



Communication Styles and Emotional Intelligence as Predictors of Marital Instability among Married Adults in South-West Nigeria

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Abstract

Marital instability has become an increasing social concern in Nigeria due to rising cases of marital conflict, emotional disconnection, separation, and divorce, all of which negatively affect family cohesion and societal stability. Despite the growing prevalence of marital instability, limited empirical attention has been given to the psychosocial factors contributing to this problem within the South-West Nigerian context. This study investigated communication styles, and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population comprised married adults in South-West Nigeria, while a sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Communication Styles, Emotional Intelligence and Marital Instability Questionnaire (CSEMIQ). The validity of the instrument was established through expert review, while reliability was determined using the Cronbach's Alpha method. Descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that the passive-aggressive communication style was the most commonly used communication pattern among married adults. The study also found a moderate level of marital instability, particularly in unresolved conflicts, emotional disconnection, and dissatisfaction within marriage. Furthermore, a significant relationship was established between communication styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. The study concluded that ineffective communication patterns significantly contribute to marital instability

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INTRODUCTION

Marriage remains one of the most consequential social institutions, providing the primary context for emotional intimacy, family formation, and child socialisation across cultures (Chambers & Gracia, 2021; Hu & Nash, 2019). Despite its enduring significance, contemporary marriages face mounting pressures stemming from urbanisation, shifting gender roles, and socio-economic instability, factors that collectively contribute to rising rates of marital dissolution globally (Ottakkam Thodukayil et al., 2026; Arigbede, 2025). In Nigeria, legal practitioners have noted a marked increase in divorce petitions filed in Nigerian courts since 2020 (Elekwa, 2025). These reflect a broader pattern of marital vulnerability that extends beyond individual relationships to affect children, extended families, and community cohesion (Özkaya, 2022; Walsh, 2012). Marital instability encompasses a range of relational disruptions, including recurrent conflict, emotional disconnection, infidelity, low commitment, and separation tendencies that collectively undermine the viability of the marital union (Das, 2025; Monk et al., 2025). Its consequences are far-reaching: partners in unstable marriages frequently experience chronic anxiety, depression, and diminished self-worth (Okere & Ubani, 2020), while children reared in such environments are at elevated risk of behavioural difficulties, academic decline, and impaired social functioning in later life (Humphreys & Zeanah, 2015). Within Nigeria, where cultural norms have historically discouraged open discussion of marital difficulties and prioritised the endurance of marriage over relational quality, these consequences are often compounded by delayed help-seeking (Sarpong, 2015). Totenhagen et al. (2023) further argue that when emotional alignment, companionship, value agreement, and mutual accommodation are absent in a marriage, the resultant relational stress compromises individual well-being and societal functioning alike.

The South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, predominantly inhabited by the Yoruba, presents a compelling context for investigating marital instability. The region is experiencing a complex interplay between deeply rooted traditional marital norms and the pressures of rapid modernisation, including increased female labour-force participation and exposure to global cultural influences (Eboka et al., 2017). More recent research on divorce determinants in Ibadan has identified socio-cultural and economic factors, alongside evolving behavioural norms, as key contributors to marital dissolution in this setting (Arigbede, 2025; Adegoke, 2010; Olasehinde & Onodje, 2023). These realities make South-West Nigeria an analytically rich environment in which to examine the psychosocial antecedents of marital instability..

Communication style constitutes another critical determinant of marital quality and stability. Assertive communication, characterised by directness, transparency, and mutual respect, promotes the shared understanding necessary for effective conflict resolution and the maintenance of emotional intimacy (Omoboye et al., 2024; Ebohon, 2024). Gottman's (2023) foundational research identified criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling as the most destructive communication patterns in marriage, reliably predicting eventual dissolution. Empirical evidence corroborates that demand-withdrawal interaction patterns, in which one partner escalates while the other disengages, are significantly associated with relational dissatisfaction and breakdown (Schrodt et al., 2014). Among Nigerian married adults, Musolino and Davis (2025) and Winer et al. (2024) found that assertive, open communication was essential for sustaining intimacy and managing conflict, while passive-aggressive or aggressive exchanges tended to escalate minor disagreements into major relational threats. Given the

influence of both patriarchal traditions and emergent egalitarian values on spousal interaction in South-West Nigeria, analysing how diverse communication styles predict marital instability in this setting carries particular theoretical and practical significance (Oluku & Abasiokong, 2024; Ola, 2023).

