SEXUAL INTIMACY FACTOR IN MARITAL CONFLICTS AMONG CHRISTIAN COUPLES IN LAGOS WEST BAPTIST CONFERENCE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
This study investigated sexual intimacy factor in marital conflicts among Christian couples within the Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria. A descriptive research mixed method, which is quantitative and qualitative in approach, was utilised in this study. The population of the study consisted 4,000 Christian couples married for 5-25 years including 5 pastors, 5 counsellors and 190 Christian couples in 8 Associations. A total of 200 participants selected through stratified and purposive sampling techniques consisted the sample for the study. The four research questions were formulated to guide the study. To answer these questions, therefore, a questionnaire and semi-structured interview instruments consisted of items formulated in line with the four research questions was used to collect data from participants of the study. The instrument was equally validated through a test re-test method. Data collected from 200 respondents through a 20-item structured questionnaire and 5 key semi-structured interviews by both five Pastors and Counsellors were analysed using descriptive simple statistical percentage and thematic analysis. Findings indicated that inadequate sexual communication, lack of sexual education, doctrinal misinterpretation, and mismatched libidos are critical factors in sexual disharmony and conflicts in Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria. Results indicated a high prevalence of sex-related conflicts among Christian couples in Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria exacerbated by socio-cultural and theological constraints. This researcher argued for a pragmatic theological model that affirms mutual consent, pleasure, gender inequality, and communication. Recommendations include church-based sexual education, equitable pastoral counselling, and reforms in doctrinal teachings.

Introduction

Sexual intimacy remains a foundational component of marriage, yet it is often a major source of marital conflict, including in Christian marriages. Christian doctrine views sex as a sacred bond within marriage, meant to enhance emotional connection and enhance intimacy. However, unresolved sexual issues, especially those emanating from poor communication, have led to emotional detachment, infidelity, and even divorce[1]. This study investigated how sexual intimacy factors contribute to marital conflicts among Christian couples in Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria.

The central thesis of this research is that the lack of effective sexual communication significantly contributes to marital dissatisfaction and sexual conflict among Christian couples. This study contended that sexual intimacy, when nurtured, can promote deeper marital satisfaction. However, when mismanaged or neglected, it leads to conflict and marital breakdown[2]. Within Christian marriage, where biblical ethics set the basis for relational expectations, the inability to express sexual needs can create emotional and spiritual disconnection[3].

While studies have explored sexual satisfaction and marital conflict, most are rooted in Western secular cultures and overlooked the religious and cultural dimensions that influence sex-related discussion in African Christian settings[4]. This study fills that gap by anchoring its analysis on the Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria which upholds strong biblical values regarding monogamy, sexual fidelity, and marital responsibility. Despite these doctrinal strengths, couples within this region still struggle with sexual dissatisfaction and communication.

This study contends that Christian couples face unique barriers to open sexual dialogue, such as doctrinal silence, cultural taboos, and limited exposure to relational communication models. It critiques the church's inadequate emphasis on sexual communication within marriage enrichment programmes. The research, therefore, introduces a linguistic-pragmatic approach to sexual intimacy-highlighting the use of ethical, scripturally aligned dialogue as a method for resolving conflict and promoting sexual intimacy.

Guided by the Applied Biblical Covenant Model, as advanced by Calvin, Bullinger, and Balswick, the study underscores marriage as a divine covenant governed by mutual obligations of love, fidelity, and communication[5]. The researcher argues that this covenantal understanding legitimizes sexual communication not just as a right, but as a divine and moral responsibility and obligation.

The study contributes to theology and marital communication scholarship by contextualizing sexual intimacy within biblical ethics and African Christian practice. It draws from couples who have been married for 5–25 years, providing empirical insights into long-term marital dynamics. The Lagos West Baptist Conference offers a rich and practical research setting due to its large Christian population and accessibility. The researcher's relationship with local church leaders also enabled trust-based access to sensitive data.

