

Spouses' Anger as an Indicator of Marriage Crisis: Understanding the Dynamics and Implication for Counselling

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Abstract: *The study examines spouses' anger as an indicator of marriage crisis: understanding the dynamics and implication for counselling. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. The descriptive survey research method was adopted for the study. The population was all marriage couples in Edo State Ministries. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select 10 marriage couples (male and female) from the ten (10) Ministries that add up to 200 marriage couples. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, and the hypotheses were tested using t-tests at 0.05. Finding reveals that with a cluster mean of 2.73, accompanied by a matching standard deviation of 0.83. This implies that individual couple's psychological factors have a significant impact on the relationship between anger and marriage stability in Edo State Ministries. Also, the average value of the cluster, 2.70, together with a standard deviation of 1.01, the finding suggests that cultural background have a significant impact on anger and its implications for marriage dynamics. The implication of the study is that attachment styles developed during childhood, effective emotional regulation and different cultural norms and values have distinct impact regarding the expression of anger by civil servants. The study recommend among others that counsellors should help couples use assessment tools questionnaires or assessments to identify specific triggers for their anger and the patterns of interaction that exacerbate conflicts, and encourage partners to keep journals documenting their feelings of anger, noting situations, thoughts, and reactions.*

Keywords: *Spouse, Anger, Marriage Crisis, Dynamics, Therapeutic Approaches, Counselling*

Introduction

In the landscape of modern relationships, anger can serve as a critical indicator of deeper issues within a marriage. While it's normal for couples to experience disagreements and moments of frustration, persistent anger often signals an underlying crisis that, if unaddressed, can jeopardize the health of the relationship (William & Manasseh 2022).

Marriage is often characterized by deep emotional bonds, shared experiences, and mutual support. However, underlying tensions can sometimes manifest as anger, particularly between spouses. Spouses' anger can serve as a significant indicator of a marriage crisis, reflecting unresolved conflicts, unmet needs, and a breakdown in communication (Snyder & Whisman 2021). Understanding the dynamics of this anger is crucial for identifying the root causes of distress within a relationship and can provide valuable insights for effective counseling strategies.

As couples navigate the complexities of their relationships, anger may emerge as a response to feelings of frustration, betrayal, or neglect. Recognizing this anger not merely as a negative emotion

but as a vital signal can help therapists and counselors facilitate healthier conversations between partners (Song, Curtis & Aragon 2021). By exploring the underlying issues that fuel this anger, counselors can guide couples toward constructive dialogue, fostering empathy and understanding. This approach not only aids in addressing immediate conflicts but also promotes long-term relational health. Thus, examining spouses' anger within the context of a marriage crisis offers a pathway to not only repair but also enrich the marital bond (Sai, Achmad, Yusro & Aziza 2023).

Rosen and Lann (2023) agree that anger in relationships or marriage can manifest in various forms ranging from mild irritation to explosive outbursts. While occasional anger is a natural part of any relationship, a consistent pattern can indicate unresolved issues. Patterson, Dunbar, Mast, Fernández-Dols, eds. (2022) suggest that anger often arises from unmet needs, lack of communication, or

feelings of disrespect and neglect. When one partner feels unheard or unappreciated, it can lead to resentment, which in turn fuels anger.

Markman, Renick and Floyd (2022) emphasized that anger as an indicator as there is a connection between anger and marital satisfaction couples who frequently express anger are often facing deeper emotional disconnection. Karim and Swahnberg (2021) added that anger serves not only as a symptom of existing problems but also as a barrier to effective communication and intimacy. Hesse, Floyd and Mikkelsen (2022) avow that couples may find themselves trapped in a cycle where anger begets further resentment, making it increasingly difficult to resolve conflicts.

Gottman and Silver (2015) believed that effective communication is vital in addressing anger and its roots causes. Many couples fall into negative communication patterns, such as criticism, defensiveness, and stonewalling behaviors identified by Dr. John Gottman, a leading researcher in marital stability. These patterns can escalate anger and lead to a breakdown in trust and understanding. García-Sánchez, Matanock and Garbiras-Díaz (2022) advocated that couples, who can openly discuss their feelings, including their anger, are more likely to navigate challenges successfully and strengthen their relationship.

