



Marital Resilience factors that enhance Conflict Management in Black African Marriages in South Africa: An Afro-Centric Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite the stressful conditions and difficulties that bring about habitual conflict in many Black African marriages, some couples choose to manage their conflict and remain married, even in the context of the divorce culture. It is important to determine the potential factors that impact marital resilience in the midst of difficulties. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore resilience factors that enhance conflict management in Black African marriages in South Africa. A phenomenological research design was adopted using a qualitative research approach. Forty participants, consisting of 20 married men and 20 married women, were purposively selected to participate in this study. Data was collected using semi-structured individual and focus group interviews which were also audio-recorded. Following recordings, the interviews were transcribed. The data was analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The findings of this study demonstrated that, of all the techniques employed to handle marital crises, effective communication was the most widely favoured. Leaving things alone by opting to remain silent, being humble, and pastoral counselling were also found to be effective tactics. The findings of this study may be useful in therapeutic work with couples. The factors that participants identified as vital in contributing towards their marital resilience may be helpful to add to the understanding of marital resilience and may be used to develop a strengths-based intervention program for couples in marital crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

Conflict in marriage is a common phenomenon and has affected many families of Black families in South Africa. Conflict is an inherent component of any relationship and a key driver of change and development in it.¹ Given that the partners in marriage relationships often come from different

¹ Abelneh Shemaye Tasew and Koye Kassa Getahun, "Marital Conflict among Couples: The Case of Durbete Town, Amhara Region, Ethiopia," *Cogent Psychology* 8, no. 1 (December 31, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2021.1903127>.

backgrounds, there will inevitably be conflicts and issues between them. It is also crucial to acknowledge, however, that conflict and differences exist even amongst people with similar family or parental backgrounds.

Olugbenga defines marital conflict as a state of stress or tension that arises between spouses when they attempt to fulfil their obligations as a married couple.² Marital conflict is further described as a clash, disagreement, or argument over conflicting demands, beliefs, ideas, or goals between a husband and wife, as well as occasionally with other members of the home.

The prevalence of marital conflict is high in almost all African countries. For instance, Osaji reports that 55 percent of marriages in Nigeria experienced marital conflict leading to divorce.³ Similarly, Tasew and Getahun conducted a study to determine the rate of marital conflict in six African countries.⁴ The findings revealed that, on average, marital conflict affects between 40 and 65 percent of couples. The study also reported that eight out of ten couples (80%) experienced marital conflict in their early marriages, in some cases, leading to marital separation.

The high prevalence of marital conflict in Africa as a whole follows similar trends in South Africa. A report by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA) indicated that, in 2021, there were 18,208 divorces granted in South Africa as a result of marital conflict. In 2022, this number increased to 20,196, a 10.9% rise in divorce year-on-year. When these figures are broken down by demographic category, the majority of divorces in 2021 and 2022 affected Black Africans, who accounted for 50.4% and 54.7% of all divorces respectively. The increasing rate of separation and divorce as a result of marital conflict among Black married couples is ample evidence that there is currently a crisis in Black South African marriage.

Even in the face of stressful conditions and difficulties, not all Black African marriages end in divorce. Consequently, it is important to determine the potential factors that impact marital resilience when difficulties arise. The purpose of this study, then, is to explore resilience factors that enhance conflict management in Black African marriages in South Africa. In line with this objective, the research question for this study is:

- What are the marital resilience factors that enhance conflict management in Black African marriages in South Africa?

LITERATURE REVIEW

While some marriages experience distress, frustration and uncompromising attitudes, all of which can bring negative consequences and fuel marital discord, the institution of marriage has also faced numerous crises in recent times due to the challenges of societal expectations of the twenty-first century. In South Africa, divorce rates are rising rapidly due to a number of interrelated variables, including the marital problems already spoken of,⁵ including lack of communication, lack of intimacy and marital infidelity, as revealed by Ganerre.⁶

Josiah and Nteh state that infertility, poor communication, domestic abuse, and poor money management are just a few of the issues that have led to significant breakdowns in marital relationships and that these frequently result in separation and divorce.⁷ Furthermore, Afu and Nteh claim that families encounter numerous conflict-causing issues, such as the diminishing financial resources brought about by socioeconomic variables, which include unemployment, poverty, and pressure from friends and family.⁸

² Agboola Johnson Olugbenga, "Patterns and Causes of Marital Conflict among Staff of Selected Universities in Southwest Nigeria," *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal* 5, no. 8 (2018).

