EFFECT OF IMAGO THERAPY AND EMOTIONAL FOCUSED THERAPY ON MARITAL ADJUSTMENT OF COUPLES AMONG PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN ABIA STATE

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Abstract
This study investigated effects of imago therapy and emotional focused therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia State. The study adopted a Quasi-experimental design of pretest, posttest and control group using 2x2 factorial matrix. A total of 30 married teachers that were sampled from a population of 483 primary school teachers identified to have marital challenges in the state were used for the study. These comprised 10 married teachers each for imago therapy, emotional focused therapy and control groups respectively. The study equally adopted multi-staged sampling. The instruments used for data collection were Marital Conflict Identification Questionnaire (MCIQ) containing22-items and 20-item Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ). The instruments were validated by three research experts made up of one from Guidance and Counselling, Educational Psychology and Educational Measurement and Evaluation all in College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients as well as Cronbach alpha statistic were used to test for the stability and internal consistency of the instruments which yielded indices of 0.78 and 0.83 respectively. Data were collected in three phases of pre-treatment phase, post-treatment phase and the follow-up phase. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed among others that imago therapy and emotional focused therapy combined significantly improve marital harmony among the maladjusted couples in Abia state. It enhances factors such as couples' expectations of each other, parenting styles, financial issues, friends, sexual relations, and relationships with relatives. Based on the findings, discussion, implication and recommendation were made. One of the recommendations was that teachers who have some identified couples with marital maladjustment could effectively reduce it using imago therapy and emotional focused therapy.

Key words: Imago Therapy, Emotional Focused Therapy, Marital Adjustment, Teachers

Introduction

The foundation of the family is laid through the union of couples who pledge a lifetime commitment, faithfulness and fulfillment of responsibilities to each other, irrespective of their profession or status in the society. The union that could involve people of various professions, including teachers. This union, which is referred to as marriage could develop, crack and wither off possibly because many married persons may not have developed their personality mechanism or exhibited appropriate marital behaviour to cope sufficiently in the marriage. In such situation, couples may encounter adjustment challenge and may perhaps not be able to adjust to the demands of living together in such supposed intimate and highly revered relationship called marriage.

In case of married teachers for instance, the professional knowledge, skills and competencies can be seen when the teachers take on challenging tasks directed at educational success and performance. However, many a time, that may not be the case when it comes to marriage. The adjustment of a teacher to the nature of job may be considered more important than the adjustment to marriage. So, adjustment between the teacher and the marriage partner to the point where there is companionship, agreement on basic values, affectionate intimacy, accommodation, euphoria, and some other factors may be lacking. Adjustment is a process of interaction between oneself and the environment (Jaisri & Joseph, 2019). In this process, one can either adjust to the environment or alter it. When such adjustment takes place in marriage, it is referred to as marital adjustment. Marital adjustment according to Sinha (2021) is the state in which there is an overall feeling in husband and wife of happiness and satisfaction with their marriage and with each other. Such feeling as Sinha noted depends upon the interaction between husband and wife meeting of the needs of each other.

When the married persons are able to satisfy the needs of each other, it would likely lead to growth in their marital relationship and compatibility between spouses thereby giving room for marital adjustment. Marital adjustment in this instance therefore calls for maturity that accepts and understands growth and development in the spouse. If this growth is not experienced and realized fully, death in marital relationship may become inevitable. Therefore, marital adjustment in the context of this study is defined as the presence of such characteristics in a marriage as the tendency to avoid or resolve conflicts, couples feeling of satisfaction with the marriage and with each other, the sharing of common interest and activities, and fulfilling of the marital expectation of the husband and wife.

