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The Influence of Parental Style on Marital Instability among Married Adults in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

Marital instability is an important social and family problem in Nigeria. It is expressed through persistent disagreements, emotional distance, poor conflict resolution, separation, and divorce. Although several factors influence the quality of marital relationships, the experiences individuals acquire in their families of origin may significantly shape their behaviour as spouses and parents. This article examines the influence of parental style on marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria, drawing on the attached thesis, which investigated parenting styles, communication styles, and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital instability. The study adopted a descriptive survey design of the correlational type. The sample comprised 400 married adults selected across Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States through a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using the Parenting Styles and Marital Instability Questionnaire (PSMIQ). The reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.81. Data were analysed using frequency counts, percentages, and Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that neglectful parenting was the most prevalent parental style among the respondents, followed by authoritarian parenting. Parenting style had a significant relationship with marital instability, $r = .37$, $p < .001$. The findings suggest that adults raised in neglectful, authoritarian, or otherwise dysfunctional family environments may experience difficulties with emotional regulation, trust, communication, and conflict resolution in marriage. The article recommends positive-parenting education,

premarital counselling, marital enrichment programmes, and culturally responsive family counselling services in South-West Nigeria.

Kata Kunci:

Gaya Pengasuhan; Ketidakstabilan Perkawinan; Keluarga Asal; Keterikatan; Orang Dewasa yang Menikah.

Abstrak

Ketidakstabilan perkawinan merupakan persoalan sosial dan keluarga yang penting di Nigeria. Kondisi ini terlihat melalui pertengkaran yang terus-menerus, jarak emosional, buruknya penyelesaian konflik, perpisahan, dan perceraian. Meskipun berbagai faktor memengaruhi kualitas hubungan perkawinan, pengalaman yang diperoleh individu dalam keluarga asalnya dapat secara signifikan membentuk perilaku mereka sebagai pasangan dan orang tua. Artikel ini mengkaji pengaruh gaya pengasuhan terhadap ketidakstabilan perkawinan di kalangan orang dewasa yang menikah di Nigeria Barat Daya, dengan merujuk pada tesis terlampir yang meneliti gaya pengasuhan, gaya komunikasi, dan kecerdasan emosional sebagai prediktor ketidakstabilan perkawinan. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain survei deskriptif jenis korelasional. Sampel terdiri atas 400 orang dewasa yang menikah, dipilih dari Negara Bagian Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, dan Oyo melalui prosedur multistage sampling. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan Parenting Styles and Marital Instability Questionnaire (PSMIQ), dengan koefisien reliabilitas instrumen sebesar 0,81. Data dianalisis menggunakan frekuensi, persentase, dan Korelasi Product-Moment Pearson pada taraf signifikansi 0,05. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa pola asuh mengabaikan (neglectful) merupakan gaya pengasuhan yang paling dominan di antara responden, diikuti oleh pola asuh otoriter. Gaya pengasuhan memiliki hubungan yang signifikan dengan ketidakstabilan perkawinan, $r = 0,37$, $p < 0,001$. Temuan ini mengindikasikan bahwa orang dewasa yang dibesarkan dalam lingkungan keluarga yang mengabaikan, otoriter, atau disfungsional lainnya dapat mengalami kesulitan dalam regulasi emosi, kepercayaan, komunikasi, dan penyelesaian konflik dalam pernikahan. Artikel ini merekomendasikan pendidikan pengasuhan positif, konseling pranikah, program pengayaan perkawinan, dan layanan konseling keluarga yang responsif secara budaya di Nigeria Barat Daya.

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a major social institution through which individuals establish families, share responsibilities, provide emotional support, and raise children. In South-West Nigeria, marriage is traditionally regarded as a lifelong relationship involving not only the couple but also their children, extended families, religious communities, and wider social networks. Despite this important status, many marriages experience persistent conflict, emotional disconnection, separation, and divorce.

