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UNRESOLVED GRIEF AS A PREDICTOR OF MARITAL ADJUSTMENT OF MARRIED STAFF IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN DELTA STATE

***Elohor H. E., Prof J. J. Obiunu, Prof. A. Onoyase**

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University Abraka Nigeria.

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***Corresponding Author: Elohor H. E.**

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University Abraka Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment of married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State. Three research questions and one null hypothesis guided the study. The research adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 3,257 married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. The sample size was 787 married Staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select the sample. The instrument for the study was a questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was obtained through experts' judgement and factor analysis. The reliability was determined using measures of internal consistency. The data were analysed using mean, standard deviation, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of determination and regression statistics. All the hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that the level of unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high; and that there is a significant negative relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment. Arising from the findings of this study, the study recommended amongst others that professional marital counselling interventions should be integrated into staff welfare programmes to address emotional distress, reduce marital stress, and equip couples with adaptive coping strategies that enhance marital adjustment.

KEYWORDS: Unresolved Grief; Marital Adjustment; Married Staff; Tertiary Institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is an institution that has existed since the beginning of human civilization. It holds immense significance in the personal and social lives of individuals. It arises from a strong interpersonal connection between two individuals and upon fulfilling certain marital customs, a man and woman come together to form a family unit. The period of married life is widely regarded as the happiest and most crucial phase in an individual's life (Amalu & Amalu, 2022). Through their vows of loyalty and faithfulness, couples lay the foundation for a successful and fulfilling marital journey. Marriage encompasses not only an emotional bond but also an economic partnership, a social safety net and a moral obligation, serving as a moral safeguard. The marital relationship is a lifelong and evolving process that can be strengthened when couples fulfil their respective role expectations. While marriage, traditionally between a man and a woman, is expected to bring happiness and satisfaction, Akhter (2021) acknowledge that it is not always the case, as some couples experience dissatisfaction and unhappiness in their marriage, leading to experience of marital adjustment.

Marital adjustment refers to the overall state of a marriage where both partners experience a strong, consistent, well-balanced and healthy relationship. It entails couples consistently living happily together in harmony, sharing common goals and objectives. This state of marital adjustment is crucial as it paves the way for a healthy, fulfilling and longer life for both partners, while also providing the necessary conditions for the proper upbringing and nurturing of responsible children. Whisman et al. (2018) emphasize the significance of a stable and adjusted marriage for the well-being of individuals. An adjusted marriage creates an environment that promotes emotional and physical health, leading to overall life satisfaction. It serves as a foundation for personal growth, support and companionship. The stability and strength of a marital relationship contribute to the overall well-being of both partners and greatly impact the upbringing of children.

However, the institution of marriage seems to be experiencing a considerable setback globally. Marital maladjustment appears to be on the increase. For instance, Onokpegu (2018) reported increase in divorce rates in Nigeria. Nigerian couples are separating more and more. Separation rates in 2018 saw a 14% increase across the whole population of married persons (Eneyo et al., 2022). According to Adelmann (2019), the incidence of divorce has gone up exponentially and not even the wearisome process and expensive cost of filing for divorce, which depends on factors like a court, location, lawyers' charges and sometimes the reason for divorce, has been able to stop the high rate.

In Lagos, for instance, Denwigwe et al. (2013) reported that at two customary courts, 354 divorce applications were filed, 93 applications were granted, 30 were withdrawn, while 231 remained pending. The trend appears not to have changed significantly over time. In another report published by Law Weekly, about 4,000 divorce applications had been filed within the first eight months of 2020 in Abuja. Similar concerns have also been observed in Delta State where family instability, separation, and marital conflicts have become increasingly common, particularly in urban centres such as Asaba, Warri, Sapele, and Ughelli. Family court records and observations by legal practitioners in Delta State suggest a growing number of cases involving child custody disputes, separation, domestic violence, and marital dissolution, reflecting persistent challenges in marital adjustment among couples (Edewor & Oghenekohwo, 2021). Although comprehensive state-wide divorce statistics remain limited, increasing reports of broken homes indicate that marital instability is becoming a major social concern within the state. If divorce applications across the 36 states of Nigeria are combined with cases of informal separation and broken homes where legal divorce has not been sought, the prevalence of marital disruption may be considerably higher than officially documented.