³ S. Osaji, "Marriage Experts Worry over Rising Divorce among Young Couples," *Punch News*, April 23, 2023.

⁴ Tasew and Getahun, "Marital Conflict among Couples: The Case of Durbete Town, Amhara Region, Ethiopia."

⁵ Ndakaitei Makwanise and Mehluli Masuku, "African Traditional Views on Divorce: A Case of the Ndebele in the Vukuzenzele Ward at Esikhoveni, Esigodini," *Oral History Journal of South Africa* 4, no. 1 (2016): 1–14.

⁶ L. F. Ganerre, "Factors Predicting Emotional and Behavioural Resilience on Families Going through a Divorce," in *A Paper Presented at Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Australia, Melbourne Convention and Exhibition Centre*, 2016, 6–8.

⁷ Grace Ada Josiah and Onyeayana Kenneth Nteh, "Factors and Consequences of Marital Conflicts among Spouses in Rivers State, Nigeria," *International Journal of Research in Education and Sustainable Development* 2, no. 5 (2022): 38–46.

⁸ M. Afu and K. Nteh, "Consequences of Marital Conflicts among Spouses in Benue State, Nigeria: Implications for Counselling," *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts (IJCRT)* 8, no. 4 (2020).

Onah asserts that marital crisis is becoming a social concern in modern culture and that it has numerous negative effects, such as misbehaviour on the part of children from crisis-affected homes.⁹ In this light, it is noted that children who grow up in households plagued by abuse and crisis tend to develop emotional complexes. Furthermore, Onah states that, from a medical standpoint, children growing up in compromised environments such as these suffer from crippling stress, excruciating headaches, rashes, and ulcers.¹⁰ When compared to those who have experienced a stable childhood, they consistently lag behind academically.¹¹ Akpeli observes that marital crises frequently cause the marriage to fail and impose unpleasant feelings like resentment, wrath, and anger.¹² Estrangement, separation, and divorce pose a threat to the continued existence of marriage if a marital problem is not resolved.¹³

The effects of marital crises extend beyond the couples involved in affected marriages. According to Tasew and Getahun, children and other family members are the direct victims who have to deal with any potential fallout and risk a variety of psychological issues.¹⁴ Aydogan and Dincer add that marital disputes may have a range of personal, medical, and psychological ramifications, such as depression, anxiety, worsening health, and an increased risk of serious illnesses, including heart disease.¹⁵

In a culture where divorce is common, some couples choose to stay married despite the numerous challenges and marital crises that Black African couples face.¹⁶ Considering the trends in divorce already mentioned, it is worthwhile to investigate the factors that have enabled several couples to thrive in their marriages, even after enduring considerable hardship.¹⁷ The outcome of applying conflict management strategies that enable couples to survive marital crises and prevent their unions from degenerating into divorce is termed marital resilience.¹⁸

Similar to individual resilience, marital resilience may be described as a combination of family characteristics that enables couples to bounce back and display positive outcomes after experiencing difficulties such as misunderstandings, arguments, and unmet needs.¹⁹ According to Connolly, the term "marital resilience" refers to the ability of a couple to bounce back from adversity and adjust to challenging circumstances.²⁰ Stated differently, marital resilience is built through relational practices that support partners throughout the trying times in their marriage.²¹

The Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT) could be used to conceptualise resilience in marriage. The RCT identifies five basic positive conditions that should exist in supportive relationships. These are zest; a sense of worth; clarity; productivity; and a desire for more connection.²² As noted by Aydogan and

⁹ H. Onah, "Crisis in Marital Love and Family Life in Our World Today. Beyond Frontiers. To the End of Earth. Human Experiences and the Crisis of Faith," *Spiritan International Journal Ideology* 4, no. 1 (2014): 67–73.

¹⁰ Onah, "Crisis in Marital Love and Family Life in Our World Today. Beyond Frontiers. To the End of Earth. Human Experiences and the Crisis of Faith."

¹¹ N. Agha and J. Obika, "Marital Stability as Perceived by Educated Spouses in Onitsha Urban of Anambra State" (University of Nigeria Nsukka, 2020).