Marital instability refers to the weakening or breakdown of the marital relationship, reflected in frequent conflict, dissatisfaction, poor communication, mistrust, emotional withdrawal, infidelity, physical or emotional separation, and thoughts or actions related to divorce. Its effects extend beyond the couple: children in unstable homes may experience emotional distress, poor academic performance, low self-esteem, behavioural difficulties, and distorted expectations about intimate relationships (Adeoye & Ola, 2019; Josiah & Nteh, 2022).

One factor that may influence marital stability is the parental style experienced during childhood (Adewale, 2021). Parenting style describes the characteristic pattern of behaviour, discipline, emotional responsiveness, communication, and supervision that parents use in raising their children. The classic classification of parenting styles rests on two dimensions — responsiveness and demandingness — whose interaction produces four broad styles (Odeyemi & Adekeye, 2017; Talib et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 1995).

Authoritative parents combine warmth and responsiveness with reasonable control and clear expectations, explaining rules and allowing age-appropriate independence; children raised this way tend to develop confidence, emotional regulation, empathy, and social competence that support healthier adult relationships. Authoritarian parents emphasise obedience, strict control, and punishment with limited emotional support and dialogue, which may leave adult children struggling with assertiveness, emotional expression, and flexible problem-solving. Permissive parents are warm and accepting but provide few limits or demands, leaving adult children to struggle with delayed gratification, responsibility, and tolerance for disagreement. Neglectful parents show low responsiveness and low supervision, providing little emotional involvement or guidance, which may leave adult children insecure, low in self-esteem, emotionally detached, and distrustful (Akpan & Udonwa, 2020).

The family of origin is an important context for learning interpersonal behaviour. Children observe how their parents express emotions, resolve disagreements, exercise authority, show affection, and respond to stress, and these observations may become internalised as relationship patterns. An adult raised in a home marked by harsh criticism, emotional neglect, inconsistent discipline, or unresolved parental conflict may reproduce similar behaviours in marriage; conversely, adults raised by supportive and emotionally responsive parents may develop stronger self-esteem, empathy, communication skills, and conflict-management abilities.

Attachment Theory helps explain why this transfer occurs. Early relationships with caregivers shape internal expectations about safety, trust, emotional availability, and intimacy: secure caregiving may support stable adult relationships, whereas inconsistent or rejecting caregiving may create insecurity and difficulty with marital attachment. Anxiously attached adults may become excessively dependent or fearful of abandonment, while avoidantly attached adults may resist intimacy, suppress emotions, or withdraw during conflict.

Social Learning Theory offers a complementary explanation, proposing that people acquire behavioural patterns through observation, imitation, reinforcement, and modelling; children may therefore learn their future relationship behaviours by watching how parents communicate, discipline, resolve conflict, express affection, and respond to stress (Branden, 2019). Parental style may also shape the development of emotional intelligence: children encouraged to identify and discuss emotions tend to become better able to recognise their own feelings and respond to the emotions of others, whereas children whose feelings are dismissed or punished may learn to suppress or indirectly express emotion, with consequences for marital communication, intimacy, and conflict resolution later in life (Akpan & Udonwa, 2020; Alegbeleye & Akinboye, 2019).

Marital instability itself is a condition in which the strength, satisfaction, commitment, and continuity of a marriage are threatened. It may occur before formal separation or divorce and may exist even when couples continue to live together, and its indicators include persistent and

unresolved conflict, emotional distance and reduced affection, poor communication, mistrust and suspicion, infidelity, dissatisfaction with the relationship, avoidance of intimacy, thoughts about separation or divorce, and an inability to negotiate roles, finances, parenting, or extended-family expectations. Because marital instability is multidimensional, shaped by psychological, interpersonal, economic, cultural, and structural factors, parental style is best understood as one important developmental influence rather than the sole cause of marital breakdown (Afu & Nteh, 2020; Israel, 2023; Heatherton & Wayland, 2023).

Nwaokugha and Keri (2023) identify several concrete ways in which marital instability manifests among couples: communication problems marked by constant disagreement and misunderstanding; financial strain arising from economic stress and disagreement over spending priorities; mistrust and infidelity, including extramarital involvement; difficulty resolving conflict; emotional distance; sudden shifts in a partner's goals and priorities; substance abuse; and cultural or religious differences that challenge marital harmony (Yusuf & Muraina, 2022; Yusuf et al., 2020).

