

24th June, 2026

INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND FAMILY INTEGRATION

RESEARCH REPORT

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF MARITAL PAIN-POINTS AND CHALLENGES OF COUPLES BELOW FIVE YEARS OF MARRIAGE RESIDING IN LAGOS AND IMO STATE

 INSTITUTE FOR
WORK & FAMILY
INTEGRATION

 **IWFI**
CHINYERE
DOZIE
MARITAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

FUNDED BY

Chinyere Dozie Marital
Development Centre

RESEARCHERS

Dr. Charles Aigbona
Dr. Victor Kolo
Michael Fasina

Table of Contents



01

Executive
Summary &
Message from
the Executive
Secretary

02

Who we are,
What we do
and How we do
it.

03

Marital Pain-
Points and
Challenges of
Couples
residing in
Lagos State

04

Marital Pain-
Points and
Challenges of
Couples
residing in Imo
State

05

Comparative
Analysis of the
Pain-Points and
Challenges of
Couples
residing in
Lagos State
with those in
Imo state

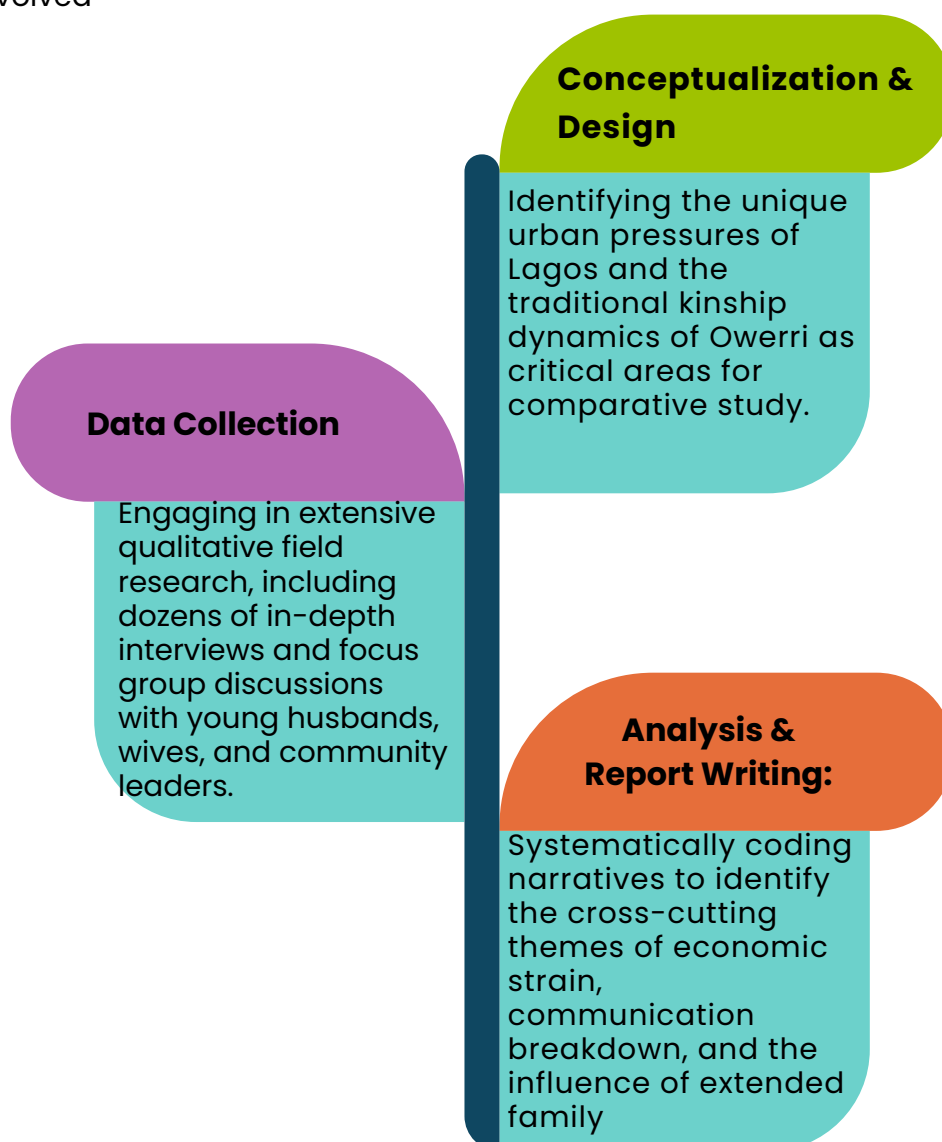
Executive Summary

& Message from the Executive Secretary

It is with a profound sense of purpose that I present this qualitative report, "**Pain-Points and Challenges in Marriage Among Couples Within 0–5 Years,**" focusing on the lived experiences of newlyweds in Lagos and Owerri. This research represents a significant milestone for the Institute for Work and Family Integration (IWFI). It was made possible through the dedicated funding provided by the endowment received for the establishment of our centre, reflecting our unwavering commitment to strengthening the foundational unit of society—the family.

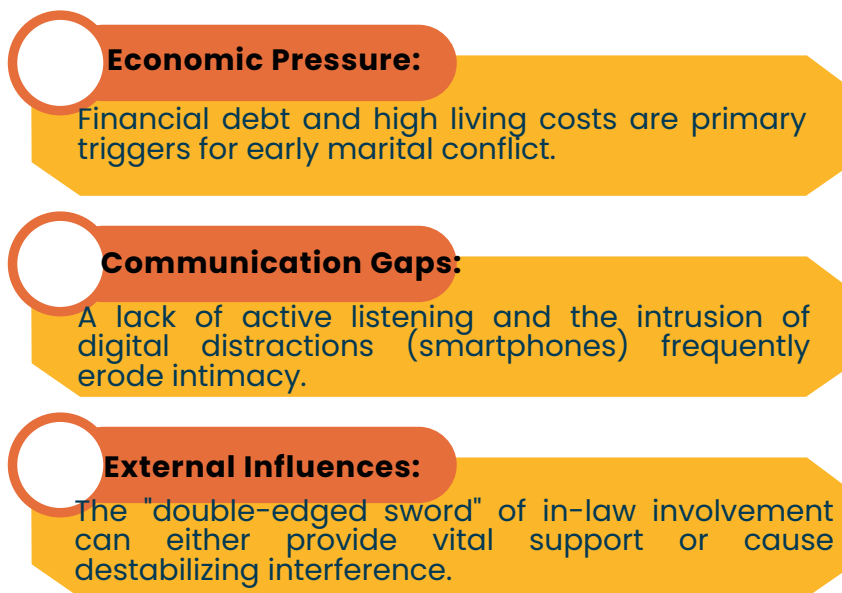
The Journey of Discovery (2023–2025)

This report is the culmination of a rigorous two-year work plan that began with the conceptualization of the study's framework. Our goal was to move beyond statistics and capture the authentic "voices" of couples navigating the delicate first five years of marriage. The process involved



Key Findings: A Call to Action

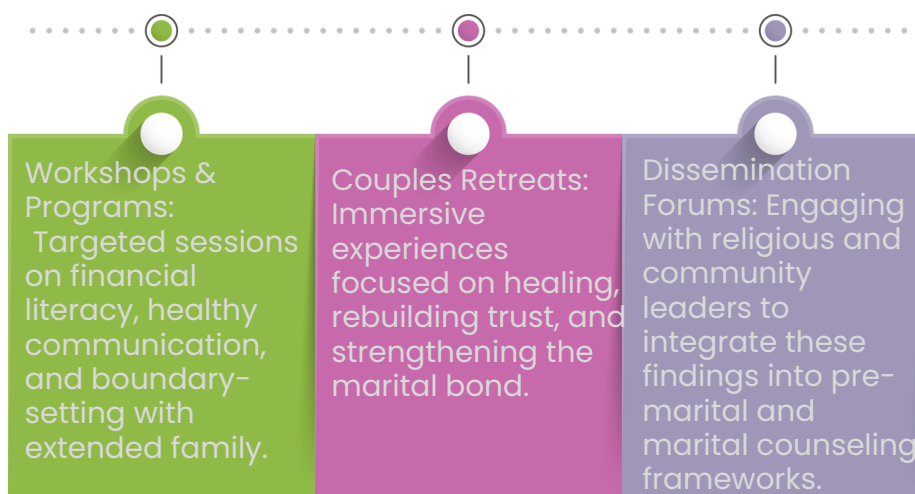
Our research highlights that while couples in both cities desire companionship and stability, they often lack the tools to manage modern stressors.



The Path Forward: From Research to Impact

This report is not merely an academic exercise; it is the first phase of a broader mission. Having identified these critical pain-points, the IWFI is now moving into the **dissemination and intervention** phase. Our ultimate aim is to make a tangible, positive impact on the lives of married couples across Nigeria.

In the coming years, the Institute will roll out a series of evidence-based interventions designed to resolve the issues identified in this study:



We invite you to engage with the findings of this report, as they provide the roadmap for building healthier, more resilient families and communities. Together, we can provide the support systems necessary to help young couples weather the early storms of matrimony and thrive.



Dr. Charles Aigbona,
Executive Secretary,
Institute for Work and Family Integration (IWFI)

The Institute for Work and Family Integration (IWFI) has been in operation for over fifteen years. Since the incorporation, it has enjoyed increased and widespread social impact through her research effort, interventions, and advocacy programs.

WHO WE ARE

The Institute for Work and Family Integration (IWFI) is a non-governmental – not for profit Organization (NGO) registered as a company limited by guarantee to provide solutions through research and advocacy to work and family conflicts created by the sociodemographic shifts, to create a better society.

Work and family integration as a concept is to enable the effective balance between Career and Family for a more fulfilling life, productive workforce, enhanced profitability of corporate organizations, and better education and training for future leaders, thereby positioning our society to play more competitively in the global community.

WHAT WE DO

As an institution, our activity starts with problem identification, research and investigation to identify the facts and design solutions in the form of programs, to teach and educate on strategies of overcoming the challenges and realizing the expected benefits. IWFI currently operates in Lagos State, Nigeria.

PRODUCTS/ SERVICE OFFERINGS

Our research provides solutions delivered as the following offerings

01

Corporate Family Responsibility
Index study and Award

02

Executive Teachers Programme in
Integral Education

03

Work-Life Integration Training

04

Marriage Counsellors Training
Programme

05

Married Couples Relationship
Programme (MCR);

06

Workplace Counselling for HR
Professionals

07

Work-Family Conference;
international Family Conference;

08

Customised Programmes for
companies and organizations

The Chinyere Dozie Marital Development Center is a unit of the Institute focused on the identification and provision of solutions to the challenges encountered by couples in the first five years of marriage.

WHO WE ARE

There is a current dearth of data on marital research in our country. The Centre conducts marital research. The data and findings from this research enable the Centre to seek interventions and provide solutions to sustain happiness in marriages. These interventions are delivered as programmes.

The Centre organizes an annual conference for a large group of couples. There are spinoffs from it in the form of short workshops for smaller groups which would empower participating couples to sustain happiness in their marriage.

To ensure and measure the efficacy of these interventions, there is an impact assessment conducted on all participants and beneficiaries of the programmes. The report of these findings assists in the continuous improvement of these programs' design, development, and delivery.

TARGET POPULATION

The Center focuses on couples in marriages under five years of age. The focus is on couples residing in Lagos and Owerri—locations that are central to the life history and experiences of Chinyere Dozie. Evidence suggests that the early years of marriage are especially formative, as they shape the foundations and long-term sustainability of marital relationships.

PROGRAMMES

01

Research: Conducts research into the challenges and pain points of 1 – 5 years' marriages.

02

Conference: Organizes an annual conference designed from the outcome of the research and proffering solutions and interventions. This reaches many attendees from around the world.

03

Workshops: Coordinates several workshops for couples during the year

04

Retreats: Couples' Retreat in Owerri and Lagos State.

INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND FAMILY INTEGRATION

RESEARCH REPORT

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
MARITAL PAIN-POINTS AND
CHALLENGES OF COUPLES
RESIDING IN LAGOS STATE

 INSTITUTE FOR
WORK & FAMILY
INTEGRATION

 **IWFI**
CHINYERE
DOZIE
MARITAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

FUNDED BY

Chinyere Dozie Marital
Development Centre

RESEARCHERS

Dr. Charles Aigbona

Dr. Victor Kolo

Michael Fasina

Table of Contents

Overview	9
Background & Context (Lagos Focus)	10
Methodology	11
Key Findings <i>Economic Pressure and Financial Strain</i> <i>Communication Breakdown and Conflict Resolution</i> <i>Trust Issues and Infidelity Fears</i> <i>Influence of In-Laws and Extended Family</i> <i>Gender Role Expectations and Power Dynamics</i> <i>Parenting and Family Planning Stress</i> <i>Conflict Management and Domestic Violence</i>	12
Cross-Cutting Observations	25
Implications & Recommendations	27
Conclusion	29

Overview

The Lagos qualitative study reveals that newly married couples (0–5 years) face a complex interplay of major marital challenges. Predominant stressors include economic pressures, such as unemployment and financial debt, breakdown in communication, trust issues often tied to infidelity, interference from in-laws, and conflicting expectations around gender roles and parenting.

Participants across multiple interviews and focus groups consistently voiced these pain-points, often illustrated by personal anecdotes. For example, one young wife explained that early on “they already have some financial debts that they need to pay... they will not really have time for each other”, highlighting how money troubles erode couple intimacy. Others noted that “most of the problem in relationship is communication” and a lack of trust – some husbands become “promiscuous... due to lack of trust, not having confidence in a wife” – undermines marital stability.

OTHER THEMES

Meanwhile, minor themes like social media influence and differences in upbringing also emerged, but to a lesser degree. Notably, key informants (e.g. community leaders and clergy) observed that modern couples are less prepared and less tolerant of hardship than previous generations, leading to early conflicts. Despite the challenges, many couples also described coping strategies (like joint problem-solving, prayer, and spousal support) that helped them navigate the early years.

POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS

The findings suggest an urgent need for strengthened premarital counseling focusing on realistic expectations and skill-building in communication, conflict resolution, financial planning, and boundary-setting with extended family.