Problems and challenges are part of matrimony the higher the occurrence in relationship the disturbance of anger dynamics between partners; the more psychologically and martially distressed the couples (Fye, Chasek, Mims, Sandman & Hinrichsen 2020). Against this backdrop the study examines spouses' anger as an indicator of marriage crisis: understanding the dynamics and implication for counselling.

Recognizing Warning Signs:

1. It's essential for couples to recognize the warning signs that anger may be a symptom of a larger crisis. Key indicators include:
2. Frequent Arguments: If disagreements become routine and escalate quickly, it may signal unresolved issues.
3. Silent Treatment: Withholding communication can indicate avoidance and unresolved feelings, which often lead to anger (Cocodia 2023).
4. Increased Irritability: Feeling irritable over small matters can point to deeper dissatisfaction in the marriage.
5. Emotional Distance: A lack of intimacy or connection can foster anger and frustration.
6. Blame and Criticism: Constantly blaming one another can create a toxic environment that breeds further conflict.

Dynamics of Anger in Marriages:

1. Triggering Factors: Unresolved conflicts, misunderstandings, financial stress, lack of communication, and unrealistic expectations can trigger anger. (Adebayo, Omojola & Evbuoma 2021).
2. Expression Styles: Couples may express anger through passive-aggressive behavior, explosive outbursts, or suppressed emotions.
3. Conflict Escalation: Anger can escalate conflicts, leading to hurtful comments, defensiveness, and withdrawal.
4. Emotional Contagion: One partner's anger can infect the other, creating a toxic cycle.
5. Power Struggles: Anger can be used to assert control or dominance.

Implications for Relationship Health:

1. Communication Breakdown: Chronic anger can lead to communication breakdown, making resolution difficult.
2. Emotional Distancing: Unaddressed anger can create emotional distance, weakening intimacy.
3. Conflict Resolution: Ineffective anger management can hinder conflict resolution.
4. Partner Abuse: Unmanaged anger can escalate into physical or emotional abuse.
5. Mental Health: Chronic anger can contribute to depression, anxiety, and stress.

Effective Anger Management Strategies:

1. Active Listening: Listen attentively to understand each other's perspectives. Couples should make an effort to listen to each other without interrupting, validating each other's feelings (Demir & Park 2022)
2. Emotional Regulation: Recognize and manage personal emotions. Engaging in activities that strengthen emotional bonds can reduce feelings of resentment and anger.
3. Conflict Resolution Skills: Develop effective conflict resolution strategies. Setting boundaries around how disagreements are approached can help create a safe space for both partners.
4. Communication: Express concerns calmly and respectfully.
5. Time-outs: Take breaks to calm down before discussing sensitive issues.
6. Seeking Help: Consider couples therapy or counselling. Couples therapy can provide tools and strategies for navigating anger and improving communication.

Healthy Expression of Anger:

1. Assertiveness: Express anger clearly and respectfully.
2. Specificity: Focus on specific issues rather than general attacks.
3. Non-Defensiveness: Avoid becoming defensive.
4. Empathy: Show understanding for each other's feelings.
5. Forgiveness: Practice forgiveness.

By this couples can mitigate its negative implications and foster a healthier, more fulfilling relationship.

Counselling Implications:

The counselling implications of spouses' anger are numerous and can have significant effects on the therapeutic process and relationship outcomes. The key considerations are:

1. Safety Concerns: Ensure physical and emotional safety for both partners, potentially separating sessions initially.
2. Building Trust: Establish trust by creating a neutral, non-judgmental space for open expression.
3. Identifying Triggers: Help couples identify underlying triggers and causes of anger.
4. Emotional Regulation: Teach effective emotional regulation techniques, such as relaxation, mindfulness, or journaling.

5. Communication Skills: Enhance communication skills, including active listening, assertiveness, and conflict resolution. Duncan & Miller (2020)
6. Conflict Resolution: Develop strategies for constructive conflict resolution.
7. Empathy and Understanding: Foster empathy and understanding through role-playing, empathy exercises, or couples' workshops.
8. Forgiveness and Letting Go: Explore forgiveness processes and letting go of resentments.
9. Addressing Power Imbalances: Address power imbalances and control issues.
10. Assessing for Abuse: Assess for signs of emotional or physical abuse.