Ultimately, this study challenges Christian couples and church institutions to reevaluate sexual discourse as a core component of covenantal marriage. This calls for a faith-informed, communicative, and ethical framework to address sexual conflict and promote holistic marital stability.

Theoretical Framework: Applied Biblical Covenant Model

This study is anchored on *Applied Biblical Covenant Model* propounded and advanced by theorists: John Calvin[6], Heinrich Bullinger[7], Johannes Cocceius[8], Francis Turretin[9], Balswick[10], Augustine[11], Piper[12], Wright[13]. This theory views marriage as a sacred covenant under divine authority, emphasizing moral, ethical, and spiritual obligations and responsibilities of Christian couples such as love, fidelity, communication, and mutual respect. This theory becomes relevant to this study because it provides a religious-ethical foundation for understanding sexual discourse in Christian marriages. It also supports and strengthens the idea that sexual communication is a divine duty and promotes the use of ethical dialogue to resolve conflicts. The researcher believed that this theory directly aligns with Christian marital ethics and the Lagos West Baptist denominational doctrines and teachings.

Literature Review

Sexual Intimacy in Christian Marriage

Scholars agree that sexual intimacy is both a predictor and stabilizer of marital satisfaction. Oladeji observed that sexual harmony significantly improves communication, emotional bonding, and mutual respect in marriage[14]. In contrast, Akanbi identified the denial of conjugal rights as a major cause of psychological and emotional breakdown in marriages[15]. Within Christian theology, sexual intimacy transcends biological necessity; it is a divinely instituted covenant between husband and wife promoting emotional, spiritual, and relational unity.

The biblical foundation for sexual intimacy is evident in Genesis 2:24, describing marriage as a "one flesh" union. Paul reiterates this in 1 Corinthians 7:3–5, emphasizing mutual sexual responsibility as essential in marriage[16]. This scriptural framework challenges ascetic traditions that view sex solely as a means for procreation. This study argues for a theology that upholds both sexual pleasure and spiritual bonding as integral to Christian marriage. Keller conceptualized sexual intimacy as a "covenant-renewing" act, drawn from Ephesians 5, reinforcing that sex fortifies the sacred bond of marriage[17]. However, this study critiqued Keller's theology for underemphasizing cultural and psychosocial dynamics in contexts like Nigeria, where taboos and silence around sex persist. Thus, this researcher advocates an African-contextual theology of sex that maintains biblical integrity while confronting cultural reticence.

Chapman's psychological insights emphasized that sexual intimacy enhances communication and reduces relational tension[18]. Nonetheless, his model, particularly the Five Love Languages, lacks theological depth and ignores African Christian realities. Akintoye argued that such gaps contribute to dissatisfaction when couples interpret sexual intimacy as carnal rather than sacred[19]. This study asserted that discipleship models in Nigerian churches must include sexual education that is biblically sound and culturally resonant. Ayantayo rightly criticized the overemphasis on procreation at the expense of companionship and emotional intimacy[20]. However, his work lacks actionable pastoral frameworks. The researcher contributes by proposing curriculum development in Nigerian seminaries to train clergy in holistic theology of intimacy, bridging doctrinal teaching and pastoral care.

Olowokere's empirical study in Lagos showed that couples who engaged in regular, consensual intimacy reported higher spiritual and emotional bonding[21]. Yet, his findings stopped short of theological interpretation. This research extends that gap by framing sexual intimacy as spiritual formation, where vulnerability in the bedroom becomes a site of grace and discipleship. Ogunbanjo stressed the need for churches to address sexual matters more openly to combat ignorance and shame[22]. This study critiques his approach for lacking a robust theological basis. Drawing from Christ's incarnation, the researcher proposes a theology of embodied intimacy, affirming that God sanctifies physical expressions, including sexuality.

