

# Efficacy of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy on Marital Adjustment of Spouses in Churches in Benin City, Nigeria

Wellington Omosefe Jesuorobo<sup>1</sup>, Mary Angela Ijeoma Otuonye<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>, Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, University of Benin, Nigeria

Corresponding author: [revwoj@gmail.com](mailto:revwoj@gmail.com)

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 1 May 2023

Revised 30 May 2023

Accepted 30 July 2023

### Keywords:

Efficacy

Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy

Marital Adjustment

Spouses

Baptist Churches

## ABSTRACT

The study investigated the efficacy of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy in managing marital adjustment among Christian Baptist spouses in Benin City Edo State. Two research questions were raised to guide this study and two corresponding hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted the true experimental research design, using a non-equivalent pre-test and post-test control group. The target population of the study consisted of all the 3290 Baptist spouses in Benin City. A sample size of 61 spouses participated in the study. A multistage sampling method was used in selecting the samples for this study. A dyadic Adjustment Scale was administered to the spouses. The data collected were analyzed using paired t-tests and independent sample statistics. The findings of the study revealed that EFCT was effective in managing the marital adjustment of spouses. The study also found that there was a significant difference in the marital adjustment of spouses exposed to EFCT and control at the post-test. Based on the findings, it was recommended that counselling psychologists should take advantage of the proven efficacy of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy in helping spouses to improve the quality of their marital relationship.

© IJAGC 2021, All right reserved  
ISSN: 2722-2365 (Online) 2722-2357 (Print)

## Introduction

Marriage is a lifelong interpersonal relationship between man and woman as husband and wife, governed by legal, customary and religious principles (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2009). Adegoke & Esere (1999) and Esere (2000) asserted that marriage is a social institution that fosters the coming together of two very different individuals with different personality traits, psychological make-up and perhaps different socio-economic backgrounds to form a family.

At the commencement of marriage comes a period of adjustment to each other. This involves some compromise by both parties for the survival of the relationship. Marital adjustment, therefore, is a situation where partners are happy with each other in the relationship (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2010). It is a complex concept which some spouses may lack the skills to manage.

According to Sholfer and Shoben (2004), marital relationships experience adjustment, challenges and conflicts that sometimes result in divorce, separation, violence, child neglect and several other devastating effects. Even though spouses are aware of the intimate contract they enter into in marriage and the implication of this contract for their lives, they encounter adjustment challenges, which they sometimes cannot handle. The survival of such marriages may largely depend on how effective the spouses are in managing their marital relationship. Okorie (2009) observed that, the fact that two people agree to live together as husband and wife calls for different expectations and hopes, some of which might be fulfilled while others remain unfulfilled. Unfulfilled expectations and hopes in marriage, such as financial and sexual satisfaction are likely to give rise to maladjustment (Onyechi, 2003).

Oftentimes, partners, in the course of the dyadic relationship, may not experience the marital bliss that they expected before entering into the relationship. This is the probable reason researchers such as Okorodudu & Ebenuwa-Okoh (2003) and Ebenuwa-Okoh (2007) observed that the rate at which marital relationship is characterised by pains, conflict and emotional confusion in recent times has increased dramatically. This has made the values of the marriage institution to diminish, its beauty to fade and its glory to wane (Jesuorobo, 2016). The phenomenon of marital adjustment problems is worldwide, not limited to Nigeria alone. The statistics released by National Centre for Health, Marriage and Divorce (2003) revealed that the divorce rate in Canada, England and Wales, Greece, the Netherlands and the United States has more than doubled since 1970. The source also shows that divorce around the world has nearly quadrupled since early 1960 in Britain. Maduakonam (1991) asserted that the situation has gone so bad that some people tend to suggest that marriage, a ubiquitous practice of man, is universally stressful; so much so that it has been described as one of the causes of human misery and unhappiness in the present world. Moreover, the author classified marital conflict as one of the most pressing social problems in the present world. Maduakonam further noted that marital conflicts are rapidly increasing among Nigerians especially those living in urban cities, and, this constitutes a serious threat to the social and economic stability of the nation. It was noted in the Nigerian Baptist Convention

Sunday School Lessons (2019), that Baptists have been experiencing marital challenges such as a lack of mutual love, understanding and caring. It was also stated that husbands and wives complained about mutual adjustment in the area of marital submission to each other (*Baptist Book of Reports*, 2011 & 2012).