Emotional intelligence (EI) has emerged as a third psychosocial construct of considerable relevance to marital functioning. Defined as the capacity to perceive, understand, manage, and effectively utilise emotions in oneself and in relationships with others, EI encompasses the dimensions of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Singh et al., 2022; Igbokwe et al., 2023). Antonopoulou (2024) argued that empathy, a core component of EI, is foundational to positive relational influence, while research has confirmed that emotionally intelligent spouses are more capable of de-escalating conflict, expressing needs constructively, and sustaining intimacy over time (Carr, 2014; Hillhouse, 2026). Pertinent evidence from Nigeria shows a significant positive relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and marital satisfaction among married secondary school teachers in Anambra State (Valentina et al., 2021). Additionally, Gndonu and Badejo (2021) identified EI as a strong predictor of marital stability among literate married adults. In a cultural milieu where norms may constrain open emotional expression, the question of how EI moderates marital outcomes warrants systematic examination (Boyd, 2025).

Although parenting styles, communication styles, and emotional intelligence have each been studied as individual predictors of marital outcomes, their joint and interactive effects within a single empirical framework remain insufficiently investigated, particularly in sub-Saharan African settings (Gospel-Ezebuio, 2025; Adeleke, 2026; Wolf & Frese, 2018; Kabir, 2025). These constructs are theoretically interconnected: early parenting experiences shape emotional regulation capacities, which in turn influence the communication strategies individuals deploy in intimate relationships (Peng, 2024; MacPhee et al., 2015). Existing Nigerian research has highlighted various aspects of marital relations, yet it lacks an exploration of how marital satisfaction, psychosocial challenges for divorced persons, and adjustment strategies collectively impact marital instability (Adeleke, 2026; Nzewuji et al., 2024). Most studies that address this constellation of constructs draw on Western samples, limiting their cultural generalizability. This gap is particularly pronounced in the South-West Nigerian context, where a distinctive blend of Yoruba cultural heritage and modern socio-economic pressures shapes the marital experience.

The present study was therefore designed to investigate the extent to which communication styles, and emotional intelligence jointly and independently predict marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. By examining these psychosocial predictors within a single, culturally situated empirical framework, the study seeks to advance theoretical understanding of marital instability and to generate evidence that can inform family counselling practices, marital enrichment programmes, and social policy interventions aimed at strengthening marriages in the region. It is anticipated that the findings will contribute to a growing body of literature on marital functioning in non-Western contexts and highlight both universal and culturally specific determinants of marital stability.

Statement of the Problem

Marital instability has emerged as a pressing social and psychological concern in Nigeria, with evidence pointing to a steady escalation in rates of separation and divorce across the country's geopolitical zones (Arigbede, 2025; Okolie et al., 2020). In South-West Nigeria specifically, the intersection of modernising socio-economic pressures and evolving cultural expectations has intensified strains on the marital institution, yet the psychosocial mechanisms driving instability in this population remain inadequately understood (Mohammed, 2018). The consequences extend well beyond the couple: children reared in unstable households face heightened risks of behavioural maladjustment and academic difficulties (Kelly, 2012), while affected adults often experience chronic psychological distress that impairs functioning across personal and professional domains (Goodman et al., 2011). Despite the evident social cost, systematic empirical attention to the predictors of marital instability among married adults in this region remains limited.

Two psychosocial constructs are theoretically implicated in marital outcomes but have not been examined in combination within the South-West Nigerian context: communication styles, and emotional intelligence. Communication styles determine the quality of spousal interaction, with assertive, open patterns promoting conflict resolution and emotional closeness, while aggressive, passive, or passive-aggressive approaches have been linked to persistent relational dysfunction and eventual dissolution (Aliyu et al., 2025; Winer et al., 2025). Emotional intelligence, encompassing the capacity for self-awareness, empathy, and emotional regulation, equips spouses to manage the affective demands of intimate relationships and to respond constructively under relational stress (Baghaei et al., 2025; Suri & Kochhar, 2021). Each of these variables has been independently associated with marital quality in various cultural settings; the combined predictive influence of these variables on marital instability among Nigerian married adults has not been empirically established.