Therapeutic Approaches:

1. Gottman Method: Focuses on building a strong relationship foundation.
2. Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT): Addresses attachment issues and emotional regulation.
3. Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Helps identify and change negative thought patterns.
4. Solution-Focused Brief Therapy: Emphasizes finding solutions rather than dwelling on problems.
5. Narrative Therapy: Helps reframe anger narratives.

Counsellor's Role:

1. Neutral Facilitator: Remain impartial.
2. Emotional Regulator: Manage sessions to prevent escalation.
3. Educator: Teach skills and strategies.
4. Support System: Offer emotional support.

Challenges:

1. Resistance to Change: Overcoming entrenched patterns.
2. Intense Emotions: Managing intense anger or defensiveness.
3. Power Struggles: Addressing control issues.
4. External Stressors: Addressing external stressors (e.g., financial, family).

Best Practices:

1. Initial Assessment: Conduct thorough intake assessments.
2. Customized Approach: Tailor therapy to each couple's needs.
3. Regular Progress Monitoring: Track progress.
4. Collaboration: Work with other professionals (e.g., individual therapists).
5. Self-Care: Prioritize counselor self-care.

By employing these counselling implications, therapists can effectively address spouses' anger, promoting healthier relationships and improved well-being.

Research Questions

The following research question was answered in this study:

1. How do individual psychological factors (e.g., attachment styles, emotional regulation) affect the relationship

between anger and marriage stability in Edo State Ministries?

2. What impact does cultural background have on the expression of anger and its implications for marriage dynamics in Edo State Ministries?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated in a null form and tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. **Hypothesis 1:** Individual psychological factors, such as insecure attachment styles and poor emotional regulation, does not significantly predict the intensity of anger experienced in marriage in Edo State Ministries.
2. **Hypothesis 2:** Cultural background do not significantly influences the expression of anger and its impact on marriage dynamics, with variations across different cultural contexts in Edo State Ministries.

Methodology

The research examined spouses' anger as an indicator of marriage crisis: understanding the dynamics and implication for counseling of marriage couples in Edo State Ministries. Edo State, has several government ministries responsible for various sectors. The key ministries are Ministry of Education; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources; Ministry of Works and Transport; Ministry of Finance; Ministry of Youth and Gender Affairs; Ministry of Local Government and Community Affairs; Ministry of Information and Communication; Ministry of Environment and Sustainability and Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture. The descriptive survey research method was adopted for the study which allows for the generalization of study findings by selecting a small sample from a large population. The population included all marriage couples in Edo State Ministries. Purposive sampling technique was employed to select 10 marriage couples (male and female) from the ten (10) Ministries making a total of 200 marriage couples sampled. The researchers selected individuals using multi-stage sampling and basic random selection was employed to pick participants. This research employed a four-point Likert-type scale, the Anger Expression Scale (AES) which was self-created. The AES scale is designed to assess the level of anger and the extent of crisis to the marriage using Partner-report questionnaire (for couples) Experts rated consensus validity 0.86. The pilot survey data was analyzed using Cronbach alpha. The Cronbach alpha was 0.87. Participants received the questionnaire from researchers. Participants were surveyed in their Ministries. To increase response rates, surveys were collected using the wait and take method. The data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation, and the hypotheses were evaluated using t-tests at 0.05

Results

The data is shown in tables, which include mean scores, standard deviation, and t-test statistics. A decision making threshold of 2.5 was used

1. **Question 1.** How do individual psychological factors (attachment styles, emotional regulation) affect the relationship between anger and marriage stability in Edo State Ministries?

Table 1: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on individual psychological factors on anger and marriage stability

S/N	Variable	N	X	Std	Remarks
1.	Do different attachment styles influence levels of anger in relationships?	200	2.74	0.83	high
2.	Attachment styles do have any impact on the stability of marriages?	200	2.77	1.23	high
3.	Do individual couples' differs in emotional regulation strategies in responses to anger during disagreements?	200	2.83	0.98	high
4.	Does the lack of emotional regulation contribute to cycles of anger and conflict in marriages?	200	2.60	1.04	high
5.	Do communication styles impact the likelihood of experiencing a marriage crisis?	200	2.99	0.82	high
Cluster mean		200	2.73	0.83	high

Table 1. Present the average and variability in the individual psychological factors (attachment styles, emotional regulation) affect the relationship between anger and marriage stability in Edo State Ministries. The data shows a cluster mean of 2.73, accompanied by a matching standard deviation of 0.83. The finding suggests that individual couple’s psychological factors have a

significant impact on the relationship between anger and marriage stability in Edo State Ministries.