The rate at which people experience marital maladjustment, which often culminates in divorce or prolonged separation, is devastating and has negative consequences for couples, children, and society at large. Drug abuse, school dropout, truancy, teenage pregnancy, prostitution, kidnapping, poor academic performance, armed robbery, and other behavioural problems have been associated with marital maladjustment and unstable family structures (Torekegan, 2015). In Delta State, studies have similarly linked family instability with increased emotional distress among adolescents, poor educational outcomes, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and risky behaviours among youths (Akpochafo & Oghuvwu, 2020). Children are often the most affected by the negative consequences of broken homes. From the stage of divorce proceedings, child custody issues commonly become contentious, leaving many children emotionally traumatised. Some resort to substance use, risky sexual behaviour, criminal activities, or develop psychological problems to cope with emotional deprivation. Others become victims of domestic abuse, sexual exploitation, maltreatment from step-parents, early marriage, or school dropout. The impact of divorce and broken homes on families and society remains substantial and largely destructive rather than developmental (Eneji et al., 2022).

As staff in tertiary institutions, marital maladjustment can have a significant impact on married persons, affecting various aspects of their professional and personal lives. For instance, marital maladjustment can lead to increased stress, emotional distress and

distraction, which can negatively impact job performance. Workers may find it difficult to concentrate on their tasks, make decisions, or meet deadlines, leading to decreased productivity and efficiency. Marital problems can cause individuals to experience heightened emotional distress, leading to increased absenteeism from work. Additionally, even when present physically, individuals may be mentally preoccupied with their marital issues, resulting in presenteeism, where they are physically present but not fully engaged or productive.

Difficulties in the marital relationship can spill over into interactions with colleagues and students. Workers may exhibit irritability, mood swings, or withdrawal, impacting their ability to establish positive relationships with others in the workplace. This can hinder collaboration, teamwork and overall work atmosphere. Marital maladjustment can contribute to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and chronic stress. Workers may experience emotional turmoil, feelings of hopelessness and a decreased sense of self-worth, which can have long-term consequences on their overall well-being and job satisfaction.

When dealing with marital challenges, individuals may struggle to focus on their professional development and growth. Opportunities for career advancement, attending conferences or workshops and engaging in research or scholarly activities may be neglected due to personal difficulties. Marital maladjustment can disrupt the delicate balance between work and personal life. Workers may find it challenging to separate their personal issues from their professional responsibilities, leading to an imbalance that can affect both domains negatively.

If multiple workers in a tertiary institution experience marital maladjustment, it can impact the overall organizational climate. Tensions and conflicts arising from marital problems may permeate the workplace, creating a negative atmosphere and potentially affecting team dynamics and morale.

Given the potential impact of marital maladjustment on married workers in tertiary institutions, there is a need to find out the factors responsible for marital adjustment among married persons working in tertiary institutions. A number of factors have been identified as predictors of marital adjustment. These factors include conflict resolution, responsibility, quality of sex life, quality of marital life, couples' congruence, commitments, shared values, work-life and financial issues. Among these variables is unresolved grief which is the focus of the study.

Unresolved grief refers to the experience of ongoing and unresolved emotional pain and distress following a significant loss or trauma. It occurs when an individual has not fully processed or integrated their feelings of grief, leading to lingering and unresolved emotions

associated with the loss. In the context of marriage, it refers to the persistent and unaddressed emotional pain and loss experienced by individuals within the context of their marriage and professional roles. It often stems from a significant loss, such as the death of a family member, close friend, or colleague. It can also arise from other forms of loss, such as the end of a meaningful relationship, a miscarriage, or a career setback. The grief associated with these losses may persist over time if not properly addressed. Unresolved grief can lead to a range of intense and complex emotions. Individuals may experience sadness, anger, guilt, regret and a profound sense of emptiness. These emotions can be overwhelming and affect their daily functioning, including their ability to engage fully in their marital relationship and work responsibilities.

Unresolved grief may have a profound impact on marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions. For instance, if one or both partners are experiencing unresolved grief, they may become emotionally distant from each other. They may struggle to provide emotional support or connect on a deep level, leading to a sense of detachment within the marriage. Grief can be overwhelming and sometimes make it difficult for individuals to express their emotions and needs effectively. Couples may find it challenging to communicate their grief-related struggles, resulting in a breakdown of open and honest communication. This lack of communication can lead to misunderstandings, resentment and further strain on the marital relationship (Uwom-Ajaegbu et al., 2015).