Marriage support programs in Lagos should be tailored to address the identified dominant themes. By tackling these pain-points through targeted interventions (e.g. community workshops or faith-based counseling), stakeholders can bolster marital stability and reduce the risk of early divorce. The report that follows provides detailed thematic findings with participants’ voices, cross-cutting observations (gender, age, duration patterns), and recommendations for practitioners and program designers.

Background & Context

Lagos, as Nigeria's largest urban centre, presents a unique context for newlyweds. It is a fast-paced metropolis with high living costs and a mix of modern and traditional influences on family life.

Many young couples in Lagos enter marriage juggling careers, extended family expectations, and financial obligations. Culturally, marriage is highly valued, and there is social pressure to remain married despite difficulties. In fact, divorce rates in Nigeria have historically been very low due to stigma, though recent reports indicate a rise in marital breakdown among younger couples as social norms evolve. Key informants in the study noted a generational shift – unlike their parents, who *“had time plenty enough to prepare for [marriage]”* and were inclined to endure hardships, today's couples often face **early turbulence**. For example, a community elder observed that *“the problem we have in marriage is as a result of how we enter into marriage. People prepare for the marriage ceremony far more than they prepare for the marriage itself”*. This points to gaps in readiness and unrealistic expectations among new couples in Lagos.

This study specifically focused on marriages in their **first five years** in Lagos. The qualitative data come from interviews and group discussions conducted in the city, reflecting the voices of both husbands and wives from diverse backgrounds (varied ethnicities like Yoruba, Igbo, etc., as indicated by participants' self-reports) in urban Lagos. Importantly, Lagos's cosmopolitan environment means couples often contend with modern influences (e.g. social media, dual-career dynamics) alongside traditional family structures. Extended family involvement is typically strong in Nigerian marriages, and in Lagos the close proximity of relatives (or frequent contact by phone/social media) can amplify that influence. Overall, the context in Lagos for early marriage is one of high aspirations but also high pressure – couples strive for a “successful” marriage and upward mobility, yet they encounter economic strains, evolving gender norms, and the need to balance personal autonomy with family/community expectations.



Methodology

STUDY DESIGN & DATA

Accounts (especially participants' own words) were used as the primary basis for theme definition – ensuring the analysis stayed grounded in participant narratives. For instance, when multiple respondents independently described money-related stress, it solidified “economic pressure” as a major theme. Similarly, phrases like “we don’t communicate” or “if there is no trust...” signaled communication and trust issues as distinct themes, even if they often overlap.

Codes were organized into major themes (primary pain-points) and minor themes. For reliability.

All names used in the report are pseudonyms or generic labels (e.g. “Speaker 2, FGD Male”) to maintain confidentiality. We have preserved direct quotes to amplify participants’ voices, editing lightly for clarity where needed. Each quote is accompanied by a citation to the transcript (with line references) so readers can verify context.

The analysis prioritized qualitative depth – understanding how and why certain issues become pain-points – over any quantification. No software was explicitly mentioned, but the systematic manual coding ensured that salient patterns and outlier perspectives were captured. The findings below synthesize these themes, supported by verbatim quotes.

DATA COLLECTION



Interviews

Interviews were conducted in English (with occasional local phrases) by trained interviewers using a semi-structured guide. Participants were asked about challenges (“pain points”) in their marriage, how they handle conflicts, the influence of family, financial and communication issues, etc.



Focus Group Discussion

The focus groups provided interactive discussions where participants built on each other’s points, while the one-on-one IDIs and KIs provided more in-depth personal or expert perspectives. The context of each transcript is as follows: FGDs captured group dynamics among peers, IDIs captured personal narratives of husbands and wives in early marriage, and KIs captured observations from those with counseling or community roles regarding young couples.

ANALYTIC APPROACH:

We employed a **thematic analysis** to code the transcripts and identify key themes. The analyst read through each transcript line-by-line, coding text segments for recurrent topics related to marital strain. Initial codes were derived both from the research questions (e.g. “economic pressure,” “communication issues,” “trust/infidelity,” “extended family/in-laws,” “gender roles,” “parenting,” etc., as suggested) and from emergent patterns in the data (e.g. “adjustment to expectations,” “social media influence,” “religious coping”).

Key Findings

1. Economic Pressure and Financial Strain

Financial stress emerged as perhaps the most frequently mentioned challenge for newlyweds in Lagos. Many couples struggled with limited finances, unemployment, or the high cost of living, which in turn caused frustration and conflict. Participants explained that early marriage often comes with accumulated expenses (wedding costs, setting up a home) and sometimes debts. One young wife in a women's focus group described how starting married life without financial stability meant neglecting couple time: *"Once they marry and things did not quickly work well – the wife may have to relocate and not have a new job yet... they already have some financial debts that they need to pay. So, in that time... they will not really have time for each other"*. Here, she highlights how economic hustling to pay bills leaves little room for intimacy or leisure, an experience echoed by others.

"provide well and meet his responsibilities at home"

Husbands in particular felt pressure to fulfill the provider role. A male interviewee noted that a man's happiness in marriage is tied to meeting his financial obligations – when he can *"provide well and meet his responsibilities at home"*, he feels content, but failing to do so leads to anger and stress (IDI Mr. Akanji, Lagos). On the other hand, some wives also expressed concern when they had to shoulder more financial burden than expected

In one women's FGD, a participant half-jokingly said if her husband doesn't willingly give her money, *"I will still collect his money and chop it... Women don't like assisting, unlike the olden days"* (Women's FGD Lagos). This remark, though humorous, underscores a tension: modern wives may be less inclined to play the traditional supportive role in finance, expecting husbands to provide. Such mismatched expectations can breed resentment. Indeed, a male focus group discussed cases of **marrying for money** rather than love, which often backfires.

"I will still collect his money and chop it... Women don't like assisting, unlike the olden days"

"They can go into marriage without first loving that person [because of] money", one man observed, noting that these marriages lack a solid foundation and quickly sour if the wealth disappears (FGD Male). Overall, economic hardship (whether **unemployment, insufficient income, or debt**) was cited as a root cause of many arguments. Couples spoke of quarrels over meeting basic needs like food and rent.

A few even referenced folk wisdom that during a wife's pregnancy finances often tighten – *“when their wife was in pregnancy, things were tough and feeding seemed so difficult” (IDI Mr. Akanji)* – illustrating that Nigerians may attribute financial strain to life stages, almost as a test of the marriage.

“poverty can remove love from a marriage very quickly”

Despite the strain, some couples found ways to cope. A newlywed wife (IDI Eniola) mentioned she and her husband sat down to openly discuss budgeting and cut non-essentials when money was tight, which required good communication and teamwork. The consensus, however, is that **financial difficulties put young marriages under immense pressure**. If unresolved, money problems can cascade into other issues like loss of respect or even temptation to seek financial solace elsewhere.

“They can go into marriage without first loving that person [because of] money”

As one community elder succinctly put it, *“poverty can remove love from a marriage very quickly” (KII, Lagos Central)*. Thus, economic stability was seen not just as a practical necessity but as a foundation for marital happiness. Programs aimed at helping young couples **manage finances** (through financial literacy or temporary support) were implied as potential buffers against this prevalent pain-point.

2. Communication Breakdown and Conflict Resolution

Nearly every participant emphasised **communication** – or the lack thereof – as a key factor in marital success or strife. In fact, a marriage counsellor who was interviewed (Mr John) stated plainly: *“Communication... most of the problems in relationship is communication”*. Couples in their early years often struggle with communicating effectively about both trivial daily matters and deeper issues. Several anecdotes illustrate how small misunderstandings, left unresolved, snowball into major conflicts. One female participant explained that if there is no open dialogue, minor issues fester:

“If there is no communication inside marriage – you don’t communicate with your wife or you don’t tell [each other] things – then little issues will cause big problems”. This sentiment, shared in a women’s FGD, highlights that silence or poor listening can breed distrust and resentment.

“no third party, no bed angry”

Common communication breakdowns mentioned include **silent treatment**, raised voices, and assumptions without clarification. For example, *"I stopped talking to him for many days, I was just on my own,"* one wife admitted, describing how she initially handled a disagreement (IDI Madam Opeyemi). This kind of withdrawal, while a natural reaction for some, actually exacerbated the issue until she learned to re-engage in dialogue. Another interviewee confessed that as a newlywed, he struggled with *"listening to understand, instead of listening to reply"*, acknowledging that truly hearing one's spouse was a learned skill (IDI Desmond).

Indeed, both husbands and wives noted that **active listening and empathy** were often missing in their early conflicts. Without clear communication, **misinterpretations** arise – for instance, a husband in an IDI mentioned a case where his wife thought he was keeping late work hours to avoid her, when in reality he was trying to earn overtime pay to support the family. Such scenarios, if not talked through, created unnecessary suspicion.

"my husband will just sit down and be pressing his phone... while I'm talking"

The data also suggests that conflict resolution styles differ: some preferred cooling-off periods while others wanted immediate discussion. A focus group with men debated this – whether it is better to address issues "there and then" or give it a day. The consensus was that issues shouldn't be swept under the rug; as one man said,

"we agree that whenever we are having misunderstandings, we won't involve a third party and we'll sort it out before sleeping" (IDI Tolu). This "no third party, no bed angry" rule was seen as an ideal, though not always achieved. Notably, **trust and communication intertwine** – one woman argued that *"if there is no trust, if there is no communication, divorce is ahead of that marriage"*, implying that lack of honest communication signals an oncoming breakdown of the union.

"today people don't talk to each other, they go to their phones"

Importantly, many participants identified poor communication as a fixable problem. They shared how they learned to communicate better: through counselling sessions, religious teachings, or trial and error. For instance, a pastor key informant stressed teaching couples "communication skills" during premarital counselling, because *"today people don't talk to each other, they go to their phones"* (KII Pastor Akinola). In fact, a **modern twist** noted was technology distraction – spouses scrolling on smartphones instead of conversing, which some participants cited as a new communication barrier. In one FGD, a young wife complained, *"My husband will just sit down and be pressing his phone... while I'm talking", leading her to feel ignored until she loudly objected* (IDI Margie). Thus, **open, respectful communication** was both a challenge and a clear solution echoed by voices across the study. Those couples who managed to institute regular talking time, active listening, and gentle expression of grievances reported far fewer lingering conflicts

3. Trust Issues and Infidelity Fears

Trust within early marriage was another recurring theme, often connected to fears or instances of infidelity. While not every couple experienced actual infidelity, **suspicion and insecurity** were mentioned frequently, especially by women. Societal norms in the study area acknowledge men's extramarital affairs as a common issue – a topic discussed candidly in the male FGD. *"When we talk about infidelity in marriage, we're talking about the husband... being promiscuous, engaging in adultery maybe due to lack of trust, not having confidence in his wife, having another [woman] outside to satisfy his pleasure, which is wrong,"* one male participant explained. His explanation suggests that some husbands stray because of personal dissatisfaction or mistrust, even though he condemns the behavior as wrong. Women in the study often shared the flip side of this experience: the emotional toll of doubting a partner's fidelity or in some cases discovering flirtations. A few wives admitted checking their husbands' phones or social media, signifying underlying trust gaps.

A particularly striking perspective came from a young female interviewee ("Madam Tolu") who recounted advice she'd heard from others: *"A man can cheat outside, as long as they are not doing it to your face, as long as they are giving you what you need in the house".* This resigned viewpoint – essentially tolerating a husband's discreet infidelity if he remains a good provider – was brought up as an example of what some women are told. It highlights a troubling double standard normalized in the community: women are expected to be faithful, but men's cheating is sometimes excused as long as domestic duties are met.

Tolu disagreed with this notion (as do many younger women), but it reveals the societal pressure on wives to endure and "ignore" infidelity rather than confront it. In fact, she noted that *"we live in a patriarchal society... they [men] will feel like it is okay"* for them to have affairs, whereas a woman doing the

"A man can cheat outside, as long as they are not doing it to your face, as long as they are giving you what you need in the house".

same would be harshly judged. Such asymmetry in expectations is a source of conflict; several women in both FGDs and IDIs expressed that **lack of trust and suspected infidelity were major pain-points** that caused emotional distress early in marriage.

"we live in a patriarchal society... they [men] will feel like it is okay"

Men, on their part, also voiced trust-related issues, though often differently framed. A few husbands worried about wives being overly influenced by friends or social media, or handling money secretly – essentially financial infidelity. One husband gave the example that *“when a woman does not trust the husband, she won’t be contributing her*

money to any of his cause”, perhaps hiding her income. This indicates that trust deficits can lead to secret-keeping around finances as well. Key informants pointed out that many trust issues arise because couples do not **“truly know each other”** before marriage (KII Engr. Okeowo) – e.g. they might hide past relationships or debt, which later, when revealed, seeds doubt.

“If there’s no trust, every little outing or phone call becomes a fight. You have to be open; otherwise, peace will just vanish”

The **impacts of trust issues** were clearly negative: participants described frequent accusations, emotional abuse (in the form of name-calling or monitoring behaviors), and even temporary separations spurred by jealousy. However, the data also contained positive notes – instances where couples rebuild trust. Some sought help from religious or community counselors when infidelity happened, and a few wives spoke of “forgiving and starting afresh” after a breach of trust for the sake of their marriage. The general sentiment though is that trust is fragile in early marriage: it has to be actively built and reinforced through transparency and keeping one’s word. As one respondent wisely noted, *“If there’s no trust, every little outing or phone call becomes a fight. You have to be open; otherwise, peace will just vanish”* (IDI Mary). Therefore, addressing trust issues – by honest communication, setting boundaries (e.g. limiting late nights out with friends), and perhaps involving a neutral mentor when suspicion arises – was deemed critical by the study participants.