Research Question 2: What impact does cultural background have on the expression of anger and its implications for marriage dynamics in Edo State Ministries?

Table 2: Mean Scores and Standard Deviation on Influence of Cultural Background on Anger and its Implications for Marriage Dynamics

S/N	Variable	N	X	Std	Remarks
1.	Cultural norms does shape the ways individuals couples express anger in their relationships? high	200	2.09	0.86	
2.	Do cultural factors influence emotional regulation practices related to anger in marriage?	200	1.84	0.90	high
3.	Does differing cultural attitudes toward conflict resolution affect marriage dynamics when anger arises?	200	3.00	1.16	high
4.	Does family upbringing play role in how partners express and manage anger within their marriages?	200	2.49	1.04	high
5.	Do culturally specific beliefs about masculinity and femininity affect the expression of anger among partners?	200	3.01	1.91	high
Cluster mean		200	2.70	1.01	high

Table 2 displays the average and variability in the impact of cultural background on anger and its Implications for Marriage Dynamics. The data represents the average value of the cluster, which is 2.70, together with its equivalent measure of variability, with is a standard deviation of 1.01. The finding suggests that

cultural background have a significant impact on anger and its Implications for Marriage Dynamics in Edo State Ministries.

Hypothesis 1.Individual psychological factors, such as insecure attachment styles and poor emotional regulation, does not significantly predict the intensity of anger experienced in marriage in Edo State Ministries.

Table 3: independent sample t-test on Psychological Factors and Anger experienced in Marriage

Variable	N	X	Std	df	α	t	p.val	Remark
Psychological Factors	200	13.96	2.79	1	.05	.690	.000	sig.
Anger experienced in Marriage	200	12.40	2.71					

Table 3 shows the t-test findings showing that Psychological Factors significantly affect Anger experienced in Marriage. With 200 samples, a t-value of 0.690, 1 degree of freedom, and a p-value of less than 0.05, the study reveals a substantial positive influence. The null hypothesis was rejected at p=.000 or p<.05. Thus,

psychological factors greatly affect couples anger experienced in marriage.

Hypothesis 2: Cultural background do not significantly influences the expression of anger and its impact on marriage dynamics, with variations across different cultural contexts in Edo State Ministries.

Table 4: independent sample t-test on influence of cultural background on marriage dynamics

Variable	N	X	Std	df	α	t	p.val	Remark
Cultural background	200	17.20	3.34	1	.05	.623	.000	Reject.

Marriage Dynamics	200	12.40	2.71
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Table 4, examines the t-test for the substantial of cultural background on the expression of anger and its impact on marriage dynamics, with variations across different cultural contexts in Edo State Ministries. The analysis indicates a significant positive effect with a sample size of 200, a correlation coefficient of 0.623, one degree of freedom, and a p-value of less than 0.05. The null hypothesis was rejected with a significance level of $p=.000$ or

$p<.05$. This indicates that cultural background has a substantial impact on marriage dynamics, with variations across different cultural contexts in Edo State Ministries

Discussion

The results from the study question one and hypothesis one indicates that individual couples psychological factors have a substantial impact on the relationship between anger and marriage stability of civil servants in Edo State Ministries. The attachment styles developed during childhood significantly influence adult relationships. Secure attachment fosters healthy communication and emotional support, while anxious or avoidant attachments may lead to heightened anger and conflict. Civil servants with insecure attachment styles might struggle with expressing their emotions, leading to pent-up frustration that can erupt as anger during stressful periods. Effective emotional regulation is crucial for managing anger. Civil servants often face high-pressure situations at work, which can spill over into their personal lives. Individuals who lack strong emotional regulation skills may express anger impulsively, resulting in conflicts with their partners. Conversely, those who can manage their emotions are likely to navigate marital disagreements more constructively, fostering stability. The ability to communicate effectively plays a vital role in relationship dynamics. Couples who utilize assertive communication are better equipped to express their feelings without resorting to anger. In contrast, those who engage in passive or aggressive communication may experience heightened conflict and instability in their marriage, particularly under the stress of civil service demands. Also, individual coping strategies significantly influence how couples handle anger. Civil servants may encounter job-related stressors that affect their emotional well-being. This finding collaborates that of (John, Shirley & Isaac 2023) who study was on factors that contribute to marriage break- down among young couples in the Ghanaian context and their findings was that lack of respect, lack of responsibility, differences in decision-making, family interference, differences in values and beliefs, infidelity, and miscommunication were identified as psychological factors for the breakdown of marriages among young couples.