¹² A.O. Akpeli, "Marital Conflict and Its Implication on the Family," 2019, <https://Dutable.com>.

¹³ Richard O Okere and Samuel N Ubani, "Rapid Increase of Infidelity among Married Women in Nigeria-Causes and Effects: Implication for Counselling," *European Journal of Education Studies* 7, no. 10 (2020).

¹⁴ Tasew and Getahun, "Marital Conflict among Couples: The Case of Durbete Town, Amhara Region, Ethiopia."

¹⁵ Didem Aydogan and Duygu Dincer, "Creating Resilient Marriage Relationships: Self-Pruning and the Mediation Role Sacrifice with Satisfaction," *Current Psychology* 39, no.2(April 18,2020): 500–510, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-019-00472-x>.

¹⁶ Kumar Deepak and Narayanan Annalakshmi, "Virtues as Predictors of Resilience among Single Women," *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 3 (2021): 288–98.

¹⁷ E R Mathipa and Q M Motsepe, "Resilience in Marriages: Traditional and Religious Versus Modern Marriages.," *Pharos Journal of Theology* 104, no. 2 (2023).

¹⁸ Mathipa and Motsepe, "Resilience in Marriages: Traditional and Religious Versus Modern Marriages."

¹⁹ Didem Aydogan and Yaşar Ozbay, "Mediation Role of Dyadic Coping on Parenting Stress and Relational Resilience in Couples," *Marriage & Family Review* 54, no. 2 (2018): 128–47.

²⁰ Colleen M Connolly, "A Qualitative Exploration of Resilience in Long-Term Lesbian Couples," *The Family Journal* 13, no. 3 (2005): 266–80.

²¹ Keith Sanford et al., "Couple Resilience and Life Wellbeing in Firefighters," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 6 (2017): 660–66.

²² Richard B. Miller et al., "Marital Problems and Marital Satisfaction Among Brazilian Couples," *The American Journal of Family Therapy* 42, no. 2 (March 11, 2014): 153–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01926187.2012.741897>.

Ozbay, the existence of these conditions is an indicator of mutuality in a growth-fostering relationship.²³

A number of protective factors have also been found to enhance resilience in marriages. These include being optimistic with one's partner; maintaining a positive attitude towards adaptation; paying attention to the needs of the partner; ability to make one another happy;²⁴ lending mutual support;²⁵ offering partner support;²⁶ engaging in dyadic positive coping behaviours;²⁷ and utilising skills that are oriented towards problem-solving.²⁸

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach, Paradigmatic Perspective and Design

The major objective of qualitative studies is to describe and understand human behavior. This was also the intention of this study and the reason why a qualitative research approach was chosen. Using this approach, the researchers were able to investigate how married Black African couples manage conflict in their marriages.

The selection of an interpretivism paradigm was impacted by the philosophical foundation that directs this study, which is inherently focused on comprehending the world through people's lived experiences.²⁹ Given that the objective of this study was to explore resilient factors that enhance conflict management in Black African marriages in South Africa, the researchers chose a phenomenological research design. Due to the complexity of this phenomenon and the need for fresh perspectives, the study agrees with Creswell that a phenomenological approach should be employed when analysing a phenomenon as the participants describe it.³⁰

Sample and Sampling Strategies

The research employed a non-random purposive sampling technique to identify potential couples for participation. The following criteria were used to select twenty married men and twenty married women: Participants needed to be in their first marriages, have a lawfully sanctioned marriage, have been married for more than three years, and have at least one child. Participants were recruited from churches, couples' clubs and gatherings of married individuals, such as workshops for married couples in the indicated area. The research participants were informed about the project and its potential benefits to the community, and an appointment was arranged with them in a location free from any disturbances.

Ethical Considerations

The research ethics committee of the authors' institution provided ethics approval. Participants had the option to leave the research at any time and were fully informed about the possible implications of the study in advance.³¹ The researchers took all necessary safety measures to ensure that the research participants would not suffer harm. These measures included but were not restricted to, getting written informed consent prior to the study; closely monitoring their emotions; making plans for emergency intervention or stopping the study if a dangerous situation developed; and providing research participants with a thorough debriefing immediately after the interview.³²

²³ Aydogan and Ozbay, "Mediation Role of Dyadic Coping on Parenting Stress and Relational Resilience in Couples."