The absence of integrative empirical evidence is particularly consequential given that communication style and emotional intelligence are theoretically interrelated constructs whose effects on marriage are likely compounded rather than additive. Individuals raised under authoritarian or neglectful parenting may develop deficits in emotional regulation and assertive communication that simultaneously lower their emotional intelligence and predispose them to maladaptive interaction patterns within marriage (Sanchez, 2024; Sharma, 2025). Without an integrative examination, counsellors, family therapists, and policymakers lack the empirical basis needed to identify which psychosocial factors most strongly drive instability and, by extension, which intervention points are most promising. The result is that marital enrichment programmes and counselling services in South-West Nigeria risk being grounded in assumptions imported from culturally dissimilar contexts rather than in locally generated evidence. It is against this background that the present study investigates the extent to which communication styles, and emotional intelligence predict marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. By situating these three psychosocial predictors within a single empirical framework and within a culturally specific context, the study aims to fill a substantive gap in the literature, generate findings that are both theoretically meaningful and practically actionable, and provide an evidence base for developing culturally relevant interventions aimed at reducing marital instability and fostering more stable family life in the region.

Research Questions

1. What are the communication styles among married adults in South-West Nigeria?
2. What is the level of marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between communication styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria.

Literature Review

Marital instability is a multidimensional construct that encompasses the range of conditions and experiences that undermine the viability, cohesion, and longevity of a marital union. Shafiq et al. (2025) define it as an ongoing conflict in marriage arising from communication difficulties, disagreements over parenting or gender roles, financial strain, infidelity, and substance misuse. Manning and Cohen (2012) extend this definition to include separation, estrangement, and situations in which couples continue cohabiting but without meaningful marital engagement. Ünal and Akgün (2022) conceptualise marital instability as the absence of key relational characteristics, including the ability to avoid or constructively resolve conflicts, mutual satisfaction, shared interests, and the fulfilment of spousal expectations. Collectively, these definitions point to marital instability as both a process and a state: a deteriorating relational trajectory marked by emotional distance, diminished commitment, and eroded mutual functioning. The consequences of marital instability operate at multiple levels. At the individual level, partners in unstable marriages frequently experience anxiety, depression, and chronic stress that impair personal and occupational functioning (Trudel & Goldfarb, 2010). At the family level, children raised in conflict-ridden households are at heightened risk of behavioural maladjustment, academic decline, and difficulties in forming stable relationships in later life (Niraula, 2016). At the societal level, the erosion of stable family units has been linked to rising rates of juvenile delinquency, poverty, and diminished social capital (Hoffmann & Dufur, 2018). Kofoworola and Rofiu (2024) observe that in many Nigerian households, couples who initially pledged lifelong commitment become the primary agents of their own marital dissolution, often lacking adequate psychological or relational resources to reverse the trend. These observations underscore the urgency of identifying psychosocial determinants that can serve as targets for preventive and therapeutic intervention.

Communication styles encompass the verbal and non-verbal strategies that individuals habitually use to convey thoughts, needs, and emotions in interpersonal interaction (Burgoon et al., 2011). Four broad styles are commonly identified in the literature: assertive, passive, aggressive, and passive-aggressive. Assertive communication is marked by directness, clarity, and mutual respect, enabling individuals to express their views and needs without undermining the dignity of their interlocutor (Bîrsan, 2026). Passive communication involves the avoidance of direct expression, often leading to suppressed needs and unresolved tensions. Aggressive communication is characterised by dominance, hostility, or coercion, prioritising personal expression at the expense of the other person. Passive-aggressive communication blends surface compliance with covert resistance or manipulation (Winstone, 2025). The relationship between communication style and marital quality has been documented extensively since Gottman's landmark research, which identified criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and

stonewalling as the four most destructive communication patterns in marriage, reliably predicting eventual dissolution. Subsequent work has elaborated the demand-withdrawal pattern, in which one partner escalates emotionally while the other disengages, as a particularly corrosive dynamic associated with dissatisfaction and relational breakdown (Edwards, 2018). Woszidlo and Segrin's (2013) research indicates that a positive problem-solving communication style is the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction in couples during the first five years of marriage, whereas avoidant and compliant styles correlate with lower satisfaction and diminished emotional connection. Gesell et al. (2020) further reported that constructive conflict resolution styles were positively related to overall marital quality, a finding consistent with meta-analytic evidence linking effective communication training to sustained improvements in relational functioning.