4. Influence of In-Laws and Extended Family

The **involvement of extended family**, particularly in-laws, in the couple’s affairs was identified as a double-edged sword. On one hand, supportive in-laws can provide guidance and material help to young couples; on the other, intrusive or hostile in-laws were described as a major “pain-point” that could destabilize a marriage. Many participants – especially women – recounted challenges with their spouse’s family. A poignant saying came from one female interviewee who stressed the power

of in-laws: *“If a man should marry a bad woman but have good in-laws, the marriage can still work; but... if the in-laws are not good, even a good woman will have problems”*. This captures the sentiment that the behavior of parents-in-law (and siblings-in-law) can make or break a marriage in these early years. Several wives felt judged or pressured by their husband’s mother in particular. Common frictions included: criticism of the wife’s homemaking or child-rearing, demands for frequent visits or grandchild bearing, and, in some cases,

attempts by in-laws to control the couple's decisions (such as where to live or how to spend money).

"Your mother said this to me and you did nothing!"

One illustrative example involved household roles: "If the husband is cooking and then the mother [in-law] thinks that it should be the wife doing it, the husband should be able to protect the wife – say the wife is busy or she needs her rest even if she's not doing anything". This was shared by a woman who experienced her mother-in-law disapproving that her son was helping in the kitchen. She emphasized that it was crucial for the husband to stand up for his wife in such scenarios, to set boundaries with his own family.

Indeed, many wives in the study longed for their husbands to take their side and **"shield" them from negative in-law interference**. When that defense was lacking, women felt exposed and helpless, which led to marital fights (e.g. "Your mother said this to me, and you did nothing!"). Men also acknowledged this issue; one husband noted he had to gently remind his mother that "she [my wife] is whom I chose, please respect our space" (IDI Eniola's husband, as relayed by her).

"If a man should marry a bad woman but have good in-laws, the marriage can still work; but... if the in-laws are not good, even a good woman will have problems".

Another area of tension was **decision-making** and the flow of information. Some participants, like a Lagos pastor (key informant), advised couples to keep family out of their conflicts: *“Don’t run to your people or her people at every quarrel”*, warning that too much external input can worsen matters. However, this is challenging in practice because Nigerian families are traditionally close-knit. A few transcripts mentioned mothers-in-law moving in or visiting for extended periods after the wedding, which, if boundaries and ground rules weren’t clear, led to power struggles. For instance, one couple had the wife’s mother-in-law stay with them immediately after marriage; the wife felt constantly scrutinized in her own home and this eroded her confidence until her husband intervened to set limits on the stay (IDI anonymized).

“Don’t run to your people or her people at every quarrel”

Not all in-law interactions were negative. There were accounts of **supportive in-laws** – a husband in the male FGD shared how his own mother gave the couple wise counsel and never took sides unjustly, which he believed “saved” his marriage from early

stumbles. But participants tended to bring up in-laws mostly when things went wrong. A female focus group participant lamented how some mothers-in-law *“still see their sons as babies and won’t let go”*, trying to run the household by proxy. In a few extreme narratives, in-laws directly instigated conflict: one woman claimed her sister-in-law was feeding her husband lies about her, attempting to break them up out of jealousy.

“still see their sons as babies and won’t let go”

In summary, **extended family influence is a major theme in Lagos marriages**. Good in-laws act as a blessing, while difficult in-laws present a significant stressor. The successful couples learned to **unite as a team** and communicate openly with their families about boundaries. As one respondent advised, *“Husband and wife must be on the same page so outsiders (even family) cannot divide them” (FGD Male)*. This united front, though sometimes hard to achieve early on, was seen as the key to managing extended family dynamics.

5. Gender Role Expectations and Power Dynamics

Conflicting expectations about **gender roles** – what a husband or wife “should” do in the marriage – were a root of many disagreements. The Lagos participants are navigating a mix of traditional norms and modern values. Traditionally, a husband is expected to be the head of the family and primary breadwinner, and the wife to be the

homemaker and caregiver. While many still subscribe to this, a number of voices in the study advocated for a more egalitarian approach, which sometimes led to tension either within the couple or with older family members.

On one side, **traditional views** were clearly articulated, especially by some male participants and older female participants. In the men's FGD, one man insisted that a wife must *"submit as if she agreed to marry the man by herself"* – essentially emphasizing that by choosing to marry, a woman has implicitly agreed to cede leadership to her husband. This idea of "submission" came up repeatedly. Some husbands felt their wives were not as submissive or respectful as they expected, using words like "stubborn" or "too independent" to describe conflicts.

From the women's side, there were also endorsements of the husband's authority; for example, a female interviewee acknowledged that *"yes, [husbands] are still the head... but there are some things you can share with your wife"*. Her statement reflects a nuanced view: she affirms the culturally accepted notion of the man as head of the household, yet she calls for shared decision-making in some areas. This encapsulates a common compromise position among younger couples – recognizing male leadership but expecting husbands to consult and involve their wives rather than unilaterally dictating.

"We do market runs together... we prepare the meal together and this actually helps us [a lot]"

Areas of role contention included **household chores, decision-making, and income-earning responsibilities**. Wives in the study frequently desired help with chores and childcare, especially if they themselves were employed. Several women noted that *"these days both husband and wife work, so it is only fair to share house duties."* Indeed, a positive example came from one couple: *"We do market runs together... we prepare the meal together and this actually helps us [a lot]" (IDI Eniola)* – a young wife praised her husband for being willing to cook and shop for groceries with her, which not only eased her burden but became a bonding activity. However, not all husbands were on board with such arrangements. Some men (and older generation family members) saw a man doing "women's work" as improper.

As mentioned in the in-law section, one mother-in-law scolded her son for cooking, implying the wife was failing her role. In the male FGD, participants debated the concept of "helping" one's wife; a few younger men felt it was normal and loving to assist, but one or two others laughed that *"if you do everything, she will make you the wife!"*, revealing the lingering stigma attached to men doing domestic tasks.

"if you do everything, she will make you the wife!"

Another facet is **financial roles**: traditionally, a wife is expected to defer to the husband's decisions on money, but many modern wives in Lagos have their own careers and income. This led to friction when husbands expected to control all finances. A key informant (KII Isaac) noted that disagreements on *"who handles the money"* have become common, whereas in the past it was automatically the man.

One focus group scenario described a wife earning more than her husband, which caused a power struggle until they learned to budget jointly without ego. Ego and pride were frequently cited – e.g. a husband not wanting his wife to appear to be “in charge,” and a wife not wanting to be treated as inferior. In one interview, a working woman said, “I submit to him as my husband, but I’m not a servant. I told him we should run the home together”, capturing the desire for partnership over patriarchy.

“these days both husband and wife work, so it is only fair to share house duties.”

Notably, religion and personal convictions played a role in how couples negotiated gender expectations. Some Christian participants referenced Biblical roles (husband as head, wife as helpmate) yet also highlighted the need for love and sacrifice on both sides which implies some egalitarian practice. In at least two transcripts, couples mentioned that they **sat down to explicitly discuss roles** early in marriage – for instance, who will cook on weekdays, who manages which bills, etc. Those who had this conversation seemed to fare better, as they aligned expectations. Conversely, those who assumed roles based on their upbringing often clashed (for example, one wife expected her husband would handle all “men’s tasks” like car repairs and bills as her father did, but her husband expected her to contribute equally since she worked; this mismatch led to multiple fights in their first year).

“I submit to him as my husband, but I’m not a servant. I told him we should run the home together”,

In summary, **gender role negotiation is a critical theme** for young Lagosian couples. The study shows a spectrum from strictly traditional arrangements to fully flexible ones, with many couples struggling in the middle. The key pain-points are feelings of inequity or disrespect: husbands feeling their authority is challenged, and wives feeling their contributions or capabilities are undervalued. Encouraging open conversations and **agreements on role-sharing** was a clear takeaway, as was the importance of outside guidance – several participants said counseling helped them find a balance that works for them (neither defaulting blindly to tradition nor causing continual power struggles).

6. Parenting and Family Planning Stress

Although most participants were in the **early stage of family life**, issues related to children – both having them and raising them – featured as minor but notable themes. Many couples either had infants/toddlers or were planning to have children, and this brought its own set of challenges. One significant issue was the **pressure to conceive quickly**. In Nigerian culture, it is expected that a couple will have a child within a year or two of marriage. Key informant Rev. Omisakin pointed out that *“if they cannot conceive on time, it causes problem in the marriage”*. Several interviewees echoed this, describing the anxiety and tension that mounted each month without a pregnancy. A wife who had been married two years with no child mentioned feeling *“worried and also pressured by my in-laws’ subtle comments”*. This aligns with the influence of extended family – childlessness (even short-term) often invites unwanted advice or interference from relatives, adding stress to the couple’s relationship. Thankfully, some couples sought constructive help: one woman shared that she and her husband joined a prayer group for couples *“looking for the fruit of the womb,”* which provided emotional support until they conceived (Interview with Oyenike).

For those who **had a new baby**, the transcripts indicate adjustments that sometimes led to conflict. Late-night infant care, medical expenses, and shifting attention were common strain points. One husband candidly admitted feeling a bit neglected when the baby came, saying *“all her attention went to the baby, I felt invisible and started going out more”* (IDI Desmond).

His comment highlights how miscommunicated feelings during the postpartum period can lead to withdrawal or misbehavior. Wives, on the other hand, often felt overwhelmed juggling motherhood and spousal duties. In one FGD, women talked about **postpartum mood swings and fatigue**, and how a lack of help from husbands made them resentful. *“Sometimes I’m so tired, I start feeling headache... My husband will just sit and press phone,”* one new mother complained (IDI Margie) – tying into both communication and role-sharing issues, as she needed practical help and empathy.

“all her attention went to the baby, I felt invisible and started going out more”

Another parenting-related friction is **discipline and child-rearing approaches**. While most couples in the sample had very young children, a few instances arose of disagreement over how to raise them or who gets a say. One illustrative (and somewhat humorous) anecdote was shared by a woman who had a stepson from her husband’s side: she told her husband’s relatives *“you can’t beat my child... if you don’t have your own child, you don’t discipline mine”*.

This was in response to a sister-in-law trying to scold the child. The remark *“I hate outsiders in my marriage”* also came up (by a woman referencing not involving even a pastor in family issues), which extends to child discipline – essentially, young couples want to assert their own methods without extended family dictating. Such scenarios, while not universal, show how parenting can become a locus of conflict especially when extended family chimes in or if spouses were raised with very different discipline philosophies.

“worried and also pressured by my in-laws’ subtle comments”

Family planning decisions (when to have kids, how many) were another subtle point of contention. A few respondents mentioned that economic pressure made them want to delay having a second child but faced pushbacks from elders who expect multiple children in quick succession. One man noted that after their first baby, he wanted to wait a few years, but *“my father kept asking when the next one is coming – he didn’t understand our financial situation”*. These external expectations sometimes caused the couple to quarrel among themselves or with their parents.

“my father kept asking when the next one is coming – he didn’t understand our financial situation”.

In conclusion, while parenting and child-related issues were not as dominant as finance or communication in the data (given many were either childless or new parents), they still surfaced as **stress factors**. The ability of a couple to act as a unified team in family planning and parenting – deciding privately how to manage fertility and how to raise any children – was linked to better outcomes. When they lacked unity, outside voices or personal differences could create rifts. Early marriage programs could thus include content on **planning for children and co-parenting strategies**, as participants themselves suggested that knowing what to expect (sleepless nights, changed couple dynamics) and agreeing on parenting roles would reduce conflicts down the line.

“I hate outsiders in my marriage”

7. Conflict Management and Domestic Violence

A sobering theme that emerged at the intersection of communication, trust, and roles was the presence of **conflict and, in some cases, domestic violence**. Many participants described heated arguments in their early marriages – some confined to verbal fights, and a few alluding to physical altercations. There was a clear gender difference in discussing this: women tended to imply or gently reference instances of husbands “misbehaving” (a euphemism that could include violence) whereas men spoke more generally about conflict or, conversely, about preventing violence.

In the men’s FGD, participants acknowledged that in earlier generations, it was not uncommon for a husband to physically discipline his wife, and that some men still carry that mindset. One man gave a stark example, saying some men think they can *“beat [their] wife like an animal... because [they] know [their] wife would not divorce [them].”* He quickly contrasted that with today’s reality: *“but these days, if you pass your boundary, we have laws to check [it].”* His statement recognizes both the unfortunate occurrence of wife-beating and the positive development that legal and social changes in Lagos now hold men accountable (e.g. domestic violence laws, police intervention). Indeed, the group agreed that the **fear of legal repercussions** is now a deterrent against violent abuse in marriage, marking a shift from the past when such matters were considered private. This indicates increasing awareness and intolerance of domestic violence in the community.

From the women’s side, there was an interesting mix of acknowledging the issue but also advising **de-escalation strategies** to avoid provoking husbands. In a women’s FGD, one participant made a controversial remark: *“Some men don’t naturally beat, but by the time the woman would just talk off point – because she didn’t study the mood and the man is coming with a lot of problems – the man will misbehave, and it is not his usual habit.”* What she describes is a scenario where a normally non-violent man, under stress, lashes out physically or verbally because his wife pressed the wrong buttons at the wrong time. She implies that if the wife had “studied [her] husband’s mood” and held back at that moment, the incident might have been avoided. This perspective sheds light on how some women rationalize or try to prevent domestic conflict: essentially by tiptoeing around the husband when he is angry. While it is practical advice to be

“beat [their] wife like an animal... because [they] know [their] wife would not divorce [them].”

sensitive to one's spouse's mood, it also sadly normalizes the idea that a man's violence is a momentary 'misbehavior' caused by provocation, rather than something unacceptable outright. It shows the enduring influence of patriarchal norms – where women bear the responsibility of keeping the peace, even to the point of self-censoring to avoid being hit.

However, not all women accepted this passively. Other female participants advocated for **speaking out and seeking help** if violence occurs. One interviewee shared that after a severe incident of her husband beating her, she involved a pastor and a counselor, which led her husband to apologize and attend anger management sessions. The **role of religious and community leaders** in mediating conflicts was noted: people tend to reach out to them before even considering police or legal action. There were success stories where timely intervention and frank conversations stopped the cycle of violence early in the marriage. Additionally, a key informant (Kil Balogun) mentioned that NGOs and seminars in Lagos are educating couples on peaceful conflict resolution, which some participants had attended.