Unresolved grief may disrupt the dynamics of a marital relationship, particularly in terms of roles and responsibilities. If one partner is consumed by grief, they may withdraw from their usual responsibilities or struggle to fulfil them effectively. This can lead to a sense of imbalance and frustration within the marriage, as the burden of managing household tasks and other responsibilities may fall on the other partner. According to Kersting and Wagner (2012), unresolved grief can create a fertile ground for conflict within the marital relationship. Individuals may experience a range of emotions that can result in heightened sensitivity, irritability and defensiveness. Disagreements may escalate and conflicts may arise from misunderstandings or differing coping mechanisms. This can intensify marital strain and further hinder the adjustment between partners.

Grief may affect an individual's capacity for intimacy and sexual desire. If one or both partners are dealing with unresolved grief, it can lead to a decline in physical intimacy and sexual satisfaction. The emotional strain may make it challenging for couples to connect on an intimate level, further impacting their overall marital adjustment. Unresolved grief can make it difficult for couples to engage in shared decision-making. Individuals may struggle to

make important choices or commitments due to their emotional state. This can lead to a lack of consensus, delay in decision-making, or even avoidance of making decisions altogether, further straining the marital adjustment. In a healthy marital relationship, partners support each other through challenging times. However, if grief remains unresolved, it can hinder the ability of partners to provide adequate support and cope with the emotional burdens together (Cacciatore et al., 2021). This can create a sense of isolation and lead to further difficulties in adjusting as a couple.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State?
2. What is the level of marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State?
3. What is the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested in the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State

METHODS

The research adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study comprised 3,257 married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. The sample size was 787 married Staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. A multi-stage sampling method was used to select the sample. In the first stage, the researcher selected 3 institutions each from the three senatorial districts of Delta State. This was achieved through a simple random sampling technique. The researcher wrote out the names of the institutions on a piece of paper and put them in a basket. She picked three pieces from the basket and opened them to reveal what was written on them. This process was repeated until three institutions in the three senatorial districts of Delta state were selected. In the second stage, the researcher selected married staff from the three institutions in each of the three senatorial districts, with a total population of 2,042 married staff. This was done through proportionate stratified sampling technique. That is, the researcher selected 39% of the married staff in each of the selected tertiary institutions,

being that 787 as sample size represented 39% of the total of population of 2,042 of married staff in the selected institutions. The reason for the use of proportionate stratified sampling technique was because all the tertiary institutions did not have equal number of married staff. Therefore, in order to get a representative sample of married staff in each of the selected tertiary institution, there was the need to use the proportionate stratified sampling technique. In the third stage, the researcher stratified the selected married staff into male and female using stratified sampling technique.

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire titled: "Unresolved Grief and Marital Adjustment" (UGMA). The questionnaire contains three sections. Section A elicited demographic information such as sex, duration of marriage and educational attainment. Section B contains Unresolved Grief Rating Scale; while Section C contains Marital Adjustment Rating Scale. The Unresolved Grief was constructed by the researcher. It contains 30 items structured on a four-point rating scale, which include Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). It was designed measure the extent to which married staff are experiencing unresolved grief. The Marital Adjustment Rating Scale was adapted from a combination of different measures, designed to measure the extent to which married staff are experiencing adjustment in their marriages. These measures include Marital Happiness Index (MHI), developed by Terman (1938); Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), developed by Spanier (1976); and the Marital Happiness Scale, developed by Kamp Dush, Taylor and Kroeger (2008). The Scale contains 25 items, which were structured on a 4-point rating scale, which include Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1).

The validity of the research instrument was obtained through the scrutiny of the researcher's two supervisors, who are experts in Guidance and Counselling and one other expert in Measurement and Evaluation from the Delta State University, Abraka. Each of them was asked to judge the adequacy of the items on the instrument. They were requested to check the content of the items if they adequately measure the subject content of variables in the study. They assessed the instrument as adequate in face validity. Based on their inputs, corrections and suggestions were effected to produce the final copy of the questionnaire. Factor analysis was used to ensure the content and construct validity of the instrument. The principal component analysis of the extraction method was used to estimate the content validity of the instrument. It yielded a total cumulative variance of 65.00% and 60.03% for the Unresolved Grief Rating Scale and Marital Adjustment Rating Scale respectively. On the other hand, the rotated factor loading of the varimax method was used to estimate the construct validity of

the instruments. It yielded the following range of scores: 0.52-0.82 and 0.510.83 for the Unresolved Grief Rating Scale and Marital Adjustment Rating Scale respectively. The reliability of the instrument was determined using measures of internal consistency. This was done by trial testing the instrument on 100 married staff in a tertiary institution at Edo State, who did not form part of the study population. The data collected were analysed using Cronbach Alpha statistics. It yielded a coefficient of 0.82 and 0.88 for the Unresolved Grief Rating Scale and Marital Adjustment Rating Scale respectively.