²⁴ Sanford et al., "Couple Resilience and Life Wellbeing in Firefighters."

²⁵ Kathleen Peters, Debra Jackson, and Trudy Rudge, "Surviving the Adversity of Childlessness: Fostering Resilience in Couples," *Contemporary Nurse* 40, no. 1 (December 17, 2011): 130–40, <https://doi.org/10.5172/conu.2011.40.1.130>.

²⁶ Didem Aydogan and Seval Kizildag, "Examination of Relational Resilience with Couple Burnout and Spousal Support in Families with a Disabled Child," *The Family Journal* 25, no. 4 (2017): 407–13.

²⁷ Aydogan and Ozbay, "Mediation Role of Dyadic Coping on Parenting Stress and Relational Resilience in Couples."

²⁸ April S Masarik et al., "Couple Resilience to Economic Pressure over Time and across Generations," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 78, no. 2 (2016): 326–45.

²⁹ N. Pervin and M. Mokhtar, "The Interpretivist Research Paradigm: A Subjective Notion of a Social Context," *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development* 11, no. 2 (2022): 419–28.

³⁰ John W Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research* (SAGE publications, 2021).

³¹ H. Strydom, "Ethical Aspects of Research in the Social Science and Human Service Profession," in *Research at Grass Roots for the Social Sciences and Human Service Professions*, ed. A.S., De Vos et al., 4th ed. (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2021).

³² W. L. Neuman, *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative & Quantitative Approach*, 3rd ed. (Persons: Harlow, 2015).

The research participants were informed ahead of time that the study would cause psychological discomfort because they would be required to recount their marital experiences. Those who required counselling or debriefing were referred right away after their participation.³³ Individuals who revealed themselves to be in difficult situations, or to have unresolved issues for which they might require counselling, were referred to the Family and Marriage Association of South Africa (FAMSA), where support would be available. The research participants signed a declaration acknowledging that they were aware of the risks and that they chose to participate despite them, with their choice based on their full comprehension of any potential dangers associated with the study.³⁴

Instrumentation

As noted by Yin, an interview is a crucial method of gathering data for a qualitative phenomenological investigation.³⁵ Taking this lead, the researchers conducted in-person, semi-structured and focus group interviews with each participant to learn more about their viewpoints and experiences. With consent from each participant, the interviews were recorded. The objective behind utilising interviews was to elicit detailed and authentic data based on participants' perceptions, experiences, and beliefs about how conflict is managed in Black African marriages,³⁶ and to do so in a relaxed and unhostile atmosphere and without their being influenced by others. Moreover, the interviews enable probing for more detailed enunciations, thus limiting researchers' assumptions and preconceptions.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The study adopted the Creswell model of data analysis which contains a series of steps.³⁷ Firstly, the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed according to categories and themes that emerged. The transcriptions of the audio recordings of the interviews and the notes comprised the qualitative data that were analysed using inductive thematic analysis. The purpose of inductive theme analysis, which is a commonly used kind of qualitative research analysis, is to find, investigate, and document patterns in data.³⁸ The data was coded to identify and provide significant patterns. This involved, a) familiarising oneself with the data; b) creating preliminary codes; c) looking for themes; d) going over the themes; e) characterising and labelling the themes; and f) compiling the findings.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Trustworthiness takes into account believability based on coherence, insight, and instrument utility.³⁹ The researcher employed conformability, as described by Babbie and Mouton, to meet the criterion of trustworthiness in the use of the qualitative research design.⁴⁰ Field notes and audit trail notes were made from the raw data, which were recorded on audiotapes to enable the researchers to use them throughout the study. The focus group interviews were done with the groups of married men and women separately. The interviews were all conducted using the same set of questions. To determine reliability, the responses to the question were compared. To create a peer debriefing and strengthen the research study's credibility, the research methods and conclusions were further reviewed with a number of peers who were not involved in the study.

Through member checking — a process that involved asking participants for input on the data, our interpretation of it, and the study's conclusions — the researchers were able to ascertain the study's credibility.⁴¹ By giving them the chance to ask questions, the participants were given the chance to have any questions they had, regarding the research procedure answered. The interaction was extended to participants and three other data sources were consulted in order to further assure the validity of the

³³ Paul Leedy and Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2015).