Within the Nigerian context, Arumugam et al. (2021) found that assertive and open communication was essential for sustaining intimacy and managing conflict among married adults, while Winer et al. (2025) confirmed that passive-aggressive exchanges tended to amplify minor disagreements into major relational ruptures. Ejekwu and Sunny-Gobo (2025) established that assertive communication patterns among married adults in Nigeria functioned as a protective factor against marital dissatisfaction, whereas aggressive communication consistently predicted relational instability. Bošnjaković and Radionov (2018) argued that empathy, the capacity to accurately perceive and respond to another's emotional state, is foundational to positive relational influence, since it is difficult to exert meaningful interpersonal impact without first understanding how others feel. Substantial empirical evidence links higher EI to more positive marital outcomes. Adekeye and Sogbesan (2025) demonstrated that emotionally intelligent spouses were more capable of empathising with their partners, expressing needs constructively, and de-escalating conflict before it became entrenched, all of which function as protective factors against marital breakdown. Goyal and Narayan (2024) found that emotionally intelligent individuals tended to employ more empathic, patient, and communicative approaches to conflict, leading to improved marital harmony and reduced instability. Zeidner and Kloda (2013) similarly reported that EI was a significant predictor of constructive conflict resolution styles, which in turn predicted marital quality. A growing body of work also documents the mediating role of EI in absorbing the negative effects of stress and conflict escalation within intimate partnerships (Berenguer-Soler et al., 2023).

Nigerian-specific evidence reinforces these international findings. Valentina et al. (2021) found a significant positive relationship between EI and marital satisfaction among married secondary school teachers in Anambra State. Anyamene (2020) similarly reported that emotional intelligence was a significant correlate of marital satisfaction among married teachers in public secondary schools in Anambra State, highlighting the practical relevance of EI-focused interventions for Nigerian couples. Batool and Khalid (2012) described emotional intelligence as "the oxygen of marital relationships," finding that it significantly predicted marital stability among literate married adults. In a cultural context where socialisation norms may restrict open emotional expression, the role of EI in buffering marital instability is particularly salient (Nadeem & Mohamad, 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to collect data from a large population to examine the predictive influence of communication styles and emotional intelligence on marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. The descriptive survey design further allowed for the systematic description of existing conditions and the establishment of relationships among the study variables without manipulating them. The population for the study comprised married adults residing in South-West Nigeria. The South-West geopolitical zone consists of six states, namely Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti States. Married adults within these states constituted the target population because they possess direct experience and practical understanding of marital relationships and related psychosocial dynamics. A multistage sampling procedure was employed for the study. In the first stage, selected states were purposively chosen from the South-West geopolitical zone based on accessibility and population spread. In the second stage, local government areas were selected using simple random sampling techniques. Subsequently, communities and households were randomly selected. Finally, married adults were selected through purposive sampling based on marital status and willingness to participate in the study. A total of four hundred (400) married adults participated in the study. The sample size was considered adequate for statistical analysis and generalisation within the context of the study. A structured questionnaire titled Communication Styles, Emotional Intelligence and Marital Instability Questionnaire (CSEMIQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was divided into five sections. Section A elicited demographic information such as age, gender, educational qualification, religion, duration of marriage, and occupation. Section B communication styles among married adults. Section C measured emotional intelligence, while Section D focused on marital instability. The questionnaire items were developed based on an extensive review of related literature and adapted from validated scales used in previous studies on marital relationships and psychosocial variables. The instrument adopted a four-point Likert response format of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD), weighted 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. Higher scores indicated a stronger presence of the measured construct. To ensure the validity of the instrument, face and content validity procedures were carried out. Copies of the instrument were presented to experts in Counsellor Education, Educational Psychology, and Measurement and Evaluation for scrutiny regarding clarity, appropriateness, and relevance of the items to the objectives of the study. Their observations and recommendations guided the modification and refinement of the final version of the questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was established through a pilot study conducted among married adults outside the sampled area but with similar characteristics to the study population. The data obtained from the pilot study were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha reliability technique. The reliability coefficients obtained for the subscales were considered adequate and acceptable for research purposes because they exceeded the minimum reliability threshold of 0.70. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire to the respondents with the assistance of trained research assistants. Before administration, the respondents were informed about the purpose of the study and assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Participation in the study was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants. The completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved immediately

after completion to ensure a high return rate. The data collected were analysed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions. Inferential statistics, specifically Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC), were used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study at the 0.05 level of significance. Statistical analyses were conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research Question 1: What are the communication styles among married adults in South West, Nigeria?