The questionnaire was administered by the researcher with the help of five research assistants. The researcher and the assistants visited the staff in their offices, explained the purpose of the visit, obtained permission and administered the questionnaire to them. The researcher ensured that the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved after being duly filled by the respondents. At the end of the exercise, a total of 787 copies of questionnaire was administered and a total of 787 was retrieved, indicating 100% retrieval rate. The research questions were analysed using various statistical tools. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions 1 and 2 at a benchmark of 2.50; while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of determination was used to answer research question 3. Regression statistics was used to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What is the level of unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Table 1: Mean analysis of the level of unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

S/N	Level of Unresolved Grief	Mean	SD	Remark
1	I have not fully processed the emotions associated with the loss.	3.32	0.58	High
2	I sometimes question the meaning of life due to the loss.	3.28	0.81	High
3	I find it challenging to express my emotions about the loss to my spouse.	3.24	0.70	High
4	My grief has strained my relationship with my spouse.	3.22	0.70	High
5	The loss continues to impact my overall mood and well-being.	3.13	0.76	High
6	I have not fully accepted the impact of the loss on my marriage.	3.11	0.67	High
7	The grief I experienced in the past still affects my daily emotions.	3.08	0.73	High
8	I find it challenging to engage in future-oriented planning due to my grief.	3.07	1.99	High
9	I have trouble accepting the reality of the loss that occurred.	3.04	0.69	High

10	I avoid situations that remind me of the loss.	3.02	1.70	High
11	My grief has affected my physical health (sleep disturbances, appetite changes).	2.95	0.86	High
12	I frequently find myself thinking about a significant loss in my life.	2.89	0.81	High
13	I feel a sense of regret related to the loss.	2.81	0.89	High
14	I often feel a sense of emptiness related to the loss.	2.78	0.92	High
15	My grief interferes with my ability to enjoy activities with my spouse.	2.76	0.85	High
16	I have unresolved feelings of anger related to the loss.	2.72	0.96	High
17	I sometimes engage in behaviours to numb or avoid my grief.	2.65	0.82	High
Average Mean		**3.00**	**0.91**	**High**
Criterion Mean = 2.50				

Table 1 shows the mean analysis of the level of unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State. The result shows that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating that respondents generally experienced unresolved grief at a high level. The individual item mean scores ranged from 2.65 to 3.32, suggesting consistent agreement among respondents regarding the presence of unresolved grief-related experiences. The average mean score of 3.00, which is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, confirms that unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high. The average standard deviation of 0.91 indicates moderate variability in responses, suggesting relative consistency in participants' perceptions. Therefore, the level of unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high.

Research Question 2: What is the level of marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Table 2: Mean analysis of the level of marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State.

S/N	Level of Marital Adjustment	Mean	SD	Remark
1	If I have my life to live again, I will marry the same person	3.20	0.72	High
2	My spouse is very understanding	3.19	0.69	High
3	We often engage in outside Interests together	3.11	0.67	High
4	Disagreements usually result is us giving in	3.01	0.63	High
5	On the whole, I am happy with my marriage	2.67	0.87	High
6	My partner and I understand each other perfectly	2.63	0.88	High
7	I am very happy about how we make decisions.	2.63	0.89	High
8	I feel very good about how we each practice our religious beliefs.	2.60	0.87	High
9	My marriage has given me a new enthusiasm for life	2.57	0.84	High
10	Things between us are often getting on well	2.45	0.80	Low

11	I have never regretted my relationship with my partner, not even for a moment.	2.42	2.06	Low
12	I am very pleased about how we express affection.	2.37	0.93	Low
13	Our relationship is a perfect success.	2.30	0.89	Low
14	We often laugh together	2.17	0.82	Low
15	I am very happy with how we manage our leisure activities.	2.15	0.78	Low
16	My partner completely sympathizes with my every mood.	2.13	0.75	Low
Average Mean		**2.60**	**0.88**	**High**
Criterion Mean = 2.50				