³⁴ E. Babbie and J. Mouton, *The Practice of Social Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁵ Robert K Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (Guilford publications, 2015).

³⁶ Pranee Liamputtong, *Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences*, vol. 10 (Springer Singapore, 2019).

³⁷ Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

³⁸ Loraine Busetto, Wolfgang Wick, and Christoph Gumbinger, "How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods," *Neurological Research and Practice* 2, no. 1 (2020): 14.

³⁹ Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

⁴⁰ Babbie and Mouton, *The Practice of Social Research*.

⁴¹ Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

study findings. Another strategy for overcoming parochialism was space triangulation.⁴² Moreover, participants received emails with transcriptions of the data for validation.⁴³ Lastly, it was ensured that none of the conclusions derived from the interviews were impacted by the cultural, religious, or personal convictions of the researchers.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The four themes that emerged from the data were used to present the findings. These themes revealed the marital resilience factors that enhance conflict management in Black African marriages in South Africa.

Theme 1: Communication

Communication is reported as an important element in handling conflict in the marriage. Of all the strategies couples employ to handle marital conflict and help them settle disputes inside their marriage, communication was the technique that was most frequently mentioned. The quotes that follow attest to the fact that couples considered communication to be the most successful method for handling conflict in their marriages and that it has also helped them resolve disagreements.

Communication: we sit down, have a conversation, and point out each other's mistakes, but we don't act until we have both calmed down.... (P4).

Communication not only involves verbal communication but also signs and gestures. Nonverbal communication also was identified as one of the methods that married couples used to deal with conflict in their marriage. This can also be viewed as an avoidance style of conflict management, where couples avoid escalating the level of conflict by choosing to use nonverbal communication rather than direct confrontation when there is a conflict. The way a couple speaks during a disagreement can affect how the disagreement is handled. One of the participants attested to this, saying the following:

Nna (me) genuinely, when it comes to addressing disagreement I speak out, but most of the time I'll be the one to contact my husband—while being silent—so that we can sit down and discuss a problem I'm feeling troubled by. I'll tell him that I'm not happy about this and that..(P7).

Some of the couples indicated that the use of nonverbal cues, such as body language and facial expressions, can convey emotions and that this has helped in resolving conflict in their marriage. The following verbatim quotes illustrate the point in the words of the participants:

When my wife is moody, I will not pretend that nothing has happened. I study her mood, if she is hurt and would like to speak about it, I will give her the platform so that she can speak...I don't force her... she would like to speak and I participate in the communication before we realise it, the matter will be settled. (P13).

Theme 2: Leaving things as they are by choosing to be quiet.

The majority of participants said that using silence as a conflict-resolution technique worked well for handling disagreements in their marriage. The participants further noted that taking a moment of silence can help calm emotions, reduce impulsive reactions, and provide time for self-reflection. One of the participants stated it thus:

Being quiet while your partner speaks demonstrates respect and attentiveness. It shows that you are fully present and open to understanding their perspective on a conflicting issue (P6).

From the research participants' responses, it is evident that the majority of the couples interviewed found that being silent was a useful strategy for managing marital conflict. Couples utilise the tactic of stillness to resolve a marital disagreement, particularly when they don't want to escalate the situation.

⁴² Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*.

⁴³ Creswell, *A Concise Introduction to Mixed Methods Research*.

So most of the time if there is something that is troubling us, I usually keep quiet for some time and she will ask if there is something that is bothering me. At that time there won't be any fighting, as I will be cool and she will also be cool....then I will explain to her. Sometimes she will be talking at that time...why should you be quiet about such a thing when there are such problems in the house.....but for the sake of peace, I also don't answer her back or say anything. (P9).

In summary, quietness was noted as a powerful tool for managing conflict if used thoughtfully, allowing for calm reflection and de-escalation. However, participants noted that it should not replace honest communication or be used so as to avoid dealing with underlying issues in the marriage.