Marriage is expected to provide companionship, emotional security, mutual support, and a stable environment for raising children, yet marital instability has become a serious concern in Nigeria, with many couples experiencing repeated quarrels, emotional separation, mistrust, financial disagreement, infidelity, poor communication, and unresolved conflict that sometimes culminate in separation or divorce. The problem is not confined to the couple themselves: children who grow up in unstable homes may witness hostility, silence, intimidation, neglect, or violence and subsequently learn that such behaviours are normal ways of relating to intimate partners, raising the possibility of an intergenerational cycle in which dysfunctional family patterns are transferred from one generation to the next.

Robinson et al. (1995) explain that parental style may contribute to this cycle in several ways: authoritarian parenting may produce adults who fear disagreement, suppress their emotions, depend on control, or respond aggressively when challenged; neglectful parenting may produce adults who struggle with trust, emotional closeness, self-worth, and the ability to seek support; and permissive parenting may limit the development of self-control, responsibility, and tolerance for frustration (Odeyemi & Adekeye, 2017; Talib et al., 2011). Even when parental style does not directly cause marital instability, it may shape the emotional and interpersonal characteristics that make marital adjustment more difficult.

Although Nigerian studies have examined marital satisfaction, divorce, communication, and family adjustment, relatively limited attention has been given to the influence of childhood parental style on marital instability among adults in South-West Nigeria (Baumrind, 2019). This is the gap the present article addresses, drawing on the attached thesis, which investigated parenting styles, communication styles, and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital instability among married adults in the region. Specifically, the article examines (i) the parental styles experienced or practised among married adults in South-West Nigeria, (ii) the level of marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria, and (iii) whether parenting style is significantly related to marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria, tested against the null hypothesis that no such relationship exists, at the 0.05 level of significance.

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey design of the correlational type to examine the relationship between parental style and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. This design was considered appropriate because the study was concerned with describing the prevailing parental styles and level of marital instability among the respondents, as well as determining the strength and direction of the relationship between the two variables, without any manipulation of the variables under investigation.

The population of the study comprised married adults in South-West Nigeria. The study covered the six states that make up the region — Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo — in order to obtain a sample that reasonably reflects the diversity of the South-West geopolitical zone rather than the experience of a single state or locality.

A sample of 400 married adults was selected through a multistage sampling procedure, which combined the random selection of local government areas within each state, the random selection of communities within the selected local government areas, and the purposive selection of married adults within those communities. The sample size of 400 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula for sample size determination (Yamane, 1967), a widely used approach for estimating an adequate and statistically defensible sample from a known or estimated population.

Data were collected using the Parenting Styles and Marital Instability Questionnaire (PSMIQ), a structured instrument designed to elicit respondents' self-reports on the parental style they experienced while growing up and the level of instability they currently experience in their marriages. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot test, which yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.81, indicating an acceptable level of internal consistency for research purposes (Odeyemi & Adekeye, 2017).

The questionnaires were administered directly to the selected married adults across the six states, with the researchers explaining the purpose of the study and clarifying items where necessary to ensure accurate and complete responses. Copies of the instrument were retrieved on the spot or within an agreed period, after which they were screened, coded, and prepared for statistical analysis.

Data were analysed using frequency counts and percentages to answer the descriptive research questions on the prevailing parental styles and the level of marital instability among the respondents. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation was used to examine the relationship between parenting style and marital instability, and the null hypothesis was tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

This section presents the results of the analysis, drawn from the responses of 400 married adults sampled from Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo States.

Analysis of Research Question 1: What parental styles are experienced or practised among married adults in South-West Nigeria?

Table 1. Parental Styles among Married Adults.