Marital adjustment from the above definition could be perceived as a complex phenomenon. Social scientists for example, Spanier and Cole, have tried to find out the characteristics that might best assure marital adjustment and marital happiness. Not one major factor has been confirmed by the researchers as to correlate highly with marital happiness. Rather, the outcome of the studies like Vanover (2016) indicates that there are various factors which contribute to marital success and happiness. Some of these factors according to Vanover include age at the marriage, age differences between the spouses, educational level, duration of marriage, personality factors, complementary needs, sexual behaviour, compatibility, emotional stability, flexibility, attitudes towards roles, interests, values, mental health of the spouse, mutual affection, understanding of the spouse, willingness to give and take and cooperativeness. As crucial as marital relationship is to the human life, many married couples still experience unhappiness, separation, divorce and marital failure, despite their initial high expectations. These are contrary to the usual aims of marriage: for men and women to procreate, endure emotional affections, be sexually satisfied and enjoy companionship, economic cooperation and family formation. For instance, it was observed in the information revealed by Onabamiro, Owoyele and Elijah (2017), that a number of couples have experienced some forms of physical violence such as battering, marital rape and murder in the hands of their spouses. In contemporary times,

evidences abound of many married individuals who are dissatisfied with their marriage, are unhappy, and often consider committing suicide as a means of escape. For example, interpersonal difficulties, such as marital discords or other family conflicts, are the most commonly reported reasons for self-harm and suicide (Abubakar, 2017). Foster (2021) and Linda, Marroquín and Miranda (2017) emphasized that negative life events and stresses - and the negative effects of stress - serve as a potential explanation for occurrence of suicidal behaviours. The researcher having worked with couples as a woman leader in the local church for the past thirteen years, has observed the alarming increase in the number of unsatisfied married individuals in the society despite their taking the marital vows that are meant to bond the couple together in love and unity —until death do them part. One way to look at it is that perhaps the greater majority of individuals that took the vows don‘t really understand the purpose and thereby find it easy not to keep it till the end. Obviously, marital maladjustment has now become a global malaise affecting both the victims and the society, regardless of whether the society is a developed, developing or underdeveloped one. Similarly, happenings among Christian married persons in recent times leave one to wonder if really there is any joy attached to marriage. This is because of the frequent nagging, abuse, disrespect, quarrels and fighting among married persons that sometimes result to separation, divorce, or in extreme cases, murder (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2020). A very good example is the case of the gruesome killing of Lagos lawyer, Symphorosa Otike-Odibi, by his lawyer wife, Udeme, on May 3, 2018 at their Diamond Estate, Sangotedo, Lekki, Lagos home (Onozure, 2019). However, women too have also been victims of spousal abuse that led to the loss of their lives as in the case of Lekan Sonde, who killed his banker wife in the Egbeda area of Lagos in 2016 (Olatunji, 2019).

In recent times, there are few studies considering psycho therapeutic approach to solving challenges relating to marital satisfaction. Some of such include Oluwole (2018) and Animashaun and Oladeni (2017), who have examined psychological interventions with the use of imago relationship and integrative couple therapies in reducing marital dissatisfaction. On this premise, there is need to embark on a comparative investigation of two therapeutic interventions to enhance marital adjustment. Hence, the choice of this study, which aims to examine the effects of imago relationship and emotional focused therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia State, Nigeria.

Imago Therapy (IT) is one of the newly discovered psychological interventions aimed at helping couples to achieve conscious success in marriage. That is, IT is a romantic approach that nurtures psychological and spiritual growth for married individuals through cooperation to fulfill the emotional needs of each person (Patterson, 2017). For imago therapy to be effective, individuals must identify emotional needs that are hoped will be fulfilled by romantic partnership. Just like any other early psychological interventions such as transactional analysis, Gestalt psychology, systems theory and cognitive therapy, imago therapy was developed by Harville Hendrix and Helen Lakelly Hunt in 1980 to enhance romantic relationship among married individuals. Both clinicians had experienced divorce in their relationship history. After looking for effective and evidence-based support for understanding relationship dynamics and finding very little in the way of helpful resources, they chose to build from their own experiences to research and develop an evidence-based model of counselling that would facilitate healing and growth in committed relationships. Hendrix (2014) explained that an —imago is the image that is built into one‘s subconscious. It contains all the positive and negative qualities of caregivers; however, this model of adult relationships shows how caregivers interacted with children. With the Imago system, married individuals are able to realize that the love relationship has a hidden purpose - the healing of childhood wounds. Instead of focusing entirely on surface needs and desires, people learn to recognize the unresolved childhood issues. When marriage is analysed under this particular lens, daily interactions become more meaningful; puzzling aspects of