Theme 3: Seeking pastoral counselling

Utilising pastoral counselling is among the strategies used by the participating couples to manage marital conflict. Most of the participants believed that spiritual leaders often draw on the wisdom offered in the scriptures, applying spiritual principles to address specific marital issues. Spiritual leaders provide couples with guidelines on effective communication and conflict management, as well as problem-solving strategies that are rooted in Christian teachings. The following quotations confirm that research participants viewed talking to pastors and other spiritual leaders as one of their strategies for handling marital conflict and that this method has also assisted them in resolving disagreements within their marriage:

"In my case, talking to my pastor and seeking spiritual direction is effective. We recently visited a psychologist, who gave us 1, 2, and 3..., but I'm not sure if we're right or not. When we've tried everything to deal with the difficulties we've met and it doesn't appear to be working, we go to see the pastor at home, who helps us solve them. The pastor, in my opinion, is better than everyone else because, unlike psychologists, who often listen to their patients before giving them tasks to complete, pastors tell you the truth, even when it hurts. (P5).

Another participant said the following:

After we went to our pastors for help, I experienced a lot of improvement and the way our problems were resolved. I believe our pastor continues to pray for us after our meeting. I believe his prayer is effective as well. (P12).

Regarding the effectiveness of pastoral counseling in addressing marital issues, the third participant shared her own experience as follows:

We consult our pastor for advice if we are having marital problems. His counsel aids in the restoration of our sense of purpose, forgiveness, and trust. Our emotional and spiritual needs are also addressed.

While the pastor's capacity to offer spiritual intercession is regarded as essential, the role of the pastor is understood to encompass more than merely meditating.

If it is really tough...if I don't see someone older than me or somebody else or Pastors, those are the people who can help us, who will make us sit down and rebuke us and things will go back to normal (P13).

By offering strategies for resolving disputes, clergymen encourage reconciliation through open dialogues, empathy, and the fostering of forgiveness, which is often rooted in religious principles. Pastoral counselling often emphasises forgiveness, which can be crucial in overcoming infidelity, emotional hurt, or other deep-rooted marital wounds. By focusing on both the emotional and spiritual aspects of the relationship, pastoral counselling promotes a holistic healing approach.

Theme 4: Humility

Humility is another important virtue found in couples who tend to manage crises efficiently in their marriages. Generally speaking, humility is characterized by an accurate self-perception that takes into account one's skills and limits, modest respect for status, and an orientation toward others. Forgiveness and humility are strongly connected, and humility was found to be a personal quality that helped couples form solid ties.

Humble couples showed a tendency to assume trustworthiness in others, were more likely to trust, and demonstrated greater cooperativeness in their relationships. Furthermore, they are less defensive, making matters more pleasant when they relate to each other and manage crises in their marriages. When asked to share their experiences on what has helped them to overcome marital crises, one of the research participants shared the following sentiments:

Yes, just humble yourself because if you think you are bigger than everyone in the family nothing will work out. If you are stubborn nothing will work out in the marriage... and "If you are a man and want to build your family, don't always allow outsiders to come into your family matters, calling your brothers telling them to come to your house as your wife is saying this or that no it doesn't work that way...you must learn to solve things between yourselves. (P9).

Humility was described as a powerful strategy for managing marital crises, as it fosters openness, understanding, and reconciliation between couples. Participants noted that humility allows them to acknowledge each other's faults, listen to each other's perspectives, and approach conflict with a spirit of cooperation rather than pride or defensiveness. With respect to the question on the strategy used to manage marital crises, one of the participants has this to say:

One thing that I have seen working for me to resolve disputes in our marriage is that I remain humble. It is all about humbling yourself ... and just being quiet ... leaving things the way they are (P2).

In summary, humility de-escalates conflicts, creates space for healing, and restores balance in a marriage. It shifts the focus from pride and love, making it a key strategy in managing marital crises.

DISCUSSION

Insofar as the rate of divorce among Black African couples in South Africa, there are couples who have maintained their marriages over many years amid conflicts. In line with this, this study examined the marital resilience factors that enhance conflict management in Black African marriages in South Africa. The findings of this study demonstrated that the most effective methods for most couples to resolve disputes in their marriages involve calmness or verbal and nonverbal communication skills. In order to resolve disagreements within the marriage, communication through third-party mediation - such as with pastors - was also mentioned as a crucial tactic. This finding resonates with the findings of Neswiswa and Jacobs who reported that, if there is clear communication, open expression of emotions, and a willingness to solve problems together, marital resilience is promoted.⁴⁴ In other words, being open to discussion and being flexible in decision-making through effective communication facilitates resilience in the context of relationships.