Parental Style	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Authoritative Style	62	15.5	15.5
Authoritarian Style	113	28.3	43.8
Neglectful Style	134	33.5	77.3
Permissive Style	91	22.8	100.0
Total	400	100.0	

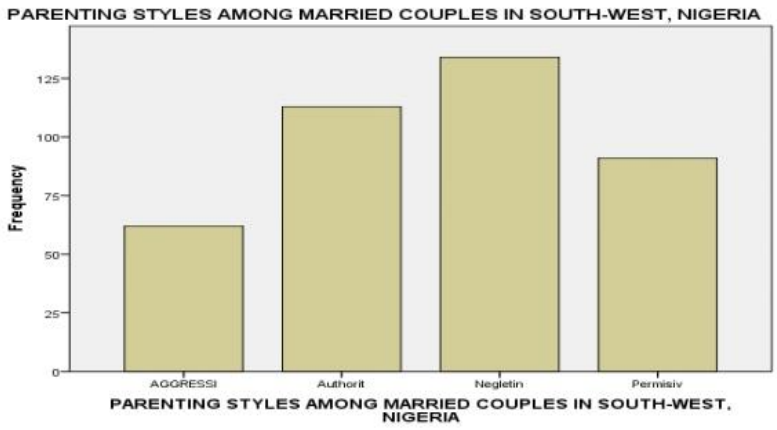


Figure 1. Bar Chart of Parental Styles among Married Adults.

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the distribution of parental styles experienced by married adults in South-West Nigeria. Neglectful parenting was the most prevalent style, reported by 33.5% of respondents, followed by authoritarian parenting (28.3%), permissive parenting (22.8%), and authoritative parenting (15.5%). The prominence of neglectful and authoritarian styles is noteworthy because both may create developmental conditions that challenge later marital adjustment, though through different mechanisms: neglectful parenting may weaken emotional security and limit opportunities to learn empathy, emotional expression, trust, and collaborative problem-solving, while authoritarian parenting may teach obedience and compliance but offer limited scope for dialogue, negotiation, and emotional validation. These findings do not imply that every adult raised by a neglectful or authoritarian parent will experience marital instability; rather, they indicate that such experiences may constitute risk factors that warrant attention.

Analysis of Research Question 2: What is the level of marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria?

Table 2. Mean Scores of Marital Instability among Married Adults in South-West Nigeria.

S/N	Marital Instability Item	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Mean	Std.	Rank
1	I often think about ending my marriage.	116 (29.0)	86 (21.5)	84 (21.0)	114 (28.5)	2.51	1.185	9th
2	My spouse and I rarely spend meaningful time together.	133 (33.3)	71 (17.8)	90 (22.5)	106 (26.5)	2.59	1.217	6th
3	There are periods when I feel unsure about continuing the relationship.	148 (37.0)	65 (16.3)	87 (21.8)	100 (25.0)	2.65	1.213	3rd
4	We often avoid discussing important issues to prevent conflict.	126 (31.5)	87 (21.8)	91 (22.8)	96 (24.0)	2.61	1.163	5th
5	I feel dissatisfied with the overall quality of my marriage.	135 (33.8)	65 (16.3)	91 (22.8)	109 (27.3)	2.57	1.212	7th

6	My spouse and I struggle to communicate effectively.	0 (0.0)	64 (16.0)	77 (19.3)	259 (64.8)	1.52	.765	10th
7	I feel more like a roommate than a partner in my marriage.	134 (33.5)	88 (22.0)	82 (20.5)	96 (24.0)	2.65	1.175	4th
8	There is a lack of trust between me and my spouse.	115 (28.8)	81 (20.3)	100 (25.0)	104 (26.0)	2.52	1.170	8th
9	I sometimes feel emotionally disconnected from my spouse.	141 (35.3)	76 (19.0)	98 (24.5)	85 (21.3)	2.69	1.174	2nd
10	My spouse and I frequently have unresolved conflicts.	142 (35.5)	114 (28.5)	88 (22.0)	56 (14.0)	2.86	1.057	1st

Table 2 presents the responses on the level of marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. The results indicate that "I often think about ending my marriage" was never experienced by 29.0% of respondents and rarely by 21.5%, while 21.0% experienced it sometimes and 28.5% always. For "My spouse and I rarely spend meaningful time together," 33.3% reported this as never true, 17.8% rarely, 22.5% sometimes, and 26.5% always. A similar pattern is seen for "periods of uncertainty about continuing the relationship" (37.0% never, 16.3% rarely, 21.8% sometimes, 25.0% always) and "avoiding important discussions to prevent conflict" (31.5% never, 21.8% rarely, 22.8% sometimes, 24.0% always). For "dissatisfaction with the overall quality of marriage," 33.8% of respondents reported never, 16.3% rarely, 22.8% sometimes, and 27.3% always.