### **Literature Review**

To enhance the quality of marital relationships, researchers and counselling psychologists have introduced the use of various therapeutic interventions that could address the critical aspects of marriages and help spouses to live a well-adjusted and blissful marital life (Gurman, 2008). Emotionally-Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) is one of the couple therapeutic interventions used by counselling psychologists in addressing distresses and dysfunctional ties in dyadic relationships. Emotionally focused therapy is a short-term and structured approach for couple therapy, which was developed, based on clear concepts of marital distresses, emotional cognition, adulthood love and emotional responses (Johnson, 2004). According to Johnson & Greenberg (1988), marital distresses is created by detachment and then continues by the comprehensive state of negative emotions and attachment traumas, neglect of internal needs and demands, negative interactive patterns and undesirable emotional experiences. Emotionally focused couple therapy helps couples to achieve a secure attachment in their relationships. It aims to specify vicious interactional cycles and problematic attachment traumas as well as to rebuild fundamental attachment emotions so that interaction cycles are changed and rebuilt (Johnson, 2004). Evidence in the literature has statistically revealed that EFCT is effective in managing adjustment as well as enhancing satisfactory relationships in marriage. The studies of Ziyaolhagh, (2010), Soltani, Molazedeh, Mamoodi, and Hosseini (2013), Najafi, Soleimani, Armadi and Kamker, (2015), Rostami, Taheri. Abdi and Kermani (2014), Vazhappilly and Reyes (2017) Ahmadi, Zarel, & Fallahchai (2014), as well as those of Rezaie, Younesi, Ahmadi, Asgari and Mirzaie (2008), show that EFCT increased emotional, psychological, sexual, physical, relationship, temporal and intellectual intimacy. Authors of these studies concluded that EFCT increased intimacy in experimental group compared with the control group. In all of these studies, none that is known to the present researchers has studied the efficacy of EFCT in enhancing marital adjustment of spouses in Baptist churches in Benin City. The present study, therefore, seeks to fill this existing gap.

### **Statement Of The Problem**

Several Christians, specifically Baptist Christian spouses living in Benin City appear to be increasingly experiencing marital adjustment challenges and conflicts (Oladapo, 2013). The researcher's pastoral experiences indicate that marital maladjustment is common among spouses in the Baptist denomination and can likely develop into sustained conflict if not checked. In the *Baptist Book of Reports* (NBC, 2008, 2009, 2011 & 2012), cases of infidelity, separation, maladjustment problems, unresolved conflicts and threats of divorce among Baptist pastors and members were reported. This awkward situation in marriages among Baptist spouses is worrisome.

Spouses often seek help from elders in the family, parents-in-law, friends and even religious leaders. While this may sometimes help spouses to adjust, at other times due to sentiments and subjectivity of mindset, seeking such help may lead to greater maladjustment among the spouses. Some spouses may not have people to turn to in times of difficulty. Professional counselling offers objective help to individuals having trouble in their marital relationships by the use of therapeutic intervention. Therefore, can EFCT be effective in managing marital adjustment and help spouses handle future difficulties to prevent marital distress and bring about a well-adjusted marital relationship?

## **Method**

The true experimental research design, using the pre-test post-test, and non-equivalent control group was adopted for this study. The design was chosen because the study investigated the cause-effect relationship by exposing the experimental group to treatment conditions. The design involved one independent variable with two levels: the treatment group, consisting of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) and the Control Group.

The inclusion population of this study consists of all 3290 spouses in Baptist churches in Benin City. Benin City is appropriate for this study because it is the capital city of Edo state with a great mixed population (various ethnic groups) as well as many churches domiciled in the city.

The samples for this study consist of 61 spouses. A multistage sampling method was used in selecting the samples for the study: In stage one, two churches were randomly selected, using the simple random sampling technique through balloting without replacement. The names of the churches were written on separate sheet of paper, folded and put into a blind bag from which the researcher picked. The two selected churches were randomly

assigned as experimental group A while B served as control. In stage 2, the Marital Adjustment Scale was administered to the spouses from the selected churches, to identify those with a certain level of maladjustment. A benchmark was set: any spouse with a score below 80% had marital adjustment problems after the pre-test. 102 spouses were found to be maladjusted. But 61 spouses successfully went through the treatment programme. Church A was exposed to Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy while church B was exposed to no treatment. Church A and B had 39 and 22 spouses respectively.