It was also mentioned that one of the key elements that may strengthen marital resilience is deciding to keep things as they are and remain calm during arguments. This finding aligns with the existing literature. For instance, the findings of Sayehmiri et al., who studied the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction, indicated that agreeableness as a personality trait is positively associated with marital stability.⁴⁵ One explanation for this is that couples who choose to agree by choosing to leave things the way they tend to demonstrate empathy, kindness and mutual understanding, all of which are ingredients for marital resilience.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Kabaro Grace Neswiswa and Susanne Jacobs, "Towards the Development of Culturally Responsive Marriage Interventions: Traditional and Modern Perceptions," *Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work*, May 19, 2023, 1–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15313204.2023.2213907>.

⁴⁵ Kourosh Sayehmiri et al., "The Relationship between Personality Traits and Marital Satisfaction: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *BMC Psychology* 8, no. 1 (December 7, 2020): 15, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-020-0383-z>.

⁴⁶ Aydogan and Dincer, "Creating Resilient Marriage Relationships: Self-Pruning and the Mediation Role Sacrifice with Satisfaction."

In addition, participants in this study identified seeking pastoral counselling as another prominent strategy that enhances conflict management in Black African marriages. Pastors were considered to hold a high position in the family, like that of an elder. Not only is the pastor's role as a mediator valued, but their capacity to act as spiritual advocates are also recognised. For many of the research participants, the function of a pastor was associated with spirituality, which is part of the complexity of being human. This finding is in line with the historic notion that Black Africans are less likely to seek professional support and often rely on pastors and spiritual leaders for counselling and immediate support.⁴⁷

Lastly, this study found evidence that acting with humility has a positive effect on marital resilience. This may be because humble married couples are more satisfied, partly because they are better at repairing their relationships, and partly because they are more trusting of each other. In a similar study by Wang et al., humility was found to be a strong contributor to managing marital conflict.⁴⁸

RECOMMENDATIONS

Factors identified in this study may be helpful to add to the understanding of marital resilience. Therefore, the findings of this study may be useful in therapeutic work with couples. The factors that participants identified as vital in contributing towards their marital resilience may be helpful to add to the understanding of marital resilience and may be used to develop a strengths-based intervention program for couples in marital crises. Furthermore, the results of this study may be applied to programmes that prepare couples for marriage by assisting them in setting reasonable expectations before being married, something that would help them adjust to their new roles and strengthen their resilience. Couples must also ensure that they communicate well with each other and respect one another's differences so as to strengthen their marital relationship and lessen marital conflict.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the factors that have enabled Black African spouses to maintain their marital resilience. Communication was revealed as an important element in handling conflict in marriages and, as such, it is important for couples to note that conflicts should not be addressed when either of the parties is emotional - this is in order to avoid miscommunication. The practice of remaining silent during arguments has been shown to be beneficial in resolving marital problems, and couples employ it in particular when they wish to keep the conflict from getting worse. The positive influence of spiritual leaders in providing pastoral counselling that enhances conflict management was emphasised. The guidance that pastors provided was seen as very important in helping couples resolve conflict in the marriage. The experiences and opinions of the participants strongly agreed with the existing body of research on resilience-enhancing factors. It was intriguing to learn that while experiencing truly trying and trying times in their marriages, the participants had not sought out professional assistance through therapy. Rather, they utilised additional resources that were available to them. Communication was the most often chosen method among all the techniques employed to manage and resolve marital conflicts. Leaving things alone by opting to remain silent, staying humble, and seeking pastoral counselling also proved to be effective strategies. This serves to further emphasise the main theme made clear in the present study that, couples may overcome obstacles in their marriages by concentrating on their partners' strengths and making a concerted effort to build marital resilience in their unions.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The researchers declare that the research, authorship, and/or publication of this paper were conducted without any potential conflicts of interest.

⁴⁷ Andrew Spaumer, "Conflict Management in Black African Marriages in an Urban Context: An Exploratory Study" (University of Pretoria (South Africa), 2017).

⁴⁸ Frank Wang, Keith J Edwards, and Peter C Hill, "Humility as a Relational Virtue: Establishing Trust, Empowering Repair, and Building Marital Well-Being," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 36, no. 2 (2017): 168.

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