Ikuomola found that sex often functions as a reconciliation tool after conflict[23]. This therapeutic use of sex is vital in pastoral counselling. Accordingly, this study advocates for intimacy restoration modules in Christian marriage therapy, modelled on biblical reconciliation themes in Hosea and Ephesians. Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 7:5 cautions against prolonged sexual abstinence, recognizing human vulnerability and spiritual risk. In Nigeria, sexual neglect contributes to infidelity and emotional detachment. This study critiqued the Church's silence and urges proactive theological engagement with sexuality, positioning it as a relational and spiritual necessity, not merely a moral concern.

Lewis framed eros as a means of vulnerability that fosters humility and intimacy[24]. This research builds on his view, arguing that sexual intimacy should be considered a spiritual discipline, cultivating fruits like patience and gentleness. Babalola supported this by linking regular intimacy to godliness and reduced temptation[25]. Thus, the researcher proposes devotional intimacy practices that integrate prayer with physical closeness.

Okonkwo viewed sexual fidelity as a public witness in societies marred by infidelity and sexual exploitation[26]. This study agrees, urging churches to recognize faithful Christian marriages as missional tools, using them to model godly sexuality in outreach programs. Ultimately, sexual intimacy in Christian marriage is a divine gift that fosters unity, healing, spiritual growth, and witness. The researcher contributes a contextual theology of intimacy that is

scripturally grounded, culturally aware, and pastorally informed—vital for the Nigerian Christian context where silence.

The Christian View of Marriage

Marriage is a divinely ordained, ancient institution defined as a sacred covenant and legal union between a mature man and woman for companionship, procreation, and social order. David defined marriage as a legal union between a mature man and woman, established within a culturally and spiritually sanctioned structure[27]. Nwagwu viewed it as a deep interpersonal bond foundational to social development, although increasingly complex in the contemporary era[28]. Nwobi further emphasized that marriage imposes legal and moral obligations, thereby shaping the societal fabric[29].

The researcher noted that legal and moral obligations alone can't prevent marital issues without spiritual and emotional maturity. Idealizing marriage without emotional preparation leads to fragile unions. Biblically, marriage is rooted in Genesis 2:24 as a divine union for mutual support. Blitchington argued that the complementary nature of male and female roles within marriage is crucial for harmony, advocating distinct but interdependent roles[30]. However, such views have drawn critique in contemporary discourse, where rigid gender roles are seen as outdated. This study argued that Christian marriage must adapt, recognizing that equality and mutual respect do not contradict biblical partnership ideals.

Ireton maintained that marriage is a divine covenant rather than a human invention, reinforcing its sacred and unbreakable nature.[31] Yet, this view can be critiqued for underplaying the evolving cultural context in which marriage now operates. Omojola shifted attention to the emotional and psychological aspects of marriage, emphasizing the relational depth required for enduring unions. However, this researcher contends that while psychological stability is vital, spiritual grounding remains the cornerstone of lasting Christian marriages.

Adebayo posited the primary aim of marriage as unity and mutual support, grounded in faith[32]. However, this interpretation overlooks the role of individual growth and personal expression. This study contends that Christian marriage should facilitate not just collective commitment but also personal fulfilment under God's purpose. Faith Oyedepo advocated a covenantal view of marriage with complementary roles, but Akinrinmade critiqued this as potentially reinforcing unequal marital dynamics[33]. This researcher aligns with egalitarian interpretations that revisit Galatians 3:28 to affirm equal partnership within Christian unions. In today's Christian homes, traditional roles may not sufficiently address issues of communication, autonomy, and shared responsibility.

Walrond-Skinner emphasized the permanence of the marital covenant, yet scholars like Babarinde failed to account for contexts such as abuse or betrayal that threaten emotional well-being[34]. This research supports a flexible interpretation of marital permanence, informed by biblical allowances for separation and the need to prioritize individual safety. Adewale offered a practical view of Christian marriage, prioritizing emotional support, joy, and peace within the relationship[35]. This view aligns with the present researcher's argument that Christian marriage education must emphasize relational skills such as empathy, mutual respect, and effective communication alongside doctrine.