Table 2 shows the mean analysis of the level of marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State. The result shows that some items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50, while others recorded mean scores below the criterion mean, indicating varying levels of marital adjustment among respondents. The individual item mean scores ranged from 2.13 to 3.20, suggesting differences in respondents' perceptions of marital adjustment experiences. The average mean score of 2.60, which is higher than the criterion mean of 2.50, confirms that marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high. The average standard deviation of 0.88 indicates moderate variability in responses, suggesting relative consistency in participants' perceptions. Therefore, the level of marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State?

Table 3: Correlation and coefficient of determination on the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Variables	***N***	***r***	r^2	r^2%	**Decision**
Unresolved Grief Marital Adjustment	787	-0.166	0.028	2.8	Weak Negative Relationship

Table 3 shows the correlation and coefficient of determination on the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. The result revealed a correlation coefficient (r) of –0.166, indicating a weak negative relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment. This implies that an increase in unresolved grief is associated with a decrease in marital adjustment among married staff. The coefficient of determination (r^2) of 0.028 shows that 2.8% of the variation in marital adjustment is explained by unresolved grief, while the remaining 97.2% may be attributed to

other variables not included in the study. Therefore, there is a negative relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Table 4: Linear regression analysis of the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State.

Model	***SS***	***df***	***MS***	***F***	***Sig***
Regression	626.933	1	626.933	22.202	0.000[b]
Residual	22166.854	785	28.238		
Total	22793.787	786			
Variables in Equation					
Model	**Unstandardized Coefficient**		**Standardised Coefficient**	***t***	***Sig***
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	34.609	1.491		23.206	0.000
Unresolved Grief	0.137	0.029	0.166	4.712	0.000
α = .05, *R* = .166, *R*-Square = .028 **a. Dependent Variable:** Marital Adjustment **b. Predictors (Constant):** Unresolved Grief					

Table 4 shows the linear regression analysis of the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. The result revealed an *F*-value of 22.202 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected, which means that the relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment is statistically significant. The linear correlation coefficient ($R = 0.166$) indicates a weak relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment, while the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.028$) shows that 2.8% of the variance in marital adjustment is explained by unresolved grief. Further analysis of the regression coefficient shows that unresolved grief ($\beta = 0.166$, $t = 4.712$, $p < 0.05$) significantly predicted marital adjustment since its significance value is less than 0.05.

DISCUSSIONS

The first finding revealed that the level of unresolved grief among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high. This finding suggests that a considerable proportion of married staff continue to experience lingering emotional pain, psychological distress, and

unresolved emotional reactions arising from past losses, which have not been adequately processed over time. This implies that many married individuals may still be struggling with emotional adjustment issues that extend beyond the immediate period of loss, thereby affecting their emotional stability, interpersonal functioning, and marital interactions. One possible reason for this finding is that adults in marital and occupational roles often suppress grief reactions because of societal expectations that emphasize emotional strength, productivity, and resilience, particularly among working professionals. Married staff may prioritize family responsibilities, workplace demands, and social roles over personal emotional healing, thereby prolonging grief experiences. Cultural beliefs within many Nigerian communities tend to discourage prolonged emotional expression after loss, which may also lead individuals to internalize grief rather than process it adaptively. Work-related stress, academic workload, and financial pressures common among tertiary institution staff may further complicate emotional recovery, making it difficult for individuals to fully resolve grief experiences. The finding agrees with the study of Stroebe et al. (2021), who reported that unresolved grief remains prevalent among adults managing multiple social roles, particularly when emotional coping opportunities are limited. The finding also aligns with Eisma and Tamminga (2020), who found that unresolved grief symptoms tend to persist among working adults when losses are not adequately processed through social or psychological support systems. The finding is also consistent with Killikelly and Maercker (2022), who observed that cultural expectations and role obligations often contribute to prolonged grief reactions among adults, especially in collectivist societies where emotional restraint is valued. The finding however, contrasts with Lenferink et al. (2021), who reported moderate levels of unresolved grief among employed populations in contexts where structured bereavement interventions and mental health services are readily accessible, suggesting that availability of psychological support may reduce prolonged grief experiences.