The research instrument for this study is a questionnaire titled “Dyadic Adjustment Scale” (DAS) which was originally developed by Spanier (1976) but adapted by the researcher. It is the most widely used measure for assessing the quality of marital relationships (Whisman, Uebelacker & Weinstock, 2004, Bogat, Dejonghe, Davison, & Von, 2006). It is designed to evaluate couples’ adjustment and relationship quality in married couples. It is made up of two sections. Section A contains questions on the respondents’ biodata. Section B was composed of 32 items that identify four factors and their relative subscales, made up of Dyadic Consensus (DC), Dyadic Satisfaction (DS), Dyadic Cohesion (DH) and Dyadic Affection (DA) (Chiara, G., Eva, G., Elisa, M., Luca, R., & Piera, B., 2014). The modifications made by the researcher were in the form of changing the tenses from questions to statements and introducing 4 point Likert scale with items under the options of response (Never=1, Sometimes=2, Often=3, Always=4).

The internal consistency reliability of the instrument was established using a sample of 20 spouses outside the study sample. The data collected was analyzed using the Cronbach alpha Statistics and it yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.96 which is considered high for the measure of internal consistency of the instrument.

This therapy took place in the church auditorium for a period of six weeks of two sessions per week, numbering twelve sessions of 45 minutes per session. The spouses for this therapy were drawn from Church A. The purpose of this treatment programme was to help spouses recognize negative interaction patterns, to pinpoint the secondary emotions on which these patterns are based; and to experience and express the primary emotions (such as fear of abandonment) which underpin the secondary emotions (such as anger) which have not been exposed. Through this process, attachment bonds within the dyadic relationship are established and dysfunctional reciprocities are replaced with more adaptive interaction patterns for better dyadic adjustment. Spouses were exposed to relevant issues such as the

meaning of marital adjustment and maladjustment. They were exposed to the explanation of Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy and its tenets. The respondents were equally taught important concepts in the therapy such as negative interaction patterns, dysfunctional reciprocities, adaptive interaction patterns, attachment theory, emotions, and types of emotions common in marriage relationships. The participants in the control group received a non-attention treatment. The group was only exposed to the instrument (Dyadic Adjustment Scale) at the commencement of the experiment to obtain pre-test scores. At the end of six weeks, participants in the experimental and control groups were post-tested to obtain post-test scores, using the same instrument that was used for the pre-test. Data collected were collated and analysed using paired samples t-test correlated and independent samples statistics.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Hypothesis I:

There is no significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores in marital adjustment of spouses exposed to EFCT treatment.

**Table I: Paired Sample T-test of Pre-test and Post-test Scores in Marital Adjustment of Spouses Exposed to EFCT Treatment**

Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	t	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pre-Test	54.18	3.87		
			-26.43	.000
Post-Test	89.10	7.85		

N = 39;  $\alpha = 0.05$

Table 1 shows a paired sample t-test of -26.4, testing at an alpha level of .05, with a p-value of .000. Since the p value is less than the alpha value, the null hypothesis which states that 'there is no significant difference in the pre-test and post-test scores in marital adjustment of spouses exposed to EFCT' is rejected. Consequently, there is a significant difference in pre-test and post-test scores in the marital adjustment of spouses exposed to EFCT treatment. Since the mean of the group at the post-test is higher than the mean at the pre-test, it implies that the EFCT treatment is effective in enhancing the marital adjustment of spouses.

Hypothesis II:

There is no significant difference in the post-test scores in marital adjustment of spouses exposed to EFCT and those in Control.

**Table II: Mean and Standard Deviation of Pre-test Scores in Marital Adjustment of Spouses exposed to EFCT and Control**

<i>Group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
<i>EFCT</i>	39	54.18	3.87
<i>Control</i>	22	51.27	6.10

Table 2 shows the Mean and Standard Deviation of Pre-test Scores in Marital Adjustment of Spouses exposed to EFCT and Control as 54.18 and 3.87 and 51.27 and 6.10 respectively.

**Table III: Mean and Standard Deviation of Post-test Scores in Marital Adjustment of Spouses Exposed to EFCT and Control**

<i>Group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>
<i>EFCT</i>	39	89.10	7.85
<i>Control</i>	22	67.09	9.40

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of post-test scores in marital adjustment of spouses exposed to EFCT and Control as 89.10 and 7.85; and 67.09 and 9.40 respectively.