Notably, "My spouse and I struggle to communicate effectively" produced the most polarised response pattern: no respondent (0.0%) selected "never," while 16.0% selected "rarely," 19.3% "sometimes," and a majority of 64.8% selected "always" — yet this item recorded the lowest mean score (M = 1.52) and lowest rank (10th) among the ten items, a result that should be re-verified against the raw data before publication. For "feeling more like a roommate than a partner," 33.5% of respondents reported never, 22.0% rarely, 20.5% sometimes, and 24.0% always. Regarding "lack of trust between spouses," 28.8% reported never, 20.3% rarely, 25.0% sometimes, and 26.0% always. For "feeling emotionally disconnected from a spouse," 35.3% reported never, 19.0% rarely, 24.5% sometimes, and 21.3% always. Finally, for "frequently having unresolved conflicts," 35.5% of respondents reported never, 28.5% rarely, 22.0% sometimes, and 14.0% always.

Overall, the item "My spouse and I frequently have unresolved conflicts" recorded the highest mean score (M = 2.86, 1st), followed by "I sometimes feel emotionally disconnected from my spouse" (M = 2.69, 2nd) and "There are periods when I feel unsure about continuing the relationship" (M = 2.65, 3rd). These results, together with the remaining items — avoidance of important discussions (M = 2.61), infrequent quality time (M = 2.59), dissatisfaction with marital quality (M = 2.57), lack of trust (M = 2.52), thoughts of ending the marriage (M = 2.51), and difficulty communicating effectively (M = 1.52) — indicate that marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria is generally at a moderate level, reflecting persistent marital challenges that may not yet be severe but require attention to prevent escalation.

Test of Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant relationship between parenting styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria.

Table 3. Relationship between Parental Style and Marital Instability among Married Adults.

Variable	N	Mean	Std.	df	r (calc.)	p-value	Remark
Parental Style	400	25.1575	5.13699				
Marital Instability	400	29.1625	12.08662	398	.373	.000	Rejected

Table 3 shows a calculated r-value of .373 at a significance level of .000, which is less than the .05 threshold ($r = .37$, $p < .001$). The null hypothesis (Ho1) was therefore rejected, indicating a significant relationship between parenting styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. The positive relationship suggests that less constructive parental experiences are associated with higher levels of marital instability: adults who reported problematic parental styles were more likely to report marital difficulties. This finding supports the view that family-of-origin experiences may influence adult expectations, emotional responses, communication patterns, and approaches to conflict. The correlation was moderate rather than strong, which is theoretically meaningful, since marital instability is unlikely to be determined by parental style alone; economic pressure, infidelity, cultural expectations, domestic violence, religious differences, infertility, health conditions, personality, communication, and the quality of the current relationship may also shape marital outcomes.

Discussion

The finding that parental style significantly relates to marital instability, $r = .37$, $p < .001$, is consistent with the developmental view advanced by Odeyemi and Adekeye (2017), who argue that adult relationships are partly rooted in early family experiences. Parents serve as children's earliest models of intimacy and authority, and through daily interactions children learn whether relationships are safe, whether their needs will be heard, whether conflict can be resolved constructively, and whether affection is dependable. Where these lessons are absent or distorted, as appears to be the case for a substantial proportion of the respondents in this study, the resulting relational habits are carried, largely unexamined, into adult marriage.