relationships start making sense, and people are then better equipped to take control over their actions and reactions. The therapeutic process of imago relationship therapy involves five series of exercises: (1) re-imagining the partner, (2) restructuring frustrations, (3) resolving rage, (4) re-romanticizing and (5) re-visioning the relationship (Hendrix, 2014). IT has evolved from a focus on skill development, to engag.ing in the five previously mentioned procedures, to dialogue as a process which incorporates the five procedures. The research about imago relationship therapy to date has focused on the underlying theory and imago constructs. Several studies have showcased the effectiveness of imago therapy on spouses abuse (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014; Zainah, Nasir, Ruzy & Nuraini, 2016; Rezaeanlangroodi, Aziznazahad & Hashemi, 2017). More importantly, counselling psychologist use imago therapy in correcting developmental stumbling blocks and childhood wounds by restoring the connection between partners. It helps couples in learning to apply connection building skills through a number of specific interventions, such as the couple's dialogue, parent – child dialogue, behaviour change request dialogue, and imago workup. However, imago relationship therapy has not gained much attention among researchers, it is practically esteemed within the therapeutic community, and its effectiveness on marital dissatisfaction is not doubted. Being a new psychological intervention seeking empirical validation, it is hoped that it would be effective in enhancing marital adjustment among primary school teachers in Abia State, Nigeria.

Another counselling approach that could be used to enhance marital adjustment is emotionally-focused couples therapy, which is influenced by systemic therapies as it is based upon the fact that marital problems and conflicts arise from the interaction patterns/cycles between family members/couples. This therapy is a valid experimental approach to couples therapy and relies on the theory of attachment and understanding couples' needs. The therapeutic goals of this method include fostering a safe and powerful bond between couples. Emotionally-focused therapy highlights the integration of emotion, cognition, motivation, and behaviour, which are activated by the therapist to modify emotions (Momeni, Ramezani & Mardpour, 2020). In this method, the identification and improvement of emotion schemes are of utmost importance. Emotional focused therapy affects various dimensions of marital intimacy in the maladjusted couples which includes emotional intimacy, social intimacy and sexual intimacy Wiebe, Johnson, Burgess, Dalgleish & Tasca, 2017). It is an evidence-based approach with reportedly successful outcomes (Change requiresa gradual process of emotional activation, which is mainly achieved by using specific techniques to overcome avoidance, reduce disruptive behaviours, and facilitate emotional improvement. Therapists' help patients identify and express their primary feelings and access their intrinsic capabilities (Soleimani, Najafi, Ahmadi, Javidi, Kamkar & Mahboubi, 2015). This model distinguishes between primary and secondary emotions and also divides these states into structured, adaptive, maladaptive, complex, and social emotions.

Lack of marital adjustment could lead to a situation where supposedly peaceful atmosphere is replaced with chaos in marriage. The consequences are usually grievous and likely to result in marital instability, marriage separation, divorce or even death of the couple. These could have serious effect on the students, home, family, children of the marriage, society and the nation. Perhaps early marital adjustment could be attained through understanding and application of imago therapy and emotional focused therapy among primary school teachers in Abia State. This would likely be of help in preventing problems that often accompany poorly adjusted marriages.

Statement of Problem

Marriage is a divine situation which should be a special relationship for life and harmoniously integrate the husband and wife into becoming one flesh. Despite efforts in creating

harmonious living relationship in marriage, the incidence of marital conflict appears to be prevalent.

Researchers, church leaders and educators working with families especially dysfunctional homes have expressed concern about the difficulties that divorce and separation have created in establishing an egalitarian society. There is crisis definitely when it comes to the frequency of divorce. Infatuation wears off, sexual misbehaviour sets in, communication problem develops, trust and honesty are missing and children manifest a whole new set of maladaptive behaviours. This is quite sad.