Adebayo's assertion that Christian marriage glorifies God is crucial, but this study critiques narrow interpretations of this glorification. Instead, it posits that true glorification must encompass both the spiritual mission and personal dignity of each partner[36]. Finally, scholars such as Abimbola and Oyedepo David reinforced the permanence of marriage, yet neglected practical challenges like financial stress and sexual dissatisfaction.

This research argued that a holistic Christian approach must incorporate conflict resolution, counselling, and openness to redemptive marital adjustments. In summary, while Christian marriage is rooted in covenant theology, it must engage with modern realities. This study calls for a balanced theology one that honours biblical values while prioritizing emotional, psychological, and spiritual health in marriage.

Marital Conflict

Marital conflict is an inevitable aspect of every marriage, including Christian marriages. Wilmoth and Hocker emphasized that Christian marriages are not immune to conflict despite their foundation on biblical teachings[37]. This highlights a critical argument that faith alone does not eliminate relational struggles, reflecting the complex realities of human nature

and interpersonal dynamics. Christian marriage, designed to promote companionship and mutual support (Genesis 2:18), nevertheless encounters tensions rooted in personality differences, values, and communication styles.

Fincham and Beach contributed significantly by noting that while conflict is natural, persistent unresolved disputes can undermine marital stability and family well-being[38]. The study agrees that Christian values like forgiveness and grace can help in marriage but warns that religious commitment alone doesn't guarantee conflict resolution. Issues like poor communication, finances, infidelity, and personality clashes require both practical tools and faith-based emotional resilience. However, this faith-psychology approach often lacks cultural adaptation, particularly in African Christian settings with complex family dynamics.

Causes of Sex-Related Conflicts

Sex-related conflicts remain a significant source of marital discord, rooted largely in sexual dissatisfaction, which arises when partners perceive unmet sexual needs. Yucel and Gassanov's dyadic analysis underscored a strong correlation between sexual and marital satisfaction[39], supporting the argument that sexual intimacy is a critical barometer of relational health. Yet, this relationship is bidirectional and complex, with Sprecher and Cate warning that sexual dissatisfaction can both stem from and contribute to broader marital issues[40]. Mismatched sexual desire often creates tension, as one partner's higher libido may cause feelings of rejection or frustration. Mark's research highlighted this gendered dynamic[41], though Conley et al. challenged simplistic gender stereotypes by showing significant individual variation[42]. This critique is important for avoiding overgeneralization and encouraging couples to communicate openly, as Gottman stressed[43].

Infidelity, both physical and emotional, is widely recognized as profoundly damaging, leading to trust breakdowns and divorce[44] [45]. However, Glass and Wright argued emotional infidelity can be equally injurious, a nuance often overlooked in popular discourse.[46] Ellison et al. pointed out that in conservative Christian settings, sex is often framed as duty, which may generate guilt or dissatisfaction.[47] Hence, religious and cultural expectations shape sexual roles in complex ways.

Pargament's work on sanctification presented a counterview, suggesting that viewing sex as sacred can deepen marital bonds.[48] This tension between duty and sacredness requires further investigation, especially in non-Western contexts. Finally, emotional and psychological issues, such as anxiety or trauma, disrupt sexual intimacy and are often under-addressed in faith communities. Integrating counselling and open communication is thus essential for holistic resolutions.

Communicative Strategies in Negotiating Sex in Marital Conflict

Adeyemi[49] and Umeh[50] highlighted that open communication and premarital counselling are crucial in managing sexual expectations within Christian marriages. This aligns with the argument that effective communication strategies can mediate sex-related conflicts. Greece[51] contended that sexual intimacy is not merely physical but deeply emotional and spiritual, serving as a vital expression of love and trust. However, Basson[52] noted that in many Nigerian Christian homes, a limited sexual vocabulary suppresses desires, leading to silence that harms relational harmony.

