of

relationship stability than others (McCoy, et al. (2013). Avoidance conflict resolution style, on the other hand, showed a negative correlation suggesting that the continued use may result in reduced marital stability. There was a very slight difference in the ratio of conflict resolution patterns used by male and female. The results therefore, indicate that conflict resolution plays a significant role in marriage and is therefore an important aspect of the marital relationship.

The findings help to explain patterns of behavior during conflict intervention. Though couples look forward to staying married till death do them part, the various challenges in life in the course of their day to day interactions expose them to conflict. Marriage therapists should, therefore, help couples to address conflict resolution behavior in relationships. Therapists need to pay special attention to avoidant behaviors, and highlight their negative effects on healthy and stable relationships, when necessary, which have been indicated as escalation of conflict, build up negative emotions, and pile up of unresolved conflict among others, leading to instability and in some cases violence and divorce.

Results also showed that age at marriage has an effect on the marital relationship confirming the suggestion that people who marry at an older age have better marital outcomes (Mahapatra, N., 2012). Individuals marry as they meet without thinking of the implication of the age of the partner, the subsequent goals of marriage and how their age may impact their future marital relationship. When young people marry, they may be immature economically, cognitively and socially therefore, their relationship unstable in the long run. However, later marriages are predictive of stable outcomes. These results indicate the importance of individuals readying themselves for marriage to assess their suitability for marriage and its role expectations.

Gender related conflict resolution styles have significant relationship to marital stability. Therefore, each individual should be aware of their partners and their own conflict resolution style in order to achieve functional relationship and therefore marital stability. Counselors should sensitize individuals and couples on conflict approaches to in order to create awareness in the practice of more effective conflict resolution styles.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The researcher makes the following recommendations based on the study findings:

1. Trained marital counselors be available in NGOs, social welfare institutions and religious organizations.
2. Pre-marital counseling for would-be couples to help them understand some of the problems that could

lead to conflict, conflict resolution and marital harmony.

3. Regular seminars and workshops for couples organized/conducted by government, religious bodies e.g. churches and mosques, and nongovernmental organization (NGOs).
4. Training and seminars for couples should be based on comprehensive conflict resolution strategies.
5. Future research should also involve qualitative approaches for deeper exploration of conflict in marriage.

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