Similarly, another school of thought concluded that finance, childlessness among couple and issues of relatives often brings about family rancor and deep-seated discontent in family life. There has also been a disturbing assertion to the extent that the inability of the couples to adjust martially is responsible for the maladjustment that has bedeviled the family. Equally worrisome is the notion that some people tend to handle marital issue by suppressing or venting it without application therapeutic procedures such as imago therapy and emotional focused therapy. This study therefore sets out to find out the effectiveness of negotiation skill training and social skill training in the resolving martial conflict among couples in primary schools in the study area. It is on this basis that this study investigated the effects of imago therapy and emotional focused therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the effect of imago therapy and emotional focused therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia State. Specifically, this study seeks to determine:

1. find out the effect of imago therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia State at post-test.
2. the effect of emotional focused therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia State at post-test.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed and answered to guide the study:

1. What is the difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers exposed to imago therapy and the control?
2. What is the difference in the post test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers exposed to emotional focused therapy and the control?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance to further guide the study.

$H0_1$: There is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples of teachers exposed to imago therapy and the control group at posttest.

$H0_2$: There is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples of teachers exposed to emotional focused therapy and the control group at posttest.

Method

The study adopted a Quasi-experimental design of pretest, posttest and control group using 2x2 factorial matrix. A total of 30 married teachers that were sampled from a population of 483 primary school teachers identified to have marital challenges in the state were used for the study. These comprised 10 married teachers each for imago therapy, emotional focused therapy and control groups respectively. The study equally adopted multi-staged sampling. The instruments used for data collection were Marital Conflict Identification Questionnaire (MCIQ) containing22-items and 20-item Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ). The instruments were validated by three research experts made up of one from Guidance and Counselling, Educational Psychology and Educational Measurement and Evaluation all in College of Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State. Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficients as well as Cronbach alpha statistic were used to test for the stability and internal consistency of the instruments which yielded indices of 0.78 and 0.83

respectively. Data were collected in three phases of pre-treatment phase, post-treatment phase and the follow-up phase. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

The results were presented in tables according to the research questions and the hypotheses that guided the study.

Research Question 1

What is the difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers exposed to imago therapy and the control?

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation of the Marital Adjustment of Couples among Teachers Exposed to Imago Therapy and Control

		Pretest		Posttest		Mean Reduction	Mean Reduction difference
Groups	**N**	$\overline{X}$	**SD**	$\overline{X}$	**SD**		
Image Therapy	10	40.23	3.75	28.11	3.84	12.12	10.23
Control	10	40.45	3.88	38.56	3.91	1.89	

Result in Table 1 shows the mean scores on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers exposed to imago therapy (treatment Group) and the control. The treatment group had mean marital adjustment of couples score of 40.23 with standard deviation of 3.75 at pre-test and 28.11 with standard deviation of 3.84 at post-test. The mean marital adjustment score of couples exposed to IT was 12.12. On the other hand, married couples who were exposed to the control group had mean marital adjustment score of 40.45 with standard deviation of 3.88 at pre-test and 38.56 with standard deviation of 3.91 at post-test. The mean scores on marital adjustment score of couples exposed to the control group was 1.89. The mean difference of 10.23 was recorded for the two groups in favour of the treatment group that was exposed to treatment using imago therapy. The standard deviation of each group ranged from 3.75 – 3.91; indicating that respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their responses, adding further validity to the mean. The results therefore, revealed that the use of imago therapy reduced marital maladjustment of the couples that were identified to be involved in marital conflict before treatment using imago therapy.

A corresponding hypothesis that addressed the above research question is:

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples of teachers exposed to imago therapy and the control group at posttest.

Table 2:Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Mean Score of Marital Adjustment of Couples Exposed to Imago Therapy and the Control group

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1129.503	2	564.75	81.096	.000
Intercept	30.783	1	30.783	4.420	.000
Pretest	377.646	1	377.646	54.228	.000
Group	111.312	1	111.312	15.984	.031
Error	125.354	18	6.964		

Total	45000.000	20
Corrected Total	1154857	19

Result in the Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value of 15.984 and a probability value (P-value) of .031 were obtained. Since the P-value obtained is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis of no significant effect was rejected and the alternate accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples exposed to imago therapy and the control group. This implies that exposing couples with marital imago therapy significantly enhanced their marital adjustment.

Research Question 2

What is the difference in the post test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers exposed to emotional focused therapy and the control?