The prominence of neglectful parenting, reported by 33.5% of respondents as the parental style they experienced, is particularly concerning. Emotional neglect can be less visible than physical abuse or overt punishment, yet its consequences may be equally significant, if slower to surface. A child who receives little attention, validation, or responsiveness may grow into an adult who finds it difficult to identify personal needs, communicate vulnerability, trust a spouse, or believe that emotional closeness is genuinely possible. In marriage, such adults may either cling anxiously to a partner in search of the reassurance they did not receive as children, or withdraw from intimacy altogether as a form of self-protection, and both patterns are consistent with the elevated mean scores this study recorded for emotional disconnection ($M = 2.69$) and uncertainty about continuing the relationship ($M = 2.65$).

Authoritarian parenting, reported by 28.3% of respondents as the second most common style, may contribute to marital instability through a different mechanism: by encouraging rigid beliefs about power, obedience, and hierarchy within close relationships. Adults raised in authoritarian homes may come to regard disagreement as disrespect, or may expect a spouse to submit rather than negotiate, and in a marital context this can generate a cycle of control, resentment, emotional withdrawal, or reciprocal hostility between partners. However, cultural context must be considered carefully here. Firm parental control does not carry the same meaning in every family or culture, and in many South-West Nigerian households discipline coexists with

affection, moral instruction, and a strong sense of responsibility toward the child (Mwabila, 2020). The authoritarian label, in other words, should not be read as evidence of a uniformly harmful upbringing; its effects on later marital functioning are likely to depend on the warmth, consistency, and intent that accompanied the control.

These patterns are well explained by the two theoretical perspectives that framed this study. Attachment Theory suggests that children raised by neglectful or authoritarian parents are more likely to develop insecure — anxious or avoidant — attachment styles, which later surface in marriage as either excessive dependence and fear of abandonment or as emotional withdrawal and discomfort with closeness. Social Learning Theory complements this account by explaining how children directly imitate the communication and conflict-management behaviours they observe: a child who grows up watching silence, intimidation, or emotional suppression used to manage disagreement is likely to reproduce the same strategies as a spouse, regardless of whether they consciously endorse them. Read together, the two theories indicate that the relationship between parental style and marital instability observed in this study is not incidental but operates through identifiable psychological and behavioural pathways.

These findings also sit within a wider body of Nigerian scholarship documenting persistent marital difficulty across the country. Akanle (2020) similarly identifies unresolved conflict, poor communication, and inadequate conflict-resolution skills as recurring causes of marital discord among Nigerian couples, a pattern closely mirrored in the present data, where "frequent unresolved conflicts" was the highest-ranked indicator of instability (M = 2.86). Likewise, Adeoye and Ola (2019) and Josiah and Nteh (2022) note that the effects of marital conflict extend well beyond the couple to shape the emotional and behavioural development of children, which reinforces why the intergenerational transmission of relational patterns documented in this study deserves sustained attention rather than treatment as a purely private family matter.

The moderate — rather than severe — level of marital instability found in this study is itself noteworthy. None of the ten instability indicators produced an extreme mean score, and several, including thoughts of ending the marriage (M = 2.51) and difficulty communicating effectively, sat closer to the midpoint of the scale than to its upper end. This is broadly consistent with Olson and Defrain's (2020) observation that marital difficulty in most families exists on a continuum rather than as a binary state of stability versus collapse, with many marriages persisting in a state of chronic, moderate strain rather than moving decisively toward separation. Such a pattern is, in one sense, encouraging, because it suggests that many of the couples represented in this sample remain within reach of preventive intervention rather than already facing marital breakdown; it is also a caution against complacency, since moderate instability left unaddressed can deepen over time.

The item measuring difficulty communicating effectively deserves separate comment. Although 64.8% of respondents indicated that this difficulty was "always" present, the item recorded the lowest mean score and lowest rank among the ten indicators, a result that is statistically inconsistent with the response pattern and should be re-examined against the original dataset before the article proceeds further, as it may reflect a reverse-coding or data-entry error in the underlying thesis rather than a genuine substantive finding. If confirmed as an error, correcting it may also modestly alter the overall interpretation of which specific behaviours are most central to the marital instability experienced by this sample.