Table 1
Communication Styles among Married Adults

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Aggressive Communication	64	16.0	16.0	16.0
Assertive Communication	71	17.8	17.8	33.8
Passive Communication	130	32.5	32.5	66.3
Passive-Aggressive Communication	135	33.8	33.8	100.0
Total	400	100.0	100.0	

COMMUNICATION STYLES AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN SOUTH-WEST, NIGERIA

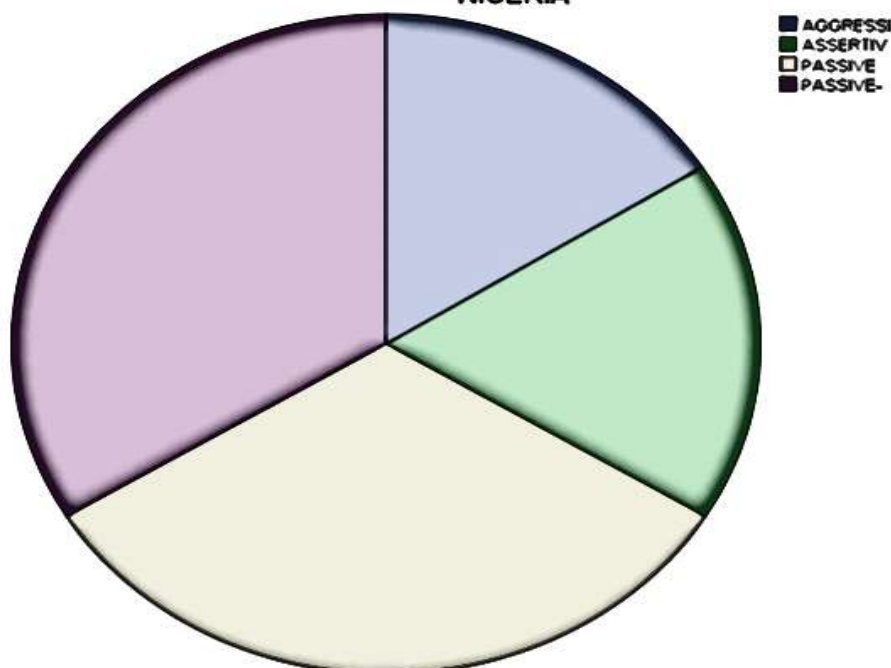


Figure 1: Communication Styles among Married Adults

Table 1 and Figure 1 show the communication styles among married adults in Ilorin South. The outcome shows that 16.0% of the respondents' communication style was aggressive in nature.

17.8% of the respondents used an assertive communication style. However, 32.5% of the respondents style was passive communication style, while married adults with a passive-aggressive communication style was 33.8%. Therefore, the passive-aggressive communication style was mostly used by married adults.

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

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

S/N	Marital Instability	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	Mean	Sdt.	Rating
1.	I often think about ending my marriage.	116 29.0	86 21.5	84 21.0	114 28.5	2.51	1.185	9 th
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	6 th
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	3 rd
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	5 th
5.	I feel dissatisfied with the overall quality of my marriage.	135 33.8	65 16.3	91 22.8	109 22.3	2.57	1.2.12	7 th
6.	My spouse and I struggle to communicate effectively	0 0.0	64 16.0	77 19.3	259 64.8	1.52	.765	10 th
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	4 th
8.	There is a lack of trust between my spouse and me	115 35.3	81 20.3	100 25.0	104 26.0	2.52	1.170	8 th
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	2 nd