Beyond physical violence, **emotional abuse** was also mentioned: insults during fights, threats of divorce as manipulation, or a spouse destroying property in anger. A young man admitted that in a rage he once smashed a phone and pushed his wife; he was filled with remorse afterward and realized he needed to control his temper (IDI Tolu's husband). Such reflections indicate that with awareness and perhaps training, many do want to avoid abusive patterns.

“Some men don't naturally beat, but by the time the woman would just talk off point – because she didn't study the mood and the man is coming with a lot of problems – the man will misbehave, and it is not his usual habit.”

In conclusion, conflict is inevitable, but the **management of conflict** is a critical difference-maker in marital quality. The Lagos study indicates that while outright domestic violence is increasingly condemned, subtle forms of coercion or the attitudes enabling violence still exist. Couples who established ground rules like “no shouting, no insults” during calm moments fared better when disputes arose. The data suggest promoting healthy conflict resolution skills (cool-down periods, using “I” statements, involving neutral mediators when needed) and reinforcing that under no circumstances is violence an acceptable solution. As one participant wisely noted, “*once there is physical assault, the trust is broken and fear enters the home*”, something very hard to reverse. Thus, early intervention and education in this area are paramount.

Cross-Cutting Observations

Analyzing the narratives across different **genders, ages, and marital durations** reveals several patterns:

GENDER DIFFERENCE

While men and women largely identified the same set of issues (money, communication, etc.), their perspectives and emphasis differed. Men in this Lagos sample often emphasized respect and the maintenance of their traditional role. Many husbands were troubled by what they perceived as challenges to their authority or instances of “disrespect.” For example, husbands expected to be consulted on decisions and sometimes felt slighted if wives acted independently.

Men also spoke frequently about the pressure to provide financially; failing in this role affected their self-esteem and could cause them to withdraw or lash out. In contrast, women put more emphasis on emotional needs and partnership. Wives talked about wanting their husbands to listen to them, spend quality time, and share responsibilities. They were more likely to bring up issues of feeling lonely in marriage (when communication failed) or feeling unsupported (when husbands didn’t help with chores or childcare). Women also more frequently mentioned in-law problems, likely because mother-in-law vs. daughter-in-law tensions are common.

Additionally, when discussing infidelity, women tended to be on the hurt/concerned side of the equation, whereas men discussed it more abstractly or from the standpoint of temptation they face. Despite these differences, it is notable that **both genders valued communication and trust** – those were universally seen as non-negotiable foundations for the marriage. Both husbands and wives also used faith as a coping mechanism (e.g. praying together or individually about their marital problems) – a reflection of the generally religious milieu in Lagos.

AGE AND LIFE STAGE

The participants ranged in age (some as young as mid-20s, some in their 40s who married later in life). Interestingly, **age at marriage sometimes influenced expectations**. Younger couples (e.g. two 25-year-olds married for 2 years) more often mentioned adjusting from a carefree single life to the responsibilities of marriage. Their conflicts sometimes stemmed from immaturity – a few admitted they initially handled arguments childishly (storming out, sulking) and had to learn maturity. In contrast, older newlyweds (e.g. a 47-year-old woman in an FGD who married recently) brought a different perspective: they had personal independence and life experience that could either help or clash. For instance, that 47-year-old wife said she was used to running her own life and found it challenging to suddenly “submit” to a husband, leading to power tussles.

However, she also had more financial stability and patience, which younger couples lacked. The **presence of children** is another life-stage factor: those who already had a child (or expecting) experienced additional stressors and a shift in couple dynamics, whereas childless couples focused more on each other.

One cross-cutting observation is that **couples in the first year** of marriage often reported “teething problems” – learning to live together, surprise at each other’s habits – whereas those around **3–5** years into marriage spoke more about external pressures like finances and kids. This suggests a possible timeline: initial adjustments give way to practical life stresses as time progresses.

MARITAL DURATION & ADAPTATION

All couples were within five years of marriage, but even within that, time had an effect. A pattern emerged where the **first 1-2 years** were the rockiest for many, with frequent conflicts as partners learned to adjust. By the **third to fifth year**, some couples had found a rhythm and reported fewer clashes over the earlier issues. For instance, one husband who at year one fought weekly with his wife over chores, said by year four they had fallen into a workable division of labor and understood each other's cues better, reducing fights significantly (IDI Okeowo, Lagos).

Those who did not adapt by this stage often had sought external help or, in a few cases, contemplated separation. A notable cross-cutting trend was that couples who underwent **premarital counselling or early marital counseling** navigated challenges more smoothly. At least three interviewees referenced counseling (often faith-based) that taught them skills like budgeting as a team or communicating feelings, which they applied and found helpful. Meanwhile, couples without such guidance seemed to take longer to figure things out, accumulating more "scars" from conflict in the process.

COPING & SUPPORT SYSTEMS

A positive cross-cutting observation is that many participants, regardless of gender or age, acknowledged the value of **external support systems**. Be it a trusted mentor couple, a family elder, or professional counselor, having someone to guide them was crucial.

Men tended to turn to older male relatives or friends for advice (one man mentioned an uncle who intervened when he was considering leaving). Women often turned to their mothers or sisters, though carefully – as one said, *"I only tell my mother things when I need advice, not to bad-mouth my husband"*. Both husbands and wives valued advice from happily married people they knew. This suggests that young couples are open to learning and adjusting; they do not actually want their marriages to fail and will seek help when it is available and stigma-free.

CULTURAL & RELIGIOUS FACTORS

Although not a formal comparison group, it is clear that shared cultural background and religion acted as both a glue and a stressor. Almost all participants were Nigerians living in Lagos, with a majority being Yoruba (given references to Yoruba states) and Christians (many mentions of church, pastors). Shared faith provided a framework for conflict resolution – e.g. couples praying together when issues arose, or seeking counsel from church leaders rather than immediately resorting to secular interventions.

This was cross-cutting in that both younger and older couples leaned on religious principles (for instance, the idea of the husband's headship balanced by love, or the exhortation against divorce). At the same time, strict religious or cultural expectations sometimes added pressure – such as the stigma against divorce compelling some to endure more than they should, or the expectation to have children immediately because "children are the heritage of the Lord". Essentially, the **Lagos context of strong family ties and religious community** was a backdrop to all these marriages, influencing behaviors across the board.

In summary, the cross-cutting analysis indicates that while **each couple's story is unique, common threads run through**. Regardless of background, newlyweds in Lagos confront a core set of challenges and gradually learn (or sometimes fail to learn) how to manage them.

Gender socialization impacts how they perceive and tackle these issues, age and maturity influence their approach, and the duration together gradually builds understanding. Recognizing these patterns can help tailor interventions – for instance, knowing that year one is especially volatile or that men might hesitate to seek help unless it is through a male-friendly channel (like a men's fellowship at church), whereas women might benefit from female support groups.

Implications & Recommendations

Based on the above findings, several **actionable recommendations** can be made for counselors, community program designers, and policymakers in Lagos looking to strengthen young marriages:

PREMARITAL AND EARLY-MARRIAGE COUNSELING

Develop and promote comprehensive counseling programs that cover the “big five” themes – **money management, communication skills, conflict resolution, expectations about sex/fidelity, and handling extended family**. The study shows couples are often unprepared in these areas. Counselors (whether religious or secular) should use real-life scenarios (like those from this study) to help couples plan: e.g. making a joint budget, practicing how to have a difficult conversation, or role-playing how to respectfully say “no” to an in-law. Equipping couples **before or soon after the wedding** can prevent many of the issues from spiraling.

FINANCIAL LITERACY AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT

Given the prominence of economic strain, integrate financial planning modules into marriage programs. Teach couples basic budgeting, saving, and transparent financial communication (so trust is maintained even if money is tight). Community development programs or NGOs in Lagos might also offer **joint livelihood projects or microfinance** targeted at young couples – helping them start small businesses or access loans with counseling on repayment. When couples are financially steadier, they reported significantly fewer conflicts.

COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION WORKSHOPS

Create short workshops or “marriage enrichment” retreats focusing just on communication techniques (active listening, using “I feel” statements, etc.) and conflict de-escalation. These could be hosted by workplaces (for employees and their spouses) or local religious centers. Since technology distraction was noted, include guidance on **managing device use** – e.g. agreeing on no phones during dinner – to improve communication. Teaching couples how to argue fairly (no insults, no physical force) and to seek time out instead of letting things get abusive is key. Emphasize that **domestic violence is not acceptable** and provide information on legal protections and hotlines in Lagos for anyone feeling threatened.

STRENGTHENING SUPPORT NETWORKS:

Establish peer support groups – for example, a monthly young couples forum where couples can share experiences and mentor each other. Hearing that others face similar issues can normalize their challenges and allow exchange of solutions. In particular, involve **experienced older couples** (who have a healthy marriage) as mentors. Several participants benefited from advice of elders; formalizing this (through church “mentorship families” or community assigned mentors) could give couples a go-to person before issues become crises.

IN-LAW/FAMILY BOUNDARY SETTING

Since extended family interference is a big pain-point, programs can also target the in-laws themselves. For instance, community leaders or religious institutions might hold seminars for parents of married children, educating them on giving the couple space and respecting boundaries. Encourage couples to **present a united front** kindly but firmly to their families – perhaps even a session where a counselor mediates a conversation between a couple and an in-law to negotiate boundaries (for example, how often parents can visit, or not undermining the couple's decisions with grandchildren). Additionally, counselors should coach couples in assertive communication strategies specifically for in-law situations (as one wife said, the husband defending the wife is crucial).

ADDRESSING TRUST AND INFIDELITY PREVENTION

Encourage open discussions about expectations around fidelity before problems occur. Counseling should invite couples to frankly talk about what they consider cheating and set boundaries (e.g. social media behavior, opposite-sex friendships). Given the societal normalization of male infidelity, public health or faith-based campaigns in Lagos could promote fidelity as achievable and desirable, perhaps by featuring male figures who are proud to be faithful. Also, improving communication and emotional intimacy in marriage (previous recommendations) indirectly helps “affair-proof” the relationship. Where infidelity has happened, provide confidential couple therapy options to help rebuild trust if the couple chooses to reconcile, rather than leaving them to navigate the pain alone or rely on potentially biased family input.

GENDER ROLE FLEXIBILITY INITIATIVES

To address the tug-of-war on roles, community programs (and media campaigns) can promote the idea of “shared roles = shared happiness.” Highlight stories of couples who successfully share chores, and both contribute economically and at home. Men's groups can encourage husbands to be proud of supporting their wives (whether it is cooking occasionally or taking care of kids), and women's groups can discuss balancing respect with assertiveness. Basically, creating a narrative that helping each other is modern and loving, not an affront to tradition. This could gradually reduce stigma and frustration around changing gender norms.

PARENTAL EDUCATION FOR NEW PARENTS

Since parenting stress does arise early, clinics or community centers could offer **“new parent” classes** for couples. This can cover managing fatigue, sharing baby duties, and keeping the marriage relationship healthy post-baby. Emphasize cooperation and understanding that both may be stressed. Normalizing seeking help (like asking a trusted relative to babysit so the couple can have a break/night out) can also alleviate pressure. For family planning, couples should be counseled together on making mutual decisions and presenting a united response to outsiders who push them, which might involve politely telling in-laws **“We're working on it in our own time.”**

MARRIAGE AND WORK- LIFE BALANCE POLICIES

Employers and policymakers in Lagos could also take note. Work pressures were mentioned as contributing to lack of time together. Employers might institute family-friendly policies – reasonable work hours, perhaps occasional family days – acknowledging that stable home lives contribute to employee productivity. Government or NGOs could organize public awareness on the importance of husbands and wives making time for each other despite hustling for money, tying it to mental health and societal well-being.

LEVERAGING RELIGIOUS PLATFORMS

Given the influence of religion in participants' lives, churches and mosques in Lagos are key venues for these recommendations. They can integrate modules on marriage in premarital classes that cover the specific issues found (finances, communication, etc.), not just generic teachings. Pastors and imams can also periodically check in with newlyweds in their congregation, providing a safe space to talk about issues before they explode. Moreover, religious leaders should be trained (if not already) on spotting signs of abuse and not simply advising endurance in harmful situations – a critical point since some women may first confide in them if there's violence.

By implementing such multi-faceted interventions, the common pain-points identified in this study can be proactively addressed. The goal is to **foster resilience in young marriages** – helping couples in Lagos develop the skills and support networks to weather their early marital storms. Over time, this can contribute to lower rates of marital breakdown and happier family units, which benefits the community at large.

Conclusion

The qualitative analysis of Lagos early-marriage narratives paints a vivid picture of the **trials and triumphs** that characterize the first five years of matrimony in this urban Nigerian context. Despite individual differences, couples overwhelmingly grapple with a shared set of core issues: money, communication, trust, family interference, gender roles, and the transition to parenting. These pain-points, as expressed in participants' own voices, often intersect – a financial crunch can spark communication breakdown; an overbearing in-law can test a wife's trust in her husband's support; rigid gender expectations can inflame conflicts around money and chores. Yet, the study also highlights the adaptive capacity of couples. Many learn and grow over time, especially when they utilize communication and seek help. As one young husband wisely reflected after navigating numerous quarrels, *"we keep learning each other, and it gets better if you don't give up."*

"we keep learning each other, and it gets better if you don't give up."

In Lagos, where cultural and economic currents are changing the landscape of marriage, the insights from this research are particularly valuable. They underscore that early interventions – be it through counseling, community engagement, or policy support – can make a significant difference in marital outcomes. Strengthening marriages is not just about preventing divorce (which is still relatively uncommon and stigmatized), but about improving the quality of life for couples and any children they may have. Happier, stable marriages contribute to better mental health, more secure children, and a more productive society.

In closing, the Lagos newlyweds who lent their stories to this study teach us that while early marriage is challenging, it also presents an opportunity: patterns set in these first years often become the blueprint for the future. By identifying major and minor pain-points through a thematic lens, we can better support couples in laying a strong foundation. As the participants themselves frequently noted, "with God, understanding, and patience, we can overcome" – a hopeful note that, alongside the recommended practical steps, suggests young marriages in Lagos can indeed thrive despite the odds. The journey from "I do" to enduring love is fraught with difficulties but navigable with the right tools and support, as evidenced by these authentic Lagos voices.

INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND FAMILY INTEGRATION

RESEARCH REPORT

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF
MARITAL PAIN-POINTS AND
CHALLENGES OF COUPLES
RESIDING IN IMO STATE(OWERRI)

 INSTITUTE FOR
WORK & FAMILY
INTEGRATION

 IWFI
CHINYERE
DOZIE
MARITAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

FUNDED BY

Chinyere Dozie Marital
Development Centre

RESEARCHERS

Dr. Charles Aigbona
Dr. Victor Kolo
Michael Fasina

Table of Contents

Overview	32
Background & Context (Owerri)	33
Methodology	34
Key Findings	35
<i>Financial Pressure and Economic Hardship</i> <i>Communication Breakdown and Conflict Resolution</i> <i>Trust Issues and Infidelity</i> <i>Extended Family Influence and External Pressure</i> <i>Gender Role Expectations and Power Dynamics</i> <i>Parenting Challenges and Childbearing Issues</i> <i>Domestic Violence and Abuse</i>	
Cross-Cutting Observations	43
Implications & Recommendations	45
Conclusion	49

Overview

This report presents a comprehensive qualitative analysis of marital pain-points as expressed by participants in Owerri (Imo State) interview transcripts. Using thematic analysis of 30 transcripts (focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews), we identified major challenges in marriage, including **financial pressures, communication breakdown, trust issues (infidelity), extended family interference, gender role conflicts, parenting and childbearing stress, and domestic violence.**

Participants' narratives reveal that economic hardship and unemployment are pervasive stressors, communication gaps exacerbate conflicts, and breaches of trust (often through infidelity) deeply strain relationships. In-laws and external influences frequently complicate marital dynamics, while mismatched expectations around gender roles (e.g. provision and submission) cause friction. Couples struggle with raising children under economic duress, and **infertility** is described as one of the most painful experiences. Notably, **domestic violence** was reported as an increasing problem in contemporary marriages.

PERSPECTIVES

The study finds that **older participants** emphasised traditional values of patience and endurance in marriage, whereas younger couples are less inclined to "suffer and smile," often considering separation when expectations are not met.

Men and women sometimes perceive marital challenges differently – for example, some husbands expect unconditional respect and submission, while wives become frustrated if the husband fails to fulfill his provider role.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These nuanced insights inform several recommendations: enhancing **pre-marital counseling** to set realistic expectations, providing **economic support and skills programs** for families, strengthening **marital communication** and conflict resolution training, engaging **extended families** in positive ways, and enforcing measures against domestic violence. By amplifying participants' voices (anonymously) and grounding recommendations in their lived experiences, this report aims to guide counselors, community programs, and policymakers in designing interventions to foster healthier marriages in the Owerri context.

Background & Context (Owerri)

Owerri, the capital of Imo State in southeastern Nigeria, is culturally rooted in Igbo traditions that place a high value on marriage and family life.

Marriages in this region typically involve a blend of **traditional customs and religious rites**, and couples often navigate expectations from both **modern society and extended kin networks**. The Owerri study was conducted to explore the everyday realities and struggles faced by married couples in this context. Participants consistently reaffirmed that marriage is regarded as a **lifelong union ordained by God**, but they acknowledged that contemporary economic and social changes are testing the resilience of that union. Many older respondents recalled a time when marriages were more stable and couples *"endured a lot"* out of duty and faith, whereas they observe today's couples to be less tolerant of hardship. Owerri and its surrounding communities have faced **economic challenges** (high unemployment and inflation) in recent years, which intersect with cultural pressures – for instance, the **payment of bride price and extended family obligations** – to create a complex marital environment.

In Igbo culture, extended family (especially elders and in-laws) traditionally plays a significant advisory role in marriages, and societal norms emphasize the husband as the *“head of the family.”* However, increasing urbanization, women’s education, and exposure to global ideas via social media are shifting these dynamics. Younger couples in Owerri are more likely to insist on *companionship, mutual respect,* and personal happiness in marriage, and some challenge the belief that women must silently endure all difficulties. Within this context, the Owerri Pain-Points Study provides timely insight into the **most pressing marital issues** as described by those living through them, offering a localized understanding that can inform culturally appropriate interventions.



Methodology

DATA SOURCE

This analysis is based on qualitative data from the Owerri Pain-Points in Marriage Study, consisting of 34 transcribed sessions drawn from Imo State (Owerri and surrounding areas across Imo East, West, and North).



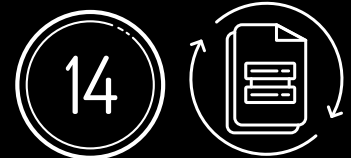
In-Depth Interviews (IDIs):

One-on-one interviews with individual married men and women (identified by pseudonyms or roles) provided personal narratives of marital challenges. These included interviews with community members from Ngor-Okpala and other localities, capturing individual spouses' experiences (e.g. a 28-year-old wife reflecting on five years of marriage).



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

Separate groups were held for categories such as younger men, younger women, older men, and older women in different communities (e.g. Awaka, Naze, Ngor-Okpala, Ohaji-Egbema, Umuozu). Each FGD involved approximately 6–8 participants sharing their marital experiences and perspectives in an interactive setting.



Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

Interviews with community leaders and stakeholders who have insight into marriage trends. Key informants included a traditional ruler (Eze), religious leaders (a Catholic priest who serves as a marriage tribunal judge, a pastor, an imam), a government social welfare official, a marriage registry secretary, and community heads (President Generals and women leaders). These KIIs provided contextual and generational perspectives on marital issues.

ANALYTIC APPROACH:

We employed a thematic analysis strategy, coding the transcripts for recurrent issues (pain-points) mentioned by participants. Coding was inductive, driven by participants' own words and emphasis. Major themes that emerged align with common marital stressors (e.g. economic pressure, communication breakdown, trust/infidelity, extended family influence, gender role expectations, parenting stresses).

We also noted subthemes – for instance, under financial challenges we distinguished income instability vs. household expenditure burden. The analysis gave primacy to the narrative accounts of participants: direct quotes are used extensively to illustrate each theme in the Key Findings. Participants' identities remain anonymized (quotes are attributed generally by participant type, such as “a female focus group participant” or “one husband”). The coding and synthesis focused only on the Owerri data (no cross-site comparison), ensuring that the cultural context of Imo State remained central.

We carefully validated themes by cross-checking multiple transcripts: a pain-point was deemed “major” if it appeared frequently across different groups or was strongly emphasized as critical by participants, whereas “minor” pain-points were mentioned less often or framed as secondary issues. The data was analyzed with attention to patterns by gender, age, and marital duration, which are discussed in the Cross-Cutting Observations section.

Key Findings

Financial Pressure and

Economic Hardship

Economic stress emerged as the most frequently cited pain-point in marriage. Participants across all demographics described how **financial difficulties** put immense strain on couples. Men, in particular, feel intense pressure to fulfill the cultural expectation of being the family provider. *"You must have money as a man,"* said one participant, explaining that *"nowadays, the man carries the whole responsibilities – you must provide food, you must pay school fees, you must do everything. If you cannot make good money, definitely your marriage will have problem."* Financial instability – whether due to unemployment, low income, or rising costs of living – often leads to conflict. Women in the study spoke about constantly struggling to feed children and pay bills under Nigeria's inflationary economy. An older female participant noted that in the past basic needs were affordable, but *"now everything is expensive. People can hardly feed their children... even paying school fees, you know how much you must spend"*. This economic squeeze means arguments over money are commonplace, as parents worry about rent, school fees, and daily survival.

Several women expressed frustration with husbands who mismanage the little money they have. One wife recounted that if her husband earns ₦15,000, *"instead of dropping the money at home, he takes it outside and comes back with only ₦4,000. If I ask how the money was spent, he starts shouting that it is his money and I'm always waiting for him to bring money for food."* This behavior left her feeling extremely hurt, especially since she herself was paying their children's school fees when he wouldn't. *"He has the money but paying the children's school fees is always a problem... he said when he was small, his mother took care of the children so I should also take care of them – that was really painful to me,"* she explained. Such scenarios of **financial irresponsibility** – where a husband spends on personal pleasures (e.g. drinking or girlfriends) while the family's needs are unmet – were cited as a major source of marital pain.

On the other hand, men complained that **financial demands from wives and children are unrelenting**, and failing to meet them undermines a man's authority at home. One husband observed that today *"everything is all about money and if you cannot make good money, your marriage will have problems."* He described how some modern wives compare their husbands to wealthier men, asking for things seen on social media or friends' lifestyles, which creates *"competition [that] keeps bringing crises"* when the husband cannot afford those things. Indeed, social changes mean many women now expect a higher standard of living; if those expectations are not met, respect for the husband can erode (this links to gender role tensions discussed later). A few participants noted that in Igbo custom, a wife traditionally could engage in petty trading or farming to help the family, but *"nowadays the man [is expected to] carry the whole load"*, which can be overwhelming.

Despite these tensions, some couples manage to cope through **communication and budgeting together**. Participants suggested that when money is tight, spouses should plan jointly rather than blame each other. *"There is no family without problems, but the problem will be amicably resolved if both of them agree and discuss it,"* a male participant advised. He gave examples: if they lack food or can't cover school fees, the husband and wife must *"come together [to] bring a way of solving it from both sides. Agreement first – if they do not agree, there is no solution."* This highlights that while financial strain is a heavy burden, its impact on the marriage depends in part on how couples handle it – cooperatively or combatively.

"You must have money as a man,"

Communication Breakdown and Conflict Resolution

Poor communication was widely identified as both a cause and symptom of marital problems. Participants described situations where couples do not discuss issues openly, leading to misunderstandings and resentment. In several focus groups, women noted that their husbands shut down dialogue: *"When I try to explain what is bothering me, he starts shouting," one wife said, "so I just keep quiet to avoid a fight."* Such **communication breakdown** can create a cycle where problems (whether financial, sexual, or emotional) fester unresolved.

Many highlighted that the **mode of handling conflicts** has changed over time. Traditionally, spouses might involve elders or take time to cool off, but now some react impulsively or involve outsiders in unhelpful ways (like running to friends who give biased advice). Notably, participants across age groups lamented the impact of technology on couple communication. A community leader explained that in today's Nigeria, *"there's no longer intimate discussion between the wife and the husband – the man is married to his phone, and the wife is married to her phone."* In the evenings, instead of talking through their day or problems, *"this person is pressing phone, and that one is pressing phone,"* so opportunities for bonding or resolving issues are lost. Several younger participants echoed that social media and constant smartphone use cause spouses to *"no longer share ideas [or] discuss problems"* the way couples of previous generations did.

Conflict resolution strategies vary. Some participants said they prefer to keep disputes private and *"avoid involving external parties"*, because community gossip or too much family interference can worsen matters. One man in an FGD insisted that when issues arise, *"you settle it in the bedroom; calling neighbors or family only escalates it"*. Others, however, felt that involving a **neutral third party** (such as a religious leader or professional counselor) can help when communication between spouses has completely broken down. In the absence of formal counseling services, couples often turn to pastors, priests, or respected elders for mediation. A key informant (marriage tribunal judge) noted that openness and *"intimacy – which is*

"you settle it in the bedroom; calling neighbors or family only escalates it".

openness" were keys to marital success in the past, where *"the married man would be open to the wife... communicate everything"*. By contrast, secrecy or failure to communicate now fuels suspicion and conflict.

A positive theme was that **effective communication is seen as a remedy** by many participants. In one interview, a husband of five years reflected that understanding and patience improved once he and his wife learned to genuinely listen to each other. *"We don't have any problem now,"* he said, *"because she understands me, I understand her. If I tell her to do something... she obeyed me for that. And I think like this phone issue too – if I tell her to stop [using the phone at a certain time], she stops... [then] if you have family something to do – go after the children, do everything."* His account suggests that setting mutual expectations (even about phone usage or household tasks) and respecting each other's requests has helped reduce conflict. Similarly, women in FGDs advised their peers to "calm down and talk it out later" when their husband is less angry, rather than confronting in the heat of the moment. Overall, while lack of communication is a major pain-point, participants clearly recognize that improving communication and conflict resolution skills is vital for marital stability.

Trust Issues and Infidelity

Erosion of trust – often through infidelity – was a dominant theme in the narratives of marital pain. Both men and women spoke about **unfaithfulness** as a grave betrayal that can destabilize a marriage. Many participants bluntly stated that *“infidelity is the highest of the problems”* and is now extremely common. A middle-aged male participant argued that extramarital affairs are *“the height of it”* – once a spouse is involved with someone else, other issues like disrespect and lack of understanding quickly follow. Women in the study, in particular, described infidelity by husbands as a source of deep emotional pain, often leading to explosive conflicts or even dissolution of the marriage.

Several male respondents shockingly expressed a **cultural acceptance of male infidelity**, which illustrates the gendered double standard around trust. *“In our African cosmology, a man and his wife have no comparison,”* one younger man claimed, *“A man has every right to infidelity... we are so polygamous in nature. I have every right to marry 10, 15, 30 wives as much as it pleases me. The only thing I owe my woman is respect.”* This participant even tried to justify his stance with a (misquoted) religious reference, reflecting how some men rationalize extramarital behavior as natural or permissible. Such attitudes were strongly challenged by others in the groups, as well as by female participants, but they underscore the **expectation gap**: some husbands expect wives to tolerate their affairs silently, which modern women are increasingly unwilling to do.

Indeed, multiple accounts suggest **infidelity has become normalized** to a troubling extent. A community speaker observed, *“Infidelity is now a normal life and no longer seen as anything... it is now the order of the day.”* He noted that many husbands openly say: *“by the way, my wife is at home; whatever I do outside, she’s not seeing it and it doesn’t concern her.”* Likewise, some wives engage in secret affairs:

“just keep praying”

“Most women, when they move out of their marital homes, they remove their ring... they will tell you being married doesn’t mean I cannot enjoy myself.” This frank description highlights a breakdown of trust on **both sides** in some marriages – a significant cultural shift where adultery by either spouse is taken less seriously than before. It was also mentioned that social media and increased mobility have made cheating easier and more tempting. Participants described scenarios of spouses flirting on Facebook or WhatsApp, reconnecting with ex-partners, or the influence of peers who condone extramarital flings.