**Table IV: Paired Sample T-test of Difference in Marital Adjustment of Spouses in Experiment and Control Groups.**

<i>Groups</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std.Dev.</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>t-value</i>	<i>Sig. P</i>
<i>EFCT</i>	39	89.10				
				59	9.62	.001
<i>Control</i>	22	67.07	9.40			

Table 4 shows that the mean score of the spouses exposed to Emotional Focused Couple Therapy (EFCT) of 89.10 is much higher than that of the control group 67.09. Similarly, the Sig. P of .001 is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected; that is, a

significant difference occurs between marital adjustment of spouses as depicted in the means scores of the experimental and control group at post-test. Therefore, EFCT intervention was effective in enhancing the marital adjustment of spouses.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study in hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant difference in the pre-test and post-test marital adjustment scores of Baptist spouses exposed to EFCT treatment. Thus, EFCT is efficacious in improving marital adjustment. The possible explanation for the effectiveness of EFCT in enhancing marital adjustment could be that it increases the different dimensions of marital intimacy such as intimacy of emotional, psychological, sexual and physical relationships. In addition, EFCT increases a sense of security and heightens mutual tolerance in a relationship which is essential for the continuation and preservation of a successful marriage. The result confirms the significant influence that the independent variable exerts on the dependent variable. This finding corroborates some earlier findings by Soltani, Molazedah, Mamoodi and Hosseini (2013); Najafi, Foleimani, Armadi and Kamker (2015); and Rostami, Taheri, Abdi and Kermani (2014) that EFCT is efficient in promoting marital adjustment and intimacy of spouses. The finding of this study is also supported by Vazhappily & Reyes (2017), Ziyaohagh (2010), Denton, Burleson, Clark Rodriguez, & Hobbs, (2002) who reported that EFCT is effective in enhancing intimacy and marital adjustment among married couples. The various studies confirm that Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy is an effective treatment for promoting marital adjustment as well as enhancing marital understanding among Spouses in a dyadic relationship.

The findings of the study in hypothesis two further revealed that there was a significant difference between EFCT and Control. The reason for the significant effect of the treatment group could be the spouses' exposure to six weeks of treatment with EFCT programmes, while the control group was not. This study agrees with the studies by Rezaie et al (2008), and Makinen and Johnson (2006) on the use of EFCT in improving marital communication and emotional attachment of married spouses.

## **Conclusion**

The findings in this study reveal that Emotionally Focused Couple Therapy is efficacious in the enhancement of marital adjustment among married spouses. Spouses that are adequately adjusted commit themselves to desirable behaviours, attachment, mutual



understanding, and caring. They stand a better chance of enjoying harmony and satisfaction in their marital life. EFCT played the role of helping spouses enhance marital adjustment and consistently maintain bliss and intimacy in their marriages.

The findings of this study revealed that EFCT is effective in managing spouses experiencing marital adjustment problems. Therefore, deliberate attempts should be made by Counselling Psychologists and Marriage Counsellors to embrace the use of EFCT as effective counselling therapy to assist spouses experiencing marital adjustment challenges. Counsellors in training and Ministers of God should be properly trained in the art of emotionally focused couple therapy as a treatment for spouses who have challenges in their marital relationship.

## **References**

- Ahmadi, F. S., Zarel, E. & Fallahchai S. R., (2014). The effectiveness of emotional-focused therapy in the resolution of marital conflicts between couples who visited the confrontation centres. *Journal of Educational and Management Studies*, 44(1), 118-123.
- Adegoke, A.A. & Esere, M.O. (1999). Sources of stress and coping strategies among Divorces in Ilorin Metropolis. *The Counsellor*, 16(1), 227-233.
- Al Horany, A., & Hassan, S. A. (2012). Marital adjustment among postgraduate students at universities in Malaysia. *Elixir Psychology*, 37(8), 3773-3776.
- Bogat, G. A., Dejonghe, E. S., Davison, W. S. & Von, E. A. (2006). *Psycho-marital properties of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com>.
- Denton, W. H., Burlison, B. R., Clark, T. E., Rodriguez, Ch. P., & Hobbs, P. V. (2002). A randomized trial of emotion-focused therapy for couples in a training Clinic. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 26 (1), 65-78.
- Ebenuwa-Okoh, E.E. (2007). Correlates of marital adjustment among married persons' in the Delta State of Nigeria: Implication for Guidance and Counselling. (Unpublished PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies of the University of Benin City).
- Ebenuwa-Okoh, E.E. (2009). Gender and age as moderators of the relationship between Environmental variables and marital adjustment among married persons. (in press).
- Ebenuwa-Okoh, E.E. (2010). Moderators of marital adjustment among married persons in Delta state: Implication for counselling practice. *The Nigerian Journal of Research and Production*, 16(2) 1-11.
- Esere, M. O. (2002). Approaches to marital therapy. *The Nigerian Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 8(1), 61-85.
- Gurman, A. S (2008). *Clinical handbook of couple therapy*. The Guilford Press.
- Jesuorobo, O.W. (2016). Efficacy of behavioural couple therapy in the enhancement of marital adjustment among couples in Oredo Local Government Area of Edo state, Nigeria. (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Department of Educational Evaluation and Counselling Psychology, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City).
- Johnson, S. M. (2004). *The practice of emotionally focused couple therapy: Creating connection (2nd ed.)*. New York, NY: Brunner-Routledge.
- Johnson, S. M., & Greenberg, L. S. (1988). Relating process to outcome in marital therapy. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 14, 175-184.
- Maduakonam, A. (1991). "Choosing a life partner", In Nwokora, L. N. (ed.) *Can I marry a non-catholic?* Onitsha: Varitas Press.