Tannen[53] discussed how language in sexual negotiation can reinforce existing power structures, often marginalizing one partner's voice due to religious and cultural norms. Parker[54] noted that cultural taboos and religious insecurities hinder open sexual communication, leading to dissatisfaction and marital breakdown, especially among Nigerian Christian couples. While Christian values like mutual respect and agape love support dialogue, they must be reinterpreted to fit real-life experiences. Ndukwe[55] highlights shame as a major barrier to sexual communication, promoting silence over openness. While forgiveness aids healing, it must be accompanied by repentance and emotional safety. The study advocates integrating emotional intelligence and sexual literacy into Christian counseling to improve intimacy and resolve sexual conflicts.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was used, involving a 20-item questionnaire for 200 Christian couples and in-depth interviews with five pastors and five counsellors. Topics included sexual intimacy, communication, doctrine, education, and satisfaction. Data was analyzed

using tables, percentages, and thematic analysis, offering clear results, combining qualitative and quantitative insights, and revealing trends and attitudes.

Data Analysis and Findings

Research Question One: Is there a relationship between frequency and marital satisfaction?

Table 1: How often do you engage sexual activity among couples?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Daily	20	10.0%
Weekly	80	40.0%
Monthly	60	30.0%
Rarely	32	16.0%
Never	8	4.0%

Most couples report weekly (40%) or monthly (30%) sexual activity, with only 10% engaging daily. Meanwhile, 16% report rare activity and 4% none at all, indicating moderate overall intimacy but a notable minority at risk of dissatisfaction and potential conflict.

Table 2: Are You Sexually Satisfied in Your Marriage?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	100	50.0%
No	40	20.0%
Sometimes	60	30.0%

Half of the respondents are sexually satisfied, 30% sometimes, and 20% are not, highlighting that while satisfaction is common, significant dissatisfaction exists, potentially causing marital tension and underscoring the need for better communication and sexual education.

Research Question Two: What communicative strategies do they use to negotiate sexual intimacy and resolve conflict?

Table 3: Do You Freely Discuss Sexual Needs with Your Spouse?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	110	55.0%
No	90	45.0%

While 55% of couples discuss sexual needs openly, 45% do not, indicating a communication gap that can harm intimacy. This underscores the need for practical communication training in faith-based marriage programmes.

Table 4: How Do You Resolve Marital Conflicts?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Prayer	80	40.0%
Counselling	40	20.0%
Communication	60	30.0%
Avoidance	20	10.0%

Couples resolve conflicts primarily through prayer (40%) and communication (30%), while others use counselling (20%) or avoidance (10%). Prayer and communication are vital tools, but the relatively low use of counselling and the presence of avoidance suggest a gap in professional conflict management support and a tendency to delay resolution.

Table 5: Do You Use Prayer or Bible Study to Resolve Conflicts?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	112	56.0%
No	88	44.0%

While 56% use prayer or Bible study for conflict resolution, 44% do not, showing varied spiritual engagement. Incorporating scripture-based communication into counseling may improve marital outcomes.

Research Question Three: How do religious beliefs and teachings influence sexual communication in marriage?

Table 6: Do You Believe Churches Should Discuss Sexual Issues with Couples?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	140	70.0%
No	60	30.0%

Seventy percent believe churches should address sexual issues in marriage, showing strong support for including sexual education in Christian teachings and a willingness to break taboos around discussing sex in religious settings.

Research Question Four: What is the common sex-related conflicts and its factors experienced by the couples?

Table 7: What Are the Most Common Sources of Conflict in Your Marriage?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Finances	48	24%
Sexual issues	64	32%
Communication	48	24%
In-laws	16	8%
Religion	24	12%

Sexual issues are the leading cause of conflict (32%), followed by finances and communication (each 24%). This highlights how sexual dissatisfaction links to wider relationship problems, emphasizing the need for focused church-based counseling and seminars.

Table 8: Has Sexual Dissatisfaction Ever Caused Conflict in Your Marriage?

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	104	52.0%
No	96	48.0%

Over half (52%) of respondents report sexual dissatisfaction causing marital conflict, highlighting its crucial role in maintaining marital harmony and stability.

Table 9: What are Causes of Sex-Related Conflict?