The **impact of infidelity** on the marriage was uniformly portrayed as destructive. Wives spoke of emotional trauma when they discovered their husband had a *“side woman,”* especially if he was diverting money to that affair while neglecting the family. *“Some men leave the essential things and do the wrong thing – like they go out, meet their girlfriend and spend the money they are supposed to spend on their family,”* one male participant admitted, acknowledging this as a major factor that *“causes pain in marriage.”* For husbands, discovering a wife’s unfaithfulness was seen as a blow to their manhood and trust that often cannot be repaired. In either case, jealousy and suspicion arising from past infidelities tend to fuel constant arguments.

Notably, older key informants pointed out that **attitudes towards infidelity and polygamy are changing**. In traditional Igbo society, polygamy was relatively common and, as one elder noted, *“My father had three wives... despite that, hardly would you see them quarrelling; they cooked in one pot and did things together. There was nothing like divorce then.”* However, he and others observed that modern polygamous arrangements rarely function so peacefully. *“Nowadays if you try it, be ready to run out of your house. The pressure [from co-wives] will make you die early,”* another participant warned. Jealousy and lack of cooperation among wives, and the emotional toll on husbands, have made polygamy a far less viable option now, so even men who cheat often prefer to **hide it** rather than officially take another wife. This secret infidelity, however, breeds its own trust issues.

Several coping strategies were mentioned: a few women in focus groups said they *“just keep praying”* for their unfaithful husbands to change, choosing to stay for the sake of the children or due to societal pressure. Others indicated infidelity was a “deal-breaker” – one key informant (a community leader) noted that *“financial strain, infidelity, [and lack of] childbirth”* are leading reasons for divorce today. Rebuilding trust once broken is difficult; participants stressed the importance of honesty from the start. One woman advised young people to truly *“know your partner”* before marriage, as deceit during courtship (for example, a man lying about his financial status or character) means the marriage

“infidelity is the highest of the problems”

begins without a foundation of trust. In summary, trust issues – especially stemming from infidelity – are a critical pain-point that both reflects and exacerbates many other marital problems in the Owerri sample.

Extended Family Influence and External Pressure

Interference or lack of support from the extended family (particularly in-laws) was frequently cited as a source of marital conflict. In the Owerri context, where familial bonds are strong, a marriage often involves not just the couple but both extended families. While family elders can provide guidance and help resolve issues, participants pointed out that they can also **cause or inflame problems** if not careful. Wives in multiple groups spoke about difficulties with their mothers-in-law. For instance, a young woman described how her husband runs to tell his mother whenever they quarrel, and the mother-in-law invariably takes his side: *“Instead of calling us together, she will only be calling her son... she’d never call the wife to hear her side.”* This one-sided intervention leaves the wife feeling unheard and blamed. *“Sometimes our mothers-in-law cause problems in marriage,”* she concluded. *“If I have a little quarrel with my husband and he reports me to his mother, she should call both of us to settle it. But [his mother] will just listen to him and then maybe send me away... They are the cause of many divorces.”*

conflicts or undermine the wife’s position. There were mentions of mothers-in-law calling their daughters-in-law “lazy” or “disrespectful,” or insisting on certain ways of running the household, which led to power struggles. One participant noted bitterly that *“when I’m quarreling with my husband... his mother only listens to him and then later she’ll scold me without even knowing the full story. She’ll say, ‘I didn’t raise my son to be talked back to.’”* The **lack of neutrality** in conflict mediation by family elders was a clear frustration.

Extended family issues were not limited to mothers-in-law. Some participants mentioned interference by siblings or husbands’ relatives living in the home. For example, a woman narrated how her husband’s brothers constantly found faults in her and reported trivial issues to their mother, putting her under suspicion. *“Sometimes your husband’s brothers can be the pain in your marriage,”* another participant agreed, explaining that they might encourage the husband to be stricter or question the wife’s behavior. In one case, a wife said her brother-in-law openly told her husband to remarry someone else from their village, undermining her marriage.

Such accounts reveal that **bias and meddling by in-laws** – especially mothers-in-law – create pain-points. Instead of being peacemakers, some in-laws escalate

There is also the issue of **peer influence and social pressure**. Some focus group members observed that friends can negatively impact marriages – for instance, a man’s drinking buddies who encourage him to stay out late or be unfaithful, or a woman’s friends who urge her to leave an “unworthy” husband instead of working on the marriage. One theme that emerged is that modern couples face “*too many outside voices,*” from social media (as discussed) to nosy neighbors and friends, which can distort their expectations and reactions. A participant gave a vivid example: “*Ada will come to Angela and say, ‘my husband just bought me the new iPhone,’ and then Angela will look at her own husband and say, ‘you are not man enough if you cannot buy me an iPhone.’*”. Such comparisons, fueled by peers or things seen online, create **competitive pressure** that can lead to constant disputes when one spouse feels they are “*falling short*” compared to others.

“too many
outside
voices,”

Despite these challenges, participants also acknowledged the positive role extended family can play when done right. A few older interviewees reminisced about how, in earlier times, if a wife ran to her parents over a marital quarrel, her father would send her back and later come to help settle the matter, rather than encourage separation. “*In the olden days, the father-in-law would say: ‘Go back to your husband, we will resolve it,’ but these days, many parents just welcome their daughter back and even say the highest that can happen is she’ll marry someone else,*” one male participant observed. This indicates a shift where even the older generation may no longer uniformly push for reconciliation, perhaps reflecting lower stigma for divorce now.

In the Owerri study, many felt that improving marriages would require “*caution*” and reform in how extended families engage. “*Our mothers-in-law are supposed to learn how to make peace between couples,*” the young wife quoted earlier insisted. Participants suggested that in-laws should be impartial mediators if they get involved at all, and that couples should set boundaries on external involvement. Overall, extended family influence is a double-edged sword: it can provide a support system or, if mishandled, become a major pain-point leading to bitterness or breakup.

Gender Role Expectations and Power Dynamics

Conflicting expectations about **gender roles** – what a husband or wife “should” do in marriage – emerged as a fundamental underlying cause of many conflicts. In the Owerri transcripts, there is a palpable tension between traditional norms and evolving realities of gender in marriage. Culturally, the husband is expected to be the **provider and head of the household**, while the wife is expected to be **submissive, respectful, and nurturing**, taking care of domestic duties and children. Many participants, especially men and older community leaders, reiterated these norms. However, the lived experiences show that when one partner fails to meet the other’s role expectations, or when partners have differing views on roles, marital strife ensues.

From the men’s perspective (particularly older or more traditional men), a “**non-submissive**” wife is a serious problem. In a group of early-married men, one speaker identified “*lack of submissiveness*” from wives as a major challenge in the first few years of marriage. He referenced religious doctrine, saying “*The Bible says a wife should submit to the husband. When you marry a wife that is not submissive... it would lead to divorce.*” He contrasted present times with the past: “*In the olden days, when the husband came home, the wife would greet him, help him with his bag, unbutton his shirt, serve his food... and if the man needed to relax with her, she wouldn’t deny him. But nowadays...*” – implying that some modern wives do not show this level of deference. According to him, if a woman fails to show respect or refuses conjugal intimacy, “*the man [starts] thinking otherwise*” (suspecting infidelity or feeling justified to seek another partner).

This viewpoint demonstrates that many husbands still expect a high degree of obedience and care from their wives, and perceive assertiveness or reluctance from the wife as a threat to their masculinity and marital harmony.

Women, on the other hand, highlighted a different aspect of the gender role equation: the **failure of some husbands to fulfill the provider and leader role**. With economic hardships, it is not uncommon now for wives to earn income or even out-earn their husbands, which challenges traditional power dynamics. A key informant (a Marriage and Family Life secretary) recounted that young women today ask very pointed questions: *"If a man is not up to expectations to bring in what he's supposed to for the family, and the woman is now taking responsibility, is she still expected to respect and submit to him?"*. He admitted that *"because of enlightenment, our young ladies are no longer willing to submit to a man since he's not responding accordingly [to his] expectations as a husband."* In other words, educated or financially independent women in Owerri may challenge the notion of automatic submission, especially if they feel their husbands are not pulling their weight. This is a profound shift from a generation ago, and it is causing friction. One wife in an IDI put it bluntly: *"How can I submit to a man who is not providing for the family? Respect is earned."*

This evolving dynamic is illustrated in real-life scenarios described in the transcripts. Women complained about husbands who abdicate responsibilities – for example, expecting the wife to care for the children and home single-handedly, even to bear **all financial costs for the kids**, as noted earlier. *"He says I should take care of the children like his mother did, but times have changed,"* the frustrated wife said. From the man's side, another participant bemoaned that *"65% of marriages [today] are being shouldered by women"* financially, yet those same men still insist *"I am the head... a woman has no say."* This man (interestingly, likely a male participant who sympathized with women) gave an example: *"You'll find a woman feeding the family, even feeding the man – which is not how it is ordained. But then the man will still say, 'Who are you to tell me what to do in my home?' It breaks a woman's heart."* Such accounts show that when reality contradicts the traditional script (e.g. a husband failing as provider), either the marriage suffers from unmet needs or the traditional power structure is questioned, leading to conflict over decision-making and respect.

Household duties and decision authority are another arena of gender expectations. Some men complained that *"women these days"* are not as domestically inclined – *"not all of them are good in the kitchen... now a lady will put food on the fire and then start watching television or WhatsApp"*, one older man grumbled. He gave an example of a wife disobeying simple requests: *"There's something you ask your wife not to do... and she will disobey. If I, as a husband, tell my wife not to do something and she does it, I will be angry."* This participant linked that to *"what is causing a lot of issues nowadays,"* implying that women's independence or distraction (by phones, TV, etc.) leads to disrespect of the husband's word. Conversely, women voiced that some husbands wield authority arbitrarily – making decisions without consulting their wives, or expecting automatic compliance even in trivial matters, which breeds resentment.

In summary, **marital pain-points around gender roles** revolve around two main tensions: – Husbands expecting *respect, obedience, and domestic care* in line with traditional norms, and feeling aggrieved (even emasculated) if wives challenge their authority or fail to meet homemaking standards. – Wives expecting *support, partnership, and fairness*, and feeling aggrieved if husbands do not meet provider obligations, do not participate in house/family duties, or do not respect the wife's voice and autonomy.

This push-and-pull was evident in many transcripts. It is a transitional moment in the community: as one clergyman key informant put it, marriage is a **"covenant, not a contract"**, and couples vow to love and honor each other, but *"when it comes to action,"* those vows are tested by real conditions. He counselled that spouses should remember the commitment they made, suggesting endurance – but he also acknowledged that understanding each other's background and capacity is important (e.g. if a man grew up poor and can't earn much, the wife should consider that before marriage).

Gender role expectations thus cut both ways as pain-points: **men feel disrespected, women feel unsupported**. As we will see in Cross-Cutting Observations, these issues often split along generational lines as well, with younger couples negotiating more egalitarian arrangements and older individuals emphasizing traditional hierarchies.

Parenting Challenges and Childbearing Issues

Issues related to children – both raising them and having them – surfaced as significant pain-points. Many participants framed their **ultimate goal in marriage as raising a family**, so anything that hinders that (infertility, child loss, or disagreements in child-rearing) can cause deep distress.

Perhaps the most emotionally charged theme here was **infertility or childlessness**. In the cultural context of Imo State, bearing children is highly valued, and couples without children face enormous pressure. Participants spoke in solemn tones about this issue. One older male participant said: *"Some pains [between] husband and wife in marriage... there are women who have been married 3, 4, 5 years, and the woman has never conceived. They have never had one issue (child). So the man is not going to be happy; the woman too is not going to be happy."* He went on to call this "the most painful thing in marriage" – the uncertainty and sorrow of an unfruitful union. Others echoed that when a couple is unable to have a child, it often leads to blame or even the husband taking another wife under family pressure. A key informant narrated a case where a couple married for 18 years with no child eventually fell apart due to family and societal expectations. Infertility was listed among top reasons for divorce by participants, alongside infidelity and financial stress.

Even for those with children, **parenting stress** is high in the current economic climate. Providing for children's needs – food, clothing, schooling – is a daily struggle for many families, and disagreements over these responsibilities cause friction. A poignant account from a young mother illustrated this: She was distressed that her husband would spend money on himself and leisure while she was left scrambling to pay their children's school fees and buy books. When she asked him for money for the children's necessities, *"he would start shouting... later they would pursue the children from school [for unpaid fees]. He has the money but... he said when he was small, his mother was the one taking care of the children, so I should also take care."* This highlights how childcare costs and duties can become a contested domain, especially if one parent (often the mother) feels the other is shirking responsibility. It also ties back to gender expectations: that husband

expected his wife to handle child-rearing like the previous generation, whereas she expected him to contribute more than he did.

Another area of parenting conflict is **discipline and upbringing**. Some participants talked about differences in how they and their spouse view child discipline or training. For example, a few mothers complained that their husbands are too harsh on the children or *"shout at me in front of the kids"*, which not only upsets the wife but also sets a troubling example. One father gave a very introspective speech on this: he realized that if he constantly quarrels with or beats his wife in the children's presence, *"any day they register it in their mind... you're finished. You've lost your family."* He noted that children are observant and will side with the victimized parent. This acknowledgement shows some parents worry that marital conflict itself (especially violence) can damage their relationship with their children. On the flip side, there were mentions that some couples fight over indulgence vs. strictness – e.g. one parent feeling the other is spoiling the child or, conversely, being too punitive. These disagreements, while not as prominently discussed as finances or infidelity, do contribute to stress.