- Makinen, J.A. & Johnson, S.M. (2006). *Resolving attachment injuries in couples using emotionally focused therapy*. *Journal consulting and clinical psychology*; 14(6), 55-64.
- Najafi, M., Soleimani A. A., Ahmadi K. & Kamfer E. H., (2015). *The efficacy of couple emotionally focused therapy (EFCT-C) on increasing mental adjustment and improving the physical and psychological health of infertile couples, physical health and psychological health in couples*. <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280911069-the>.
- Nigerian Baptist Convention Sunday School Lesson for Adults (2019). Baptist Press Nigeria Limited, Ibadan.
- Nigerian Baptist Convention (2008). Baptist Press Nigeria Limited, Ibadan.
- Nigerian Baptist Convention (2009). Baptist Press Nigeria Limited, Ibadan.
- Nigerian Baptist Convention (2011). Baptist Press Nigeria Limited, Ibadan.
- Nigerian Baptist Convention (2012). Baptist Press Nigeria Limited, Ibadan.
- National Centre for Health, Marriage and Divorce (2003).
- Okorodudu, R.I. & Ebenuwa-Okoh, E.E. (2003). Predictive factors of marital adjustment among couples in the Delta state of Nigeria: Implication for counselling. *African Journal of Studies in Education*. 1(1), 80-85.
- Okorie, G. O. (2009). Relationship between personal factors and marital conflicts resolution strategies among married people in Enugu State, Nigeria. (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, the University of Nigeria Nsukka)
- Oladapo, J.A. (2013). *The Christian home. A pre-marital counselling guide for all pastors, Christian counsellors, intending couples and parents*. Hirise Celebrity Publishers.
- Onyechi, K. C. (2003). Some Correlates of family stability among couples in Anambra State. *Unpublished PhD Thesis*. Department of Educational Foundations. University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Rezaie, M., Younesi, J., Ahmadi, K. H., Asgari, A. & Mirzaie, J. (2008). The impact of emotionally-focused couple therapy on improving communication patterns in combat-related PTSD veterans and their wives. *Journal of Family Research*, 6(21), 211-220.
- Rostami, M., Taheri, A., Abdi, M. & Kermani, N. (2014). The effectiveness of instructing emotion-focused approach in improving the marital satisfaction in couples. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 114(2014) 693-698.
- Sholfer, L. T. & Shoben, E. J. (2004). *Psychology of Adjustment*. Cambridge: River Side Press.
- Soltani, A Molazadeh, J., Mamoodi, M. and Hosseini, S. (2013). A Study in the Effectiveness of Emotional Focused Couple Therapy on Intimacy of Couples. *Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences*. 82(2013) 461-465.
- Spanier, G. B. (1976). Measuring dyadic adjustment: New scales for assessing the quality of marriage and similar dyads. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 38, 18-28.
- Vazhappily J. J. & Reyes M. E. S. (2017). *The efficacy of emotion-focused couples' communication programme for enhancing marital communication and satisfaction among distressed couples*. <https://www.researchgate.net/scientificcontributions/2118213167-Josty-Jnoob-Vazhappilly>.
- Whisman, M. A., Uebelacker L. A., & Weinstock L. M., (2004). *Psycho-marital Properties of the Dyadic Adjustment Scale*. <https://www.sciencedirect.com>.
- Ziyaohagh, M. (2010). *The effect of emotionally-focused couple therapy on marital distresses*. IRONDOC. Ferdowsi University of Mashhad