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
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Table 2 : indicates that thinking about ending their marriage is infrequent, with 29.0% reporting it as never common and 21.5% as rarely common. However, 49.5% admitted to it being sometimes or always common. Regarding meaningful time spent together, 33.3% asserted it was never common, while 49.0% expressed that it is either sometimes or always common. Additionally, 37.0% of participants reported never feeling uncertain about continuing their relationship, contrasting with 46.8% who experienced it sometimes or always. The tendency to avoid discussing important issues is also notable, with 31.5% never employing this tactic, yet 50.1% confessed to doing so sometimes or always. Feelings of dissatisfaction with marital quality were reported by 33.8% as never common, whereas 50.1% felt it occasionally or frequently. Communication struggles surfaced for 64.8% of the respondents who regularly communicated effectively, whilst only 19.3% found it sometimes common to have communication issues. Trust levels reported a similar trend, as 35.3% felt there was no lack of trust, while 51.0% felt the presence of trust issues occasionally or frequently. Emotional disconnection was acknowledged by 35.5% as seldom occurring. Unresolved conflicts were perceived by 64.0% of respondents as rarely or never frequent, delineating an apparent moderate level of marital instability, particularly regarding unresolved conflicts (M = 2.86), emotional detachment (M = 2.69), uncertainty in the relationship (M = 2.65), avoidance of significant discussions (M = 2.61), dissatisfaction with marriage quality (M = 2.57), and thoughts of ending the marriage (M = 2.51). Collectively, these findings suggest ongoing challenges within marriages, necessitating attention to avert future deterioration.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between communication styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria.

Table 3
Relationship between communication styles and marital instability among married adults

	N	Mean	Sdt.	df.	r.Cal.	P.value	Remark
Communication Styles	400	29.9825	9.66337				
				398	0.449	.000	Rejected
Marital Instability	400	29.1625	12.08662				

Table 3 : shows the calculated r. value is 0.45. The significance level is 0.00 at 0.05. The p. value 0.00 is less than 0.05 (r.cal. = 0.45; p.value<0.00). Therefore, hypothesis HO1 is rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between communication styles and marital instability among married adults in the South West, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that the passive-aggressive communication style was the most prevalent communication pattern among married adults in South-West Nigeria, followed closely by the passive communication style, while the assertive communication style was less commonly adopted. This finding suggests that many married adults tend to suppress direct emotional expression or communicate dissatisfaction indirectly rather than engage in open and constructive dialogue with their spouses. The predominance of passive-aggressive and passive communication styles may be associated with socio-cultural expectations surrounding marital endurance, emotional restraint, and conflict avoidance within many Nigerian homes. The finding is consistent with the submission of Winer et al. (2024), who found that passive-aggressive communication patterns often intensify interpersonal conflict and undermine relationship stability. Similarly, the present finding corroborates the work of Woszidlo and Segrin (2013), who reported that avoidant and compliant communication styles were associated with lower marital satisfaction and weaker emotional connection among couples. The result also aligns with the position of Gottman (2013), whose research identified destructive communication behaviours such as defensiveness and stonewalling as strong predictors of marital breakdown. Furthermore, the finding supports the study conducted by Ejekwu and Sunny-Gobo (2025), who established that assertive communication serves as a protective factor against marital dissatisfaction, whereas aggressive communication patterns contribute significantly to instability in marital relationships. The current finding equally agrees with Arumugam et al. (2021), who argued that open and assertive communication is essential for maintaining intimacy and effective conflict management among married couples. The study further revealed that married adults in South-West Nigeria experienced a moderate level of marital instability. The dimensions of instability most strongly reported included unresolved conflicts, emotional disconnection, uncertainty about the continuity of the relationship, avoidance of important discussions, and dissatisfaction with marital quality. This finding indicates that although many marriages remain intact, several couples continue to experience underlying relational tensions capable of threatening long-term marital stability if not properly addressed. The finding is in agreement with Shafiq et al. (2025), who identified communication difficulties, unresolved disagreements, and emotional strain as major contributors to marital instability. The present finding also corroborates the assertions of Monk et al. (2025), who conceptualised marital instability as a gradual deterioration in commitment, emotional attachment, and relational certainty. The current result further aligns with the observations of Olasehinde and Onodje (2023) that socio-economic pressures and changing relational expectations have contributed significantly to instability among Nigerian couples. Additionally, the finding supports the work of Totenhagen et al. (2023), who found that daily stress and poor emotional adjustment negatively affect relationship quality and marital satisfaction. The present result also agrees with Trudel and Goldfarb (2010), who reported that persistent marital tension contributes to emotional distress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction among spouses. The hypothesis testing revealed a significant relationship between communication styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. This implies that the way spouses communicate with one another substantially influences the stability or instability of their marriages. Couples who predominantly employ passive, aggressive, or passive-aggressive communication styles are more likely to experience unresolved conflicts, emotional disconnection, and marital