Finally, the **cost of education** and general child welfare in a tough economy was mentioned frequently. *"School fees now are very high,"* said one participant, *"It wasn't easy before either, but at least it was more achievable then than now."* Many parents are anxious about how to give their children a decent life amid rising costs, and they sometimes clash over budgeting priorities (for example, paying school fees vs. buying other household needs). One focus group concluded that the only way through these challenges is for couples to work hand-in-hand: *"If it is school fees or any other thing bothering them, they should come together [and] address it... If they don't agree, there's no solution."* In essence, cooperative parenting and shared responsibility were seen as crucial, whereas lack of cooperation is a pain-point.

In summary, children are both a **source of joy and tension** in marriages. Not having them can be devastating; having them introduces continuous financial and interpersonal challenges. The narratives underscore how central children are to

marital stability in Owerri – they can motivate couples to stay and work harder (many participants cited “for the children’s sake” as a reason to endure hardships or avoid divorce), but they can also become points of conflict if couples disagree on their care or if resources are scarce.

Domestic Violence and Abuse

Domestic violence – particularly wife-beating – was explicitly brought up as a disturbing trend in several discussions. Both men and women acknowledged that physical abuse happens and appears to be more prevalent in current times than in the past. An older male participant observed, “*In those days, [there was] nothing like a man beating his wife. It happens now; it is more rampant now.*” This statement suggests a perception that domestic violence is on the rise, or at least more openly recognized, in modern marriages.

Women who participated often spoke carefully around this topic, sometimes framing advice indirectly. For instance, one woman said, “*We have to be patient because some men like to beat. Just be praying, ‘God change my husband, this beating is too much.’*” Her counsel to endure and pray for change indicates how entrenched the problem can be – the expectation being that the wife should tolerate and hope for divine intervention or eventual reform, rather than easily escape the situation. Another woman responded by asking hypothetically, “*If you can beat your husband too, what will happen?*” and an older lady replied, “*Before a woman can beat a man, she has gone through a lot in the hand of the man... a woman cannot beat her husband just like that.*” This sobering exchange implies that some wives do retaliate violently, but only after prolonged abuse, and even this idea was treated as almost unthinkable or extreme.

Men’s comments on domestic violence ranged from defensive to condemning. Some younger men in FGDs excused their own anger or violence by blaming provocation – “*There are some things... if she does it, I will be angry... if I tell her not to and she disobeys, that’s what causes a lot of issues*” – which skirts close to justifying a hit if the wife “disobeys.” However, other men strongly condemned wife-beating. One male participant passionately argued that “*this beating of a thing, I don’t see it as something a man should do to his wife. It has taken so many lives in marriage.*” He and others are aware of real cases where

domestic violence escalated to fatal outcomes or the collapse of the marriage. He added, “*I wish the government will look into this and put a stop to it,*” recognizing the need for external intervention to curb domestic violence.

The transcripts also reveal the **consequences of domestic violence on the family**. Aside from physical injury, participants noted emotional trauma and the negative modeling for children. A father’s earlier testimony (cited above) highlights that children who witness abuse may grow to resent the abusive parent, effectively “losing” respect and love within the family. Some women indicated they left or would consider leaving if violence persisted, even if it meant being a single parent. Key informants (like religious leaders) stressed the importance of “*forgiveness and patience*” but equally noted that no one should be harmed in marriage – “*let nobody harm each other,*” as one priest put it, referencing the sanctity of marriage.

In summary, **domestic violence** is a critical pain-point that unfortunately several participants identified as part of their marital experience or observations. It is seen as more common now than elders remember in their youth, possibly due to increased stress and decreased stigma in reporting it. The coping response among many wives – to endure and pray – signals a gap in available support systems for victims. Meanwhile, community members are calling for stronger actions (by government or community) to “*put a stop*” to spousal abuse. This underscores an urgent need for counselling, legal enforcement of protections, and cultural reorientation that violence should not be tolerated within marriage.

Cross-Cutting Observations

DIFFERENCES BY GENDER

Men and women sometimes highlighted different pain-points or viewed the same issue through different lenses. For example, male participants frequently emphasized challenges to their authority or ego – such as a “*disrespectful wife*,” inability to provide financially, or wives not fulfilling domestic roles – as primary frustrations. Some men, as discussed, normalized infidelity and saw women’s complaints about it as a nuisance. By contrast, female participants were more likely to stress emotional neglect, lack of support, and breaches of trust as their biggest pain-points. Many women spoke about feeling undervalued when husbands don’t communicate or consider their opinions, or when they are left to carry the household burden alone. In discussions about infidelity, women condemned the double standard and several noted that women now are prepared to leave unfaithful marriages rather than accept humiliation. Similarly, regarding communication, women pleaded for their husbands to “*listen and talk calmly*”, while some men felt their wives “*talk too much*” or involve outsiders. In-laws dynamic also showed a gender split: daughters-in-law voiced in-law issues far more than sons-in-law did, reflecting the common pattern that wives often bear the brunt of meddling from the husband’s family. On domestic violence, men tended to either justify it as rare provoked incidents or deplore it in principle, whereas women spoke to the reality of enduring it and the fear it instills. Overall, men’s narratives prioritized respect and control, whereas women’s prioritized support and communication – highlighting how each gender’s unmet expectations become the other’s perceived misbehavior (e.g., “*she doesn’t respect me*” vs. “*he doesn’t support or listen to me*”).

DIFFERENCES BY AGE/GENERATION:

There was a pronounced generational divide in attitudes toward marital challenges. Older participants (roughly age 50 and above, or long-married couples) consistently advocated for **endurance and traditional norms**. They often contextualized current problems as a break from the past. For instance, elders in the community remarked that “*divorce is too much nowadays; in the olden days it was not easy for a woman to leave*”. They described previous generations as having more patience, with parents and in-laws actively encouraging couples to stay together and work out issues rather than separate. Older men and women also tended to view things like a wife’s total submission, or a husband’s occasional failings, as something to be tolerated for the greater good of keeping the family intact. One older woman gave an example from her mother’s time: whenever she ran to her father complaining, “*he sent her back to her husband’s house and later came to settle the matter*”, implying that endurance was taught as virtue. In contrast, younger participants (20s–30s, those married under ~5–7 years) voiced a more **conditional view of marriage**. A young man quipped that today marriage seems to be “*for better, stay; for worse, they leave – they don’t tolerate*”, indicating that many in his generation won’t stick around indefinitely under bad conditions. Younger wives in particular expressed that they would not endure certain things their mothers did – be it chronic abuse, serial infidelity, or total financial abandonment. They are also more likely to seek personal happiness and are aware of divorce as an option if deeply unhappy. This generational shift was also

evident in discussions of **polygamy and gender roles**. Older men from polygamous families spoke almost nostalgically of how it “worked” back then with discipline and respect, while younger men flatly said they would avoid polygamy because it is unmanageable today. Older participants often blame Westernization or loss of “family values” for these changes, whereas younger ones blame outdated mindsets or economic realities. Interestingly, **marital duration** often correlates with age in the study – those married 20+ years are generally older – and

they tended to downplay their issues or speak of having overcome them over time. Meanwhile, those married only a few years talked about adjustment difficulties and sometimes shock at the realities of marriage vs. their expectations. As one young wife noted, “*when a man is not fully matured and just jumps into marriage, after a year or two he doesn’t see what he expected... then problems start*”. This suggests younger couples face an early critical period of recalibrating expectations, and if they lack maturity or support, conflicts can spiral quickly (sometimes leading to early divorce).

INFLUENCE OF MARITAL DURATION

Related to age, the stage of marriage had some influence on pain-points emphasis. Those in the **0–5 years** bracket (newly or recently married) spoke a lot about “*adjusting to living with a stranger*”, financial setup, and establishing communication patterns. They mentioned issues like discovering new habits in their spouse, learning to compromise, and often conflicts with in-laws were sharpest early on (especially around childbearing or job stability early in marriage). A key informant noted that “*earlier couples face lack of submissiveness*” and power struggles more, which can lead to early divorce if not managed. In the **5–15 years (mid-duration)** group, discussions often revolved around raising children and managing career vs. family balance – essentially the stress of the “sandwich” years with growing kids and financial burdens peaking. They talked about schooling costs, discipline, and sometimes straying (infidelity) occurring after some years of monotony. Those in **longer marriages (15+ years)**, especially “older couples,” often had grown or nearly grown children and tended to reflect on how they overcame earlier troubles. Some admitted that things like infidelity or financial hardship had occurred, but they “*had to forgive and move on*” for the sake of the family. Notably, a few long-married participants said their marriages improved in later years once the “stormy” younger phase passed and they understood each other better. For instance, an older man remarked that many marriages stabilized after about a decade once couples learned “*patience indeed... endurance*” and children started arriving.

Implications & Recommendations

The findings from the Owerri study carry important implications for **marriage counseling, community programs, and policy interventions** aimed at strengthening marriages and reducing the identified pain-points. Below are key recommendations grounded in participants' narratives and suggestions:

1. ENHANCE PRE-MARITAL AND MARITAL COUNSELING

The data underscores the need for better preparation of couples entering marriage. Many younger participants admitted they were not fully aware of what marriage entailed and had unrealistic expectations. Pre-marital counseling programs (through churches, mosques, or community centers) should address practical topics like financial planning, communication skills, conflict resolution, and family planning. Couples should be encouraged to discuss role expectations (e.g. who will be breadwinner, views on gender roles) before marriage to ensure alignment or at least awareness of differences. As one key informant advised, *"get it right in choosing a partner – ask questions [and] check the signs"* of potential issues in advance. Early-marriage mentoring (for the 0–5 year period) could also be established, pairing newlyweds with older "model couples" to guide them, since the first years can set patterns for either healthy or toxic dynamics.

2. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES

Financial stress was the number one pain point, so economic interventions are crucial. This can include community-based microfinance or savings schemes for couples, job skill trainings (especially targeting young husbands with employment challenges, and wives with income-generating skills to support the family), and advocacy for government policies that alleviate burdens on families. Participants explicitly suggested that government should provide *"support and orientation"* to married couples. For example, a local leader noted that in Western countries certain subsidies exist: *"free antenatal care, free medical care, even stipends for children's upkeep,"* and that these *"ease the tension in marriage"*. While resources are limited, policymakers in Imo State could consider measures like subsidized healthcare for pregnant women and infants, educational bursaries or reduced school fees for families in need, and housing or food support for low-income couples. Such support would directly tackle one of the root causes of marital conflict (economic hardship) and demonstrate that the community values stable families. NGOs and government can partner on these initiatives, as participants debated – NGOs often reach grassroots with programs, but government backing ensures scale and enforcement.

3. STRENGTHEN COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION SKILLS:

Given that poor communication underlies many issues, programs should focus on teaching couples how to communicate effectively and resolve conflicts peacefully. Faith-based organizations or community centers could host workshops on active listening, anger management, and negotiation within marriage. Couples need to learn how to discuss problems without resorting to insults or shutting down. One practical idea is establishing **Marriage Enrichment Forums** where couples periodically gather (perhaps monthly) in a facilitated session to air common issues and learn from each other's experiences in a supportive setting. This can help normalize the fact that *"there is no family without problems,"* and emphasize teamwork in solving those problems. Additionally, encouraging a culture where seeking professional help is okay would be beneficial – right now, couples mostly rely on family or religious counsel. Training more local counselors or equipping religious leaders with counseling skills (and confidentiality practices) can provide couples with safe spaces to get help before problems escalate.

4. ENGAGE EXTENDED FAMILIES CONSTRUCTIVELY:

Since in-laws and extended family can heavily influence marriages in Owerri, interventions must include them. Family life education can be extended to mothers-in-law and fathers-in-law, highlighting the impact of their words and involvement. Community leaders or women's organizations could host *"in-law forums"* or use church women's meetings to discuss the role of in-laws in supporting rather than sabotaging marriages. For instance, teaching that impartial mediation and respecting the couple's autonomy leads to better outcomes, whereas taking sides increases the risk of divorce – essentially training in-law figures to be peacemakers. One recommendation is to create **guidelines or pledges** for families, such as an agreement that if a marital issue is brought to them, they will hear both spouses together (as the participant P6 implored) and encourage reconciliation where appropriate rather than immediately blaming one side. Moreover, community leaders (like the Eze or PGs interviewed) can use their influence to discourage toxic interference; they might establish community dispute resolution panels that include respected neutral parties to handle serious conflicts fairly when families cannot.

5. ADDRESS GENDER NORMS AND PROMOTE MUTUAL RESPECT:

The tension around changing gender roles suggests a need for community conversations and education promoting **mutual respect and shared responsibilities** in marriage. Traditional sermons and cultural messages in Imo often reinforce the man's authority and the woman's duty to submit, but the reality on ground – with women contributing economically and wanting a say, and men needing emotional support – calls for a more balanced model. Marriage programs should involve **couples together** and also men's-only and women's-only groups to honestly discuss expectations. Men may benefit from all-male workshops or support groups where positive models of manhood in marriage are taught – emphasizing that being a good husband today is not just about commanding respect, but also earning it through love, fidelity, and partnership. Women's empowerment programs should continue to build women's confidence to communicate needs, but also stress constructive approaches to negotiation rather than confrontation (since many women voicing their anger comes out as *"sharp tongue"* which then spirals conflict). Notably, a key informant in the study advised young wives that if they out-earn their husbands, they should approach it with understanding of his background and not with contempt – teaching emotional intelligence on both sides is key. Over time, recalibrating gender norms towards complementarity (husband and wife as a team with different strengths, rather than a boss-servant dynamic) can reduce many of the pain-points identified.

6. STRENGTHEN LEGAL AND SOCIAL MEASURES AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE:

6. Domestic violence was a dire theme, and participants even called on the government to intervene. There should be clear messaging that abuse is unacceptable. This involves both enforcing laws and providing support. Imo State authorities and NGOs can collaborate to ensure that women (and men) know their rights and have access to help – e.g. domestic violence hotlines, shelters or safe houses, and legal aid. Community leaders (traditional and religious) should be enlisted to speak out against wife-beating. The participant who said *"I wish the government would put a stop to it"* had the right idea: this might include stricter penalties for perpetrators and public awareness campaigns. Simultaneously, counseling programs for at-risk couples (where violence has occurred or seems likely due to anger issues) should be implemented. Some churches in Nigeria conduct *"anger management"* classes for husbands or couples retreats focusing on healing and forgiveness; such efforts could be expanded. Educating couples on non-violent conflict resolution, as mentioned earlier, is part of prevention, but for those already in abusive situations, confidential interventions and safety planning are needed. Empowering women economically (recommendation #2) also indirectly helps, as women who are financially dependent find it much harder to leave abusive relationships.