The second finding showed that the level of marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State is high. This finding suggests that despite the presence of personal, occupational, and societal pressures, married staff generally demonstrate the ability to adapt positively to marital roles and responsibilities. High marital adjustment indicates that couples are able to maintain mutual understanding, cooperation, emotional support, and effective conflict management within their relationships. It further implies that married staff possess coping mechanisms and interpersonal skills that enable them to sustain marital stability and satisfaction while managing the demands of professional and family life. One possible explanation for this finding is that married individuals working in tertiary institutions

are often relatively educated and may possess better communication skills, problem-solving abilities, and emotional awareness, which enhance marital functioning. Educational exposure may promote tolerance, negotiation skills, and shared decision-making, all of which contribute to marital adjustment. Longer marital duration and shared experiences over time may also strengthen emotional bonds and adaptive strategies between spouses. Cultural values emphasizing family unity, commitment, and marital endurance may also encourage couples to adjust to challenges rather than disengage from the relationship. Furthermore, economic stability associated with formal employment in tertiary institutions may reduce certain stressors that typically undermine marital adjustment. The finding agrees with the study of Adewale and Oladipo (2022), who found that educational attainment and stable employment significantly predict higher marital adjustment among married professionals. The finding also agrees with Rauer and Volling (2021), who reported that effective communication and mutual emotional support enhance adaptive functioning and adjustment in marriage among working couples. The finding is also consistent with Karney and Bradbury (2020), who observed that adaptive coping strategies and shared problem-solving behaviours contribute positively to marital adjustment over time. The finding, however contradicts Ogolsky and Bowers (2023), who reported moderate marital adjustment among dual-career couples experiencing high occupational stress, suggesting that work pressure may reduce adjustment levels where coping resources are limited.

The third finding showed that there is a significant weak negative relationship between unresolved grief and marital adjustment among married staff of tertiary institutions in Delta State. This finding suggests that increases in unresolved grief are associated with slight decreases in marital adjustment among married staff, although the influence is relatively small. This indicates that unresolved grief still plays a meaningful role in shaping marital experiences, even though it does not strongly determine marital adjustment outcomes on its own. This implies that while unresolved grief may affect emotional availability, communication, and relationship satisfaction, other personal, relational, or environmental factors may exert stronger influences on how couples adjust within marriage. A possible reason for this finding is that married individuals may develop coping mechanisms that help them maintain marital stability despite experiencing unresolved grief. Emotional support from spouses, religious beliefs, cultural emphasis on marital commitment, and adaptive coping strategies may reduce the extent to which grief disrupts marital functioning. The responsibilities associated with marriage and professional roles may also encourage individuals to regulate emotional distress to preserve relationship harmony. Educational

exposure and problem-solving skills among tertiary institution staff may further help couples manage grief-related emotions without allowing them to severely impair marital adjustment, thereby explaining the weak magnitude of the relationship. The finding agrees with the study of Boelen and Lenferink (2020), who found that unresolved grief symptoms are negatively associated with relationship functioning but often demonstrate small effect sizes when other psychosocial supports are present. The finding also supports Djelantik, et al. (2021), who reported that prolonged grief may influence interpersonal relationships, although its impact on marital adjustment becomes weaker when individuals possess effective coping resources and social support systems. The finding is also consistent with Zhang, et al. (2022), who observed that grief-related distress predicts lower relationship satisfaction but accounts for only a modest proportion of variance in marital outcomes. The finding is however, at variance with Lee and Neimeyer (2023), who reported stronger negative associations between unresolved grief and marital functioning among individuals lacking emotional support, suggesting that contextual resources may determine the strength of the relationship.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that unresolved grief is an important psychosocial factor influencing marital adjustment among married staff in tertiary institutions in Delta State. The study established that married staff experience high levels of unresolved grief and marital adjustment, indicating that while couples generally demonstrate the capacity to adapt positively within marriage, they simultaneously contend with significant emotional, relational, and social pressures. Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Tertiary institutions should establish accessible counselling and psychological support services to help married staff process grief experiences through professional grief counselling, emotional support programmes, and stress management workshops.
2. Tertiary institutions should strengthen existing positive marital functioning by organizing couple enrichment seminars and relationship skill development workshops aimed at sustaining healthy communication and mutual support among married staff.
3. Married staff should be encouraged to participate in grief recovery and emotional resilience programmes that promote healthy emotional expression and adaptive coping within marriage.

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