Cause	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Inadequate communication	90	45%
Doctrinal guilt/shame	50	25%
Mismatched libido	40	20%
Lack of sexual education	20	10%

Inadequate communication (45%) is the top cause of sexual conflict, followed by doctrinal guilt/shame (25%), mismatched libido (20%), and lack of sexual education (10%), highlighting barriers like poor dialogue, religious shame, desire differences, and misinformation.

Thematic Analysis from Interviews with Pastors and Counsellors:

1. Inadequate Sexual Communication

Four of five pastors report poor sexual communication as a common issue in counseling, with couples finding it easier to discuss money than sex due to taboo perceptions. All counselors agree that this silence breeds emotional disconnect and

resentment, causing avoidable bitterness in many Christian homes.

2. Influence of Doctrinal Teachings

Three pastors acknowledged that churches have historically avoided teaching about sexual intimacy, causing ignorance and guilt. Four counselors criticized shame-based messages in premarital counseling, noting many women view sex as dirty or sinful, negatively impacting their marriages.

3. Mismatched Libido and Sexual Expectations

Two pastors reported that sexual incompatibility, especially when unaddressed, leads to prolonged emotional separation while all the counsellors emphasized that mismatched libidos cause one partner to feel rejected or pressured. This sometimes results in assuming that the other is no longer loving, when it's actually a physiological or emotional mismatch.

4. Lack of Comprehensive Sexual Education

Four pastors admitted the church lacks age-appropriate sexual education beyond "sex is for marriage," neglecting what sustains marital intimacy. All counselors agreed on the need for biblically grounded, medically informed sexual education, as many Christian couples struggle due to ignorance about normal sexual function.

5. Psychological and Spiritual Impact of Sexual Frustration

Three pastors observed that sexual dissatisfaction often leads to emotional distance, prayerlessness, and even temptation outside marriage while counsellors emphasized that sexual neglect is often misdiagnosed as spiritual dryness or moral weakness when the root issue is intimacy. This is because Sexual frustration is a silent killer of joy, especially in homes where divorce is not an option.

Discussion of Findings

The first research question explored the correlation between sexual frequency and marital satisfaction and stability among Christian couples in the Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria. Respondents generally reported engaging in moderate to frequent sexual activity, which they associated with increased marital satisfaction and emotional connection. This aligns with the findings of Sprecher and Cate, Chapman, Akanbi, Ikuomola, and Laumann, who observed that sexual frequency is a strong predictor of marital satisfaction, while dissatisfaction often results in emotional withdrawal, poor communication, and infidelity. Olowokere also noted that regular and consensual sexual intimacy among Christian couples fosters spiritual closeness and reduces conflict.

The second research question examined the communicative strategies Christian couples use to negotiate sexual matters and resolve related conflicts. Participants reported using various techniques such as direct communication, active listening, symbolic gestures, empathy, negotiation, and, occasionally, conflict avoidance. This supports findings from Gottman, Ilesanmi, Onyekachi, Adediran, Babalola, and Arowojola and Owoeye, who emphasized that open dialogue, non-verbal cues, and empathy are vital for navigating sexual disagreements and promoting marital harmony among Christian spouses.

The third research question addressed how religious beliefs and practices influence discourse around sexual intimacy and conflict. Respondents highlighted that biblical teachings and doctrinal values greatly influence their views on sex. While some perceived sexual intimacy as solely for procreation, others viewed it as a divine gift intended to enhance marital pleasure and connection.

These findings are consistent with Mahoney, Ellison et al., Pargament, Akintola, and Ndukwe, who argued that religious ideology can both support and limit sexual expression, depending on interpretation. They observed that theological rigidity or misinterpretation can lower sexual satisfaction, while balanced spiritual understanding fosters healthy sexual communication.