7. LEVERAGE RELIGIOUS AND COMMUNITY INSTITUTIONS

The Owerri study highlighted that many couples still turn to faith and community for guidance. This is an asset that interventions can leverage. Training priests, pastors, imams, and marriage committee members in basic counseling and gender sensitivity can ensure couples get helpful advice aligned with these recommendations. For instance, religious teachings can be emphasized that promote love, fidelity, and peaceful homes – countering any misinterpretation (such as the young man misusing a Bible verse to justify infidelity). One key informant suggested interfaith collaboration, where Christian and Muslim leaders jointly address social problems like marital breakdown – such unity can reinforce that stable, respectful marriages are a shared value. Community events, like an annual Marriage Enrichment Day, could celebrate long-married couples who exemplify mutual respect and partnership, providing positive role models to younger couples.

8. OUTREACH AND EDUCATION IN RURAL AREAS:

As noted by participants, many people *“do not have details about marriages”* in the more rural communities. They recommended that orientation programs *“be spread across the rural areas”*, as those populations might not be reached by formal services. Therefore, any initiative – whether it is economic support, counseling, or violence prevention – should have a strategy for rural engagement. This could involve mobile clinics or workshops that travel to villages, radio programs in the local language discussing marital issues, and involving village heads or women leaders in disseminating information.

In implementing these recommendations, it is important to involve the **participants themselves** (or people like them) in the solution. Many participants already offered ideas (like the government support or NGO partnerships) and clearly want better marriages for their community. Therefore, forming local Marriage Support Committees that include respected couples, youth representatives, and perhaps even those who have experienced divorce (to advise on pitfalls) can help drive these changes from within.

Conclusion

Marriages in Owerri, as in many parts of Nigeria, are under strain from a convergence of economic pressures, shifting social norms, and enduring cultural expectations. This qualitative analysis has brought forth the *voices of husbands, wives, and community figures* who candidly described what makes marriage hard in their world – from the struggle to put food on the table, to the sting of betrayal, the weight of family interference, and the heartbreak of childlessness or violence. While the pain-points are numerous and interlinked, it is clear that couples yearn for solutions: they want to be happy and stay together, but on terms that are fair and fulfilling to both.

The Owerri study's insights are self-contained and locally grounded. They remind us that any effort to strengthen marriages must consider the **cultural context** (e.g. the role of in-laws, the importance of children, and religious values) as well as the **realities of modern life** (economic hardship, social media influence, evolving gender roles). By focusing on Owerri participants' own words, we have highlighted not just the problems but also seeds of solutions they hint at – *communication, patience, mutual understanding, support systems*. Implementing the recommendations outlined – from economic empowerment to counseling and reorienting norms – could alleviate many of the pain-points identified.

In conclusion, the marital challenges in Owerri are significant but not insurmountable. As one participant wisely noted, *"Marriage needs patience, maturity, the grace of God... then government and community support."* With a holistic approach that combines personal responsibility, community engagement, and structural support, couples in Owerri can be better equipped to weather their challenges. The ultimate goal is to help transform these narratives of pain into stories of resilience and thriving partnerships – where **love, trust, and understanding** are strengthened even in the face of hardship. The voices in this report, though anonymized, speak to a universal truth: when couples are given the tools and support to address their pain-points, marriage can truly become, in the words of one respondent, *"a very good thing ordained by God"* – not without challenges, but rich in meaning and reward.

INSTITUTE FOR WORK AND FAMILY INTEGRATION

RESEARCH REPORT

COMPARATIVE BRIEF:
PAIN-POINTS IN MARRIAGE OF COUPLES
FROM 0-5 YEARS (LAGOS AND OVERRI)

 INSTITUTE FOR
WORK & FAMILY
INTEGRATION

 **IWFI**
CHINYERE
DOZIE
MARITAL DEVELOPMENT CENTER

FUNDED BY

Chinyere Dozie Marital
Development Centre

RESEARCHERS

Dr. Charles Aigbona
Dr. Victor Kolo
Michael Fasina

Table of Contents

Overview and Comparative Background	52
Shared Major Pain-Points	53
Distinctive Pain-Points	54
Cross-Cutting Observations	56
Implications & Recommendations	57
Conclusion	58
References	58

Overview

This comparative analysis draws on qualitative data from **two parallel studies** conducted in Lagos (Nigeria's commercial hub) and Owerri (the capital of Imo State in southeastern Nigeria). Both studies involved interviews and focus group discussions with married men, women, and key informants, highlighting the **pain points in marriage** as expressed by participants.

Findings reveal **shared challenges** across both sites, including **financial strain, poor communication, breaches of trust (especially infidelity), conflicts over gender roles, and domestic violence**. Yet, while the core pain-points are similar, their **manifestations differ by context**. Lagos couples frame issues through an urban lens: rising costs of living, work-life balance, peer comparison, and social media distractions. Owerri couples emphasize **traditional expectations**: in-law interference, infertility, submission and provision roles, and endurance vs. separation debates.

The report concludes that interventions must be **context-sensitive**: urban Lagos needs strategies around modern stressors and dual-career dynamics, while Owerri requires engagement with kinship structures and cultural norms around childbearing and respect.

Comparative Background

Lagos

As Nigeria's economic capital, Lagos is a bustling, cosmopolitan city. High costs of living, competitive lifestyles, and long commutes shape marriages. Participants often described pressures linked to **urban hustle, exposure to global ideas, and technological distractions**. For instance, one Lagos wife lamented: *"We live under pressure here. He leaves at 5 a.m. and comes back at night tired. We don't talk anymore – even when he's home, he's on his phone."*

This contextual difference explains why Lagos narratives are often about **modernity clashing with tradition**, while Owerri narratives reflect **tradition under strain from modern change**.

Owerri

In contrast, Owerri is a smaller but culturally rooted Igbo city where **extended families and traditions** play a central role in marriage. Expectations of **fertility, submission, and respect for in-laws** remain strong. A young wife explained: *"If I quarrel with my husband and he tells his mother, she will only listen to him and later scold me. That alone can scatter a marriage."* Traditional institutions, such as elders and religious leaders, are often drawn into marital matters.

Shared Major Pain-Points

Economic Pressure

Both sites ranked finances as the **most pressing marital challenge**. Rising inflation, unemployment, and unmet financial expectations triggered recurring conflicts.

- In Lagos, the focus was on **cost of living and dual-career struggles**: *"I work, he works, but still we can't meet rent. Then we fight about who should buy food or pay bills."*
- In Owerri, emphasis was on the **husband's role as sole provider**: *"If you cannot make good money, definitely your marriage will have problem."*

Communication Breakdown

Couples in both contexts identified poor communication as a leading cause of conflict.

- Lagos: Partners often spoke of **tech distractions** – *"He is married to his phone, I am married to mine,"* said one wife.
- Owerri: Participants lamented secrecy and lack of openness – *"There is no longer intimate discussion; problems are left to boil until they explode."*

Trust and Infidelity

Infidelity eroded trust in both contexts, but perceptions differed.

- In Lagos, **emotional withdrawal and suspicion** were emphasized: *"After I saw the chats, I couldn't trust him again."*
- In Owerri, male infidelity was often **normalized culturally**: *"A man has every right to marry ten wives if he can. The only thing he owes her is respect."* (male FGD participant). Women, however, strongly rejected this double standard.

Gender Role Conflicts

Across both sites, there is a **tug-of-war between traditional and modern expectations**.

- In Lagos, women pressed for **shared domestic duties** since many are employed: *"He still expects food hot on the table even if I come back from work at 9 p.m."*
- In Owerri, the conflict was about **submission versus provision**: *"If a man is not providing, is she still expected to respect him?"* asked a young wife.

Domestic Violence

Participants in Lagos and Owerri both acknowledged domestic violence as a serious marital pain-point.

- Lagos participants often linked it to **stress and legal consequences**, noting: *"Now police can be called, so men need to be careful."*
- Owerri participants described it as **more rampant now** than in the past. One woman admitted: *"We have to be patient because some men like to beat. Just be praying, 'God change my husband.'"*

Distinctive Pain-Points

Lagos

Work-Life Imbalance

Long hours, traffic, and fatigue disrupted intimacy: "We only see each other when we are half-asleep."

Social Media Comparisons

Couples compared themselves with peers online: "She wants what her friend posts on Instagram – if I can't provide it, we fight."

Dual-Income Stress

Disputes arose over unequal contribution and recognition: "I pay bills too, but he still says he is the head."

Owerri

Infertility and Childlessness

Consistently described as "the most painful thing in marriage." A male elder noted: "After 10 years without a child, both man and woman lose happiness."

Extended Family Interference

Mothers-in-law in particular were cited as causes of divorce: "They never call both of us, they just support their son."

Generational Gap on Endurance

Older participants stressed patience, but younger ones declared: "For better, stay; for worse, they leave."

Distinctive Pain-Points

Lagos

Owerri

"We live under pressure here. He leaves at 5 a.m. and comes back at night tired. We don't talk anymore – even when he's home, he's on his phone." (Female)

"I work, he works, but still we can't meet rent. Then we fight about who should buy food or pay bills." (Female)

Economic/ Financial Pressure

"If you cannot make good money, definitely your marriage will have problem." (Male)

"He is married to his phone, I am married to mine." (Female)

Communication Breakdown

"There is no longer intimate discussion; problems are left to boil until they explode." (Participant)

"After I saw the chats, I couldn't trust him again." (Female)

Trust & Infidelity

"A man has every right to marry ten wives if he can. The only thing he owes her is respect." (Male)

"He still expects food hot on the table even if I come back from work at 9 p.m." (Female)

Gender Role Conflicts

"If a man is not providing, is she still expected to respect him?" (Female)

"Now police can be called, so men need to be careful." (Male)

Domestic Violence

"We have to be patient because some men like to beat. Just be praying, 'God change my husband.'" (Female)

"We only see each other when we are half-asleep." (Couple)

"She wants what her friend posts on Instagram – if I can't provide it, we fight." (Male,)

"I pay bills too, but he still says he is the head." (Female)

Distinctive Pain-Points

"After 5 years without a child, both man and woman lose happiness." (Male elder)

"They never call both of us, they just support their son." (Female)

"For better, stay; for worse, they leave." (Younger participant)

Cross-Cutting Observations

Category	Observations
Gender Differences	• Men: Prioritized respect and submission; some defended polygamy or occasional infidelity. • Women: Prioritized emotional support, communication, and fidelity; many were unwilling to endure what their mothers endured.
Generational Differences	• Older participants: Emphasized endurance, religious faith, and parental mediation. • Younger participants: Advocated for self-fulfilment and were quicker to consider separation when unhappy.
Marital Duration	• 0–5 years: Adjustment difficulties, clashing expectations, in-law interference. • 5–15 years: Parenting and financial stress peak. • 15+ years: Many reported improved understanding, though some endured long histories of infidelity or hardship.

Implications & Recommendations

Category	Recommendations
For Both Lagos and Owerri	1. Premarital Counselling – Equip couples with realistic expectations about finances, roles, and conflict resolution. 2. Economic Empowerment – Skills training, microfinance, and social support schemes for families under economic strain. 3. Gender Reorientation – Promote messages of mutual respect and partnership, addressing harmful double standards. 4. Domestic Violence Prevention – Strengthen laws, awareness, and safe support systems for victims.
For Owerri Specifically	• Establish infertility support groups and medical access. • Train in-laws as impartial mediators in marital disputes. • Encourage community leaders to reinforce reconciliation rather than bias.
For Lagos Specifically	• Integrate work–life balance modules into marital counselling. • Develop digital etiquette programs for couples (limiting phone/social media intrusions). • Provide mental health support for urban stress and long work hours.

Conclusion

Marriages in Lagos and Owerri face **similar pain-points but distinct contextual pressures**. Lagos marriages are challenged by urban stress, modern gender negotiations, and digital life intrusions. Owerri marriages are strained by traditional obligations, fertility pressures, and kinship interference.

Despite these differences, the voices from both sites converge on one truth: couples desire stability, trust, and companionship, but lack adequate tools and support to manage challenges. Addressing these pain-points with **context-sensitive interventions** can help strengthen marriages and reduce conflict, building healthier families and communities in both urban and traditional Nigerian settings.

References

[1]Nigeria among countries with highest divorce rate- Report :
<https://www.premiumtimesng.com/entertainment/naija-fashion/728808-nigeria-among-countries-with-highest-divorce-rate-report.html>

[2]<https://divorce.com/blog/divorce-rates-in-the-world/>

Qualitative Interview Data: Pain-point in marriage research study; Lagos and Owerri

1/5, Owel-linkso Street off Orchid Hotel Way,
2nd Toll Plaza, Lekki, Lagos

Tel: 08160537922, 08160537933 Personal 08033867663

charles.aigbona@iwfionline.org

chinyeredoziemdc@iwfionline.org

✕ iwfionline  iwfionline | iwfi cdmmdc  iwfi_cdmmdc

 iwfi.official | chinyeredoziemaritaldevelopmentcenter(IWFI)

 Chinyere Dozie Marital Development Center

www.iwfionline.org

Board of Trustees: Engr. Charles Osezua KSG(Chairman), OON, Prof. Chantal Epie, Prof. Pat Utomi, Mrs Gloria Osezua, Col. Paul Obi, Mrs Ekor Obi.

Board of Governors: Mr Patrick Akinwuntan, Mr Peter Amangbo, Prof. Okechukwu Amah, Prof. Chris Ogbechie, Mrs Abigail Isokpan, Mrs Vivian Abigail, Mrs Ojinika Olaghere, Mrs Lakshmi Tombush