Table 3: Mean and Standard deviation of the Marital Adjustment of Couples among Teachers Exposed to Emotional Focused Therapy and Control

		Pretest		Posttest		Mean Reduction	Mean Reduction difference
Groups	**N**	$\overline{X}$	**SD**	$\overline{X}$	**SD**		
EFT	10	40.23	3.75	28.11	3.84	12.12	
							10.24
Control	10	40.45	3.88	38.56	3.91	1.89	

Result in Table 3 shows the mean scores on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers exposed to emotional focused therapy and the control. The treatment group had mean marital adjustment of couple's score of 40.23 with standard deviation of 3.75 at pre-test and 28.11 with standard deviation of 3.84 at post-test. The mean marital adjustment score of couples exposed to EFT was 12.12. On the other hand, married couples who were exposed to the control group had mean marital adjustment score of 40.45 with standard deviation of 3.88 at pre-test and 38.56 with standard deviation of 3.91 at post-test. The mean scores on marital adjustment score of couples exposed to the control group was 1.89. The mean difference of 10.24 was recorded for the two groups in favour of the treatment group that was exposed to treatment using emotional focused therapy. The standard deviation of each group ranged from 3.75 – 3.91; indicating that respondents were not too far from the mean and from one another in their responses, adding further validity to the mean. The results therefore, revealed that the use of emotional focused therapy reduced marital challenges of the couples that were identified to be involved in marital conflict before treatment using emotional focused therapy.

A corresponding hypothesis that addressed the above research question is:

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples of teachers exposed to emotional focused therapy and the control group at posttest.

Table 2: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) Mean Score of Marital Adjustmentof Couples Exposed to Emotional Focused Therapy and the Control group

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	1129.503	2	564.75	81.096	.000

Intercept	30.783	1	30.783	4.420	.000
Pretest	377.646	1	377.646	54.228	.000
Group	111.312	1	111.312	15.984	.032
Error	125.354	18	6.964		
Total	45000.000	20			
Corrected Total	1154857	19			

Result in the Table 2 showed that the calculated F-value of 15.984 and a probability value (P-value) of .032 were obtained. Since the P-value obtained is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis of no significant effect was rejected and the alternate accepted. Therefore, there is a significant difference in the post-test mean scores on marital adjustment of couples exposed to emotional focused therapy and the control group. This implies that exposing couples with marital maladjustment to emotional focused therapy significantly improved their marital adjustment.

Discussion of Findings

The discussion of findings was carried out sequentially based on the research questions and hypotheses that guided study.

The study revealed that imago therapy significantly enhanced the marital adjustment of couples in Abia State. This is evident from the result which showed that couples exposed to imago therapy had higher mean marital conflict reduction than those exposed to the control group. The result agreed with the (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014) who in their separate studies examined imago therapy in improving marital relationship among couples. The study found imago therapy to be highly effective in enhancing marital harmony. The efficacy of the technique may not be in doubt as according to Hendrix (2014), imago therapy approaches provide clients with active coping strategies for dealing with problem situation which marital conflict constitute in the family.

It was found from the study that emotional focused therapy significantly improved the marital adjustment of couples in Abia State. This is evident from the result that showed that couples exposed to emotional focused therapy had higher mean in marital conflict reduction than those in the control group. The results corroborated with the findings of previous studies (Momeni, Ramezani & Mardpour, 2020) which highlights the integration of emotion, cognition, motivation, and behaviour, which are activated by the therapist to modify emotions. Change requires a gradual process of emotional activation, which is mainly achieved by using specific techniques to overcome avoidance, reduce disruptive behaviours, and facilitate emotional improvement among couples.

Conclusion

According to the findings, couple therapists can use these two approaches as interventions in couple therapy sessions to increase marital happiness and improve the quality of the couples' lives. According to the results, emotionally-focused couples therapy could effectively improve the marital indicators of the maladjusted couples (intimacy and harmony).

Recommendations

On the bases of the above findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The effectiveness of imago therapy and emotional focused therapy should be incorporated into the churches counselling sessions as to improve marital wellness among intending couples.
2. The two therapies should be used as marriage enhancement therapies for married couples.

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