dissatisfaction than those who adopt assertive communication styles. This finding is consistent with the study of Aliyu et al. (2025), who established that communication styles significantly correlate with marital stability among married couples. The finding also supports the demand-withdrawal theory advanced by Schrodtt et al. (2014), which demonstrated that maladaptive communication patterns contribute directly to dissatisfaction and relational breakdown. The present result equally corroborates the findings of Gesell et al. (2020), who reported that constructive communication and effective conflict resolution strategies positively influence marital quality. In the same vein, the study agrees with Omoboye et al. (2024), who emphasised that healthy communication patterns strengthen emotional intimacy and marital satisfaction. However, the current finding differs slightly from studies conducted in some Western contexts where assertive communication styles were reported as the dominant communication pattern among married couples. The difference may be attributed to cultural variations in marital interaction patterns, gender-role expectations, and societal norms regarding emotional expression. In many African societies, including Nigeria, spouses may avoid confrontation in order to preserve family harmony or conform to cultural expectations surrounding respect and endurance in marriage. Such tendencies may inadvertently encourage passive or passive-aggressive communication behaviours that undermine marital stability over time. Overall, the findings of this study reinforce the position that communication remains one of the most critical determinants of marital stability. The study demonstrates that ineffective communication patterns significantly contribute to marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria, thereby underscoring the need for culturally responsive marital counselling programmes, emotional intelligence training, and communication skill interventions aimed at strengthening marital relationships and reducing the prevalence of marital instability in the region.

CONCLUSION

This study examined communication styles and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. The study was motivated by the growing concern over increasing marital instability and the limited empirical evidence explaining the psychosocial factors contributing to this phenomenon within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. The findings of the study demonstrated that communication style is a critical determinant of marital stability among married adults. One of the major findings of the study revealed that the passive-aggressive communication style was the most commonly adopted communication pattern among married adults, followed closely by the passive communication style, while the assertive communication style was comparatively less prevalent. This suggests that many spouses tend to avoid direct and constructive emotional expression, thereby creating opportunities for unresolved tensions, emotional suppression, and relational dissatisfaction within marriage. The study further established that married adults experienced a moderate level of marital instability, particularly in areas relating to unresolved conflicts, emotional disconnection, uncertainty about marital continuity, dissatisfaction with marital quality, and avoidance of important discussions. Most importantly, the study found a significant relationship between communication styles and marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. This finding implies that the quality and pattern of communication between spouses substantially influence the stability of marital relationships. Couples who rely on passive,

aggressive, or passive-aggressive communication styles are more likely to experience marital dissatisfaction and instability, whereas assertive communication patterns are more likely to foster understanding, intimacy, and conflict resolution. The study contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge on marital relationships by providing empirical evidence from a non-Western and culturally specific context. Much of the existing literature on marital instability has been derived from Western societies, thereby limiting cultural generalisation to African settings. This study contributes to filling this gap by situating communication styles and marital instability within the socio-cultural realities of South-West Nigeria. The findings extend existing theoretical understanding of marital instability by demonstrating that communication behaviours remain central to marital outcomes regardless of cultural context, although the forms and manifestations of these behaviours may differ across societies. The study also contributes practically to the fields of counselling, family therapy, psychology, and educational guidance by identifying communication style as an important intervention point for strengthening marital relationships. The findings provide useful evidence for marriage counsellors, family therapists, religious leaders, social workers, and policymakers in designing culturally relevant marital counselling programmes and relationship education interventions aimed at improving communication competence among couples. Furthermore, the study underscores the need for premarital and marital enrichment programmes that emphasise assertive communication, emotional openness, empathy, and constructive conflict resolution skills. In conclusion, the study established that ineffective communication patterns constitute a significant factor in marital instability among married adults in South-West Nigeria. Strengthening healthy communication practices among couples is therefore essential for promoting marital satisfaction, reducing relational conflict, and fostering stable family systems within contemporary Nigerian society.

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