The results of study question two and hypothesis two indicate that cultural background has a substantial impact on the anger and marriage dynamics with variations across different cultural contexts in Edo State Ministries. Different cultural norms and values have distinct norms regarding the expression of anger. In some cultures, open expression of anger may be viewed as unacceptable, leading individuals to suppress their feelings. In Edo State, where communal values often emphasize harmony and respect, civil servants might feel pressure to conform to these norms, potentially resulting in unexpressed anger that can accumulate and create underlying tensions in marriages. Cultural expectations regarding gender roles can significantly influence how anger is expressed and managed. In many traditional settings, men may be socialized to display

dominance through anger, while women may be expected to adopt a more passive role. This disparity can lead to conflicts in civil servant marriages, where differing expectations about anger can cause misunderstandings and resentment. Also, cultural backgrounds shape preferred conflict resolution styles. In some cultures, indirect communication and avoidance of confrontation are favored, whereas others may encourage direct dialogue. Civil servants from different cultural backgrounds may approach marital conflicts differently, leading to varying outcomes in terms of relationship satisfaction and stability.

Edo State is home to diverse ethnic groups, each with unique cultural practices. These variations can affect how anger is expressed and managed in marriages. For instance, couples from cultures that emphasize communal decision-making may approach conflicts collaboratively, while those from more individualistic backgrounds may prioritize personal autonomy, leading to different dynamics in how anger is processed and resolved. Religious teachings often influence cultural perspectives on anger and marriage. In some religious contexts, anger may be viewed as a sin that needs to be controlled or redirected. Civil servants practicing these faiths might struggle with expressing anger constructively, impacting their marital relationships. Conversely, cultures that provide more space for emotional expression may enable healthier discussions around anger.

Conclusion

Anger is a powerful emotion that can serve as a critical indicator of a marriage in crisis. By recognizing the signs and addressing the underlying issues, couples can transform anger from a destructive force into an opportunity for growth and deeper connection. Open communication, empathy, and a commitment to understanding each other’s needs are essential in navigating the complexities of marital anger and fostering a healthier, more resilient partnership. Ultimately, acknowledging anger as a signal rather than a setback can pave the way for healing and renewed intimacy in a marriage.

The study's results indicate that psychological factors and cultural background have a substantial impact on anger, marriage dynamics and marriage stability across different cultural contexts of civil servants in Edo State Ministries. The impact of individual psychological factors on the relationship between anger and marriage stability is significant among civil servants in Edo State Ministries. By recognizing the importance of attachment styles, emotional regulation, communication, and coping mechanisms, couples can develop strategies to navigate anger more effectively. Addressing these psychological factors not only promotes healthier relationships but also contributes to the overall well-being of civil servants, ultimately benefiting their professional and personal lives.

Recommendations

- 1. Counsellors should help couples use assessment tools questionnaires or assessments to identify specific triggers for their anger and the patterns of interaction that exacerbate conflicts. And encourage partners to keep journals documenting their feelings of anger, noting situations, thoughts, and reactions.
- 2. Counsellors should help couples develop effective communication skills by teaching couples how to listen

actively without interrupting, validating each other's feelings. Also encourage partners to express feelings using "I" statements to avoid blame and promote understanding.

3. Counsellors should help couples understand conflict resolution skills problem-solving frameworks for resolving conflicts, focusing on collaboration rather than competition and applying time-out strategies by taking breaks during heated discussions to cool down before re-engaging.
4. Counsellors should help couples explore underlying psychological issues by encouraging partners to discover personal psychological factors, such as past trauma or unresolved issues that may be contributing to their anger and address how each partner's background and experiences impact their emotional responses in the relationship.
5. Counsellors should acquire cultural awareness training from workshops and seminars that focuses on the cultural practices, beliefs, and values specific to Edo State and incorporate local traditions such as local marriage customs and family structures, which can influence expectations and roles in marriage.

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