The results also underline that parental style, while significant, is only one thread within a wider fabric of factors shaping marital outcomes in South-West Nigeria. Consistent with Afu and Nteh (2020), Israel (2023), and Heatherton and Wayland (2023), the moderate rather than strong correlation obtained here (r = .37) indicates that economic pressure, infidelity, cultural and religious expectations, health conditions, personality, and the day-to-day quality of the current relationship all plausibly contribute to marital instability alongside — and possibly interacting with — the influence of childhood parenting experiences. This reinforces the view, consistent with the

multidimensional conception of marital instability advanced earlier in this article, that no single developmental factor should be treated as a complete explanation of why particular marriages remain stable while others deteriorate.

From a practical standpoint, these findings support Nwaokugha and Keri's (2023) argument that pedagogical and counselling interventions targeting marital instability in Nigeria should extend beyond addressing couples' present-day disagreements. Odebode, Ola-Alani, and Gambari (2021), writing on adjustment strategies for marital stress among Nigerian teachers, similarly emphasise that sustainable marital adjustment often depends on strategies learned and reinforced over time rather than on one-off intervention, a view that dovetails with this study's implication that premarital counselling, marital enrichment, and family-life education should routinely explore clients' family-of-origin experiences, since patterns of trust, communication, and conflict management formed in childhood may otherwise continue to operate beneath the surface of a couple's present difficulties. Structured premarital assessment of childhood parenting experiences, in particular, may help couples recognise potentially harmful relational patterns before those patterns are enacted within their own marriages (Yusuf & Muraina, 2022).

These findings should nevertheless be interpreted with appropriate caution. Because the design was correlational, the study cannot establish that parental style directly causes marital instability; it can only demonstrate that the two variables are significantly and positively associated. The data were also based entirely on participants' retrospective self-reports of the parenting styles they experienced, which may be shaped by memory, social desirability, or the current emotional state of the marriage itself — a respondent in a currently troubled marriage, for instance, may recall their childhood parenting more negatively than one in a currently satisfying marriage, independent of what actually occurred. In addition, parental style is not a fixed or universal category: parents may adopt different approaches with different children, at different developmental stages, and under different circumstances, so the single retrospective classification used in this study necessarily simplifies a more variable lived reality. Future research using longitudinal designs, multiple informants, or qualitative interviews would help clarify the direction and mechanisms of the relationship identified here.

CONCLUSION

This article set out to examine the influence of parental style on marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria, drawing on a study that investigated parenting styles, communication styles, and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital instability across the region's six states. The findings show that neglectful and authoritarian parenting styles were the most common among respondents, that marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria sits at a moderate level, and that parenting style is significantly and positively related to marital instability, $r = .37$, $p < .001$. Taken together, these findings indicate that parental style is a meaningful factor in understanding why some marriages in this region remain vulnerable to conflict, emotional distance, and instability, even though it is far from the only factor at work.

The central implication of this study is that marital counselling and family-life interventions in South-West Nigeria should not focus solely on the disagreements couples currently face. They should also explore family-of-origin experiences, the emotional lessons individuals absorbed in childhood, their attachment expectations, and the communication patterns they acquired long before marriage. This does not mean that individuals are permanently determined by their upbringing; rather, it means that early experiences may create relational tendencies that, once recognised, can be examined, challenged, and gradually transformed through deliberate effort and appropriate support.

Arising from these findings, several measures are recommended. Community-based parenting workshops should be established to teach authoritative parenting practices that combine warmth with appropriate boundaries, helping current and prospective parents understand how their own parenting approach may shape their children's future marital relationships. Government and relevant agencies should also establish accessible marital counselling and enrichment centres across South-West Nigeria to address the moderate level of marital instability reported among married adults in the region. Given the significant relationship between parenting style and marital instability found in this study ($r = .37$, $p < .001$), counsellors, therapists, and religious leaders providing premarital preparation should routinely explore clients' childhood experiences with their parents, so that couples can recognise potentially harmful relational patterns learned in their families of origin and develop healthier communication and conflict-resolution skills before these patterns undermine their marriages. Finally, given that this study relied on a correlational design and retrospective self-report data, future research should consider longitudinal designs, multiple informants, or qualitative approaches to clarify how parental style shapes marital instability over time and across different family circumstances.

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