The fourth research question identified common sex-related conflicts and contributing factors. Couples frequently cited sexual dissatisfaction, lack of communication, guilt from religious teachings, mismatched libidos, and limited sexual education as key triggers. Additionally, issues such as finances, in-laws, and religious differences were mentioned. However, sexual intimacy issues emerged as the most significant cause of marital conflict. These findings resonate with Gottman, Sanford, and

Wilcox and Wolfinger, who found that ineffective sexual communication and lack of education on sexual matters are major predictors of marital dissatisfaction and conflict.

Overall Implications of the Study

This research reveals crucial implications for marital stability or satisfaction and church-based interventions among Christian couples in the Lagos West Baptist Conference. A recurring theme is poor communication, especially regarding sexual matters. The data supported the importance and usefulness of pragmatic discourse analysis as a tool to uncover hidden or implied meanings in marital interactions. These gaps in sexual communication often led to misunderstandings and prolonged marital conflict especially sexual conflicts.

Churches need to take a more practical and pragmatic role in sexual and relational education. There is a widespread notion that the Church has remained silent or judgmental on sexual matters. This silence reinforces shame and misinformation, especially in a cultural setting where sex is still seen as a taboo for discussion in public sphere. This study finds that such cultural taboos must be addressed if Christian marriages are to thrive.

Another implication is the low rate of engagement with professional counselling. Many couples are reluctant to seek professional help, largely due to stigma or fear of judgment. The study suggests that professional help should be normalized within faith communities, possibly by integrating counselling into regular church programmes or offering it through trusted spiritual leaders.

The study also stresses the need for structured and formal training of church leaders. Many pastors and counsellors lack adequate education on Christian sexual ethics, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal communication. There is a call for intentional and ongoing training in these areas.

Scholarly Contribution to Knowledge

This research contributes to scholarly discourse by situating sexual intimacy within a pragmatic theological framework. While earlier studies, such as those by Johnson and Eze, Sprecher & Cate as well as some western scholars, affirm the importance of sex in marriage, they often overlook how theological beliefs and misinterpretations of religious texts shape couples' real-life experiences. This study bridges that gap by examining the intersection of Christian theology, correct interpretation of religious texts, culture, and marital communication towards marital stability and satisfaction.

This study also critiques the common dichotomy between spirituality and sexuality in Nigerian Christian settings. This artificial separation results in unrealistic expectations and marital dissatisfaction. By integrating pragmatic sexual discourse and theological insight, this study advocated a more holistic view of sex- one that embraces its spiritual, physical, and emotional dimensions- sexual intimacy entails physical, spiritual and emotional dimensions.

Furthermore, this study challenges churches to replace shame-based narratives with grace-centred, biblically grounded teachings. It encourages scholars and religious leaders to develop a theology that views sexuality as sacred and essential to marital well-being.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that sexual intimacy is central and crucial to marital satisfaction and stability among Christian couples in Lagos West Baptist Conference, Nigeria. When distorted, ignored, or misunderstood, it becomes a key source of conflict. Respondents (both clergy and laity) acknowledged the Church's limited role in addressing sexual issues effectively. There is a growing demand, particularly among younger couples, for scripturally sound and educationally informed guidance on sexuality.

Based on these findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

i. Churches should incorporate sexuality education into both premarital and marital counselling programmes.

ii. Open and respectful discussions about sexual pleasure, satisfaction, and mutual consent should be promoted in church settings.

iii. Pastors and counsellors should receive training on addressing sexual

issues with sensitivity and practical wisdom.

iv. Church teachings should embrace gender-equitable interpretations of Scripture that affirm mutual respect and consent.

v. Theological and secular universities curricula should be developed to reflect the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of sexual intimacy for counselling session.

vi. Christian couples should be willing to undergo sexual communication and sexual education training for their healthy and peaceful family life.

vii. Churches should establish safe spaces where couples can discuss their challenges without fear of judgment.

viii. Partnerships with Christian sex therapists and marriage counsellors should be encouraged to provide holistic care.

Finally, this study argues that the Church must lead the transformation of sexual discourse within marriage. By breaking silence, challenging outdated traditional culture, and promoting biblically rooted intimacy, Christian couples can flourish spiritually, emotionally, and sexually.

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