

**A Dyadic Approach of Gaslighting Behaviours and Marriage Harmony of Intra-ethnic Spouses in Mkpato Enin Local Education Committee of Akwa Ibom State.**

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**Abstract**

The study aimed at determining the relationship between gaslighting behaviours and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Mkpato Enin Local Education Committee Akwa Ibom State. Three research questions were raised for the study. A correlational survey design was adopted while the population comprised 2,207 female teachers from the 49 public primary schools in the study area. A sample size of 220 teachers was selected for the study using a multi-stage sampling procedure. Out of 49 schools in the population, 20 public primary schools as well as 11 female teachers each in all the sampled schools were selected using balloting method of random sampling. The researchers developed instrument titled “Gaslighting Behaviours and Marriage Harmony of Intra-ethnic Spouses Questionnaire (GRMAISQ)” were used for data collection, with a reliability co-efficient of 0.73 and 0.84 obtained through Cronbach Alpha Statistics. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics was used in answering the research questions. The finding revealed a very weak negative relationship between deceitfulness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses. The findings further revealed a weak negative relationship between contemptuousness, blame-shifting and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses. It was concluded that deceitfulness, contemptuousness and blame-shifting are all gaslighting behaviours which can hamper marriage harmony. The researchers recommended among other things that, male spouses should reshape feelings of contempt into healthy means of communication while avoiding comments and gestures that would show greater disregard to the feelings and emotions of their female’s spouses.

**Keywords:** Gaslighting Behaviours, Marriage Harmony, Deceitfulness, Contemptuousness and Blame Shifting

## **Introduction**

Are you married? If so, it means you still remember the day of your marriage solemnization, where both of you smiled and your future seemed full of hope, promise and fulfillment. But now, is your marriage full of happiness or are you facing serious problems of incompatibilities? Can you confidently tell someone that you are having a joyous married life or a tumultuous one? If you are experiencing a more depressed and turbulent married life or heard of any, then it is obvious that the warm marital relationship once enjoyed have cooled.

Conventional marriage is a mutual agreement and unique relationship between a man and a woman who are socially, financially, culturally, spiritually and biologically ready to live together as one family to fulfill the roles of husband and wife (Odebode, 2019). Marriage, also called matrimony or wedlock is a socially recognised union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between themselves, their children and their in-laws. People marry for a variety of reasons, which include establishing a permanent relationship, to get mutual help, to cater for each other and children's welfare, where they are, or to put their loved ones in bondage because they want to enjoy certain fulfillments in life.

In recent times, relationships are not always healthy as many families have experienced physical and emotional abuse. A type of abuse common among many families is gaslighting behaviours which has caused devastating consequences among spouses particularly in this 21st century. Sweet (2019) defined gaslighting behaviours in marital relationships as a tenacious manipulation and indoctrinating technique often used by husbands to make their wives develop self-doubt, lose sense of self-worth, identity and perception. A gas lighter will instigate planned arguments or verbal attacks that are completely out of context and have no truth in them. People who experience gaslighting may feel depressed, confused, and anxious as though they cannot trust themselves. In marriage parlance, Stern (2017) maintained that

husbands are major perpetrators of gaslighting behaviours since they are naturally destined to carry out the role of headship in the family; hence, they tend to over use their powers. The author added that husbands who are cheats for instance, do so to gaslight their betrayed spouse. Just like other types of domestic violence, Solanke and Ayodabo (2017) observed that some husbands engage in gaslighting behaviours as a means of maintaining a sense of superiority, powerfulness and gaining control over their wives. Such behaviour tend to inhibit marriage harmony, which in this study is described as a condition whereby couples behaviours show that they have accepted each other's individuality, live together peacefully and have a common ground for unity and mutual understanding.

There are certain components or elements of gaslighting behaviours which may disrupt the peaceful co-existence and marriage harmony of spouses. One of such behaviour is deceitfulness. Deceitfulness is an act of behaving dishonestly in order to mislead, hide or distort the truth. Deception and lies undermine the reality of others, eroding their belief in the veracity of their perception and subjective experience. According to Animasahun and Fatile (2011), an ideal relationship is built on trust, openness, mutual respect and personal freedom. Choosing to be honest with a partner every day is what keeps love real. While freedom to choose is a vital aspect of any healthy and honest union, deception is the third party that should never be welcome in marital relationship because as noted by Ojukwu, Woko and Onuoha (2016), it can destroy marriage stability and enhance feelings of separation or divorce.

Contempt in marriage is another aspect of gaslighting behaviours which may likely influence marital harmony and stability among married couples. Contempt comes from a place of superiority that makes others feel inferior. It stems from a sense of feeling unappreciated and unacknowledged in the relationship. It can take the form of verbal or non-verbal language, which includes sarcasm, mockery, and making statements that demean and vilify a romantic partner. Melwani and Barsade (2011) argued that being a recipient of contempt in a marriage can result in

emotional instability, increased sense of disapproval and exclusion in marriage. Wives who face contemptuous behaviour from the husbands can develop feelings of inferiority due to a loss of status or personal identity as well as lowered self-esteem.

Blame-shifting is another indicator of gaslighting which can diminish marital harmony among spouses. Blame-shifting is a failure of accountability whereby an individual attempts to place blame on those who are not accountable for the failure. Blame-shifting can have detrimental impact on relationships since it can damage the quality of communication between spouses. If the husband is self-vindictive and judgmental, he pushes blames on the wife; hence, Afu and Nteh (2020) maintained that both of them are more likely to respond in negative ways to one another, create serious misunderstanding, such that if not quickly settled could damage or sabotage the relationship.

### **The Feminist Theory by Dobash and Dobash**

One of the proponents of feminist theory was Dobash and Dobash in 1979. This theory is rooted in the idea that abuse of women by their intimate partners is the inevitable result of a patriarchal society that directly and indirectly allows men to dominate and control their partners. According to the theorists, a man abuses a woman because cultural norms support his belief that violence is an acceptable and effective method of solving marital conflicts, because he is entitled and expected to control his wife, and because his use of violence receives no social penalty. Denial and blaming are understood by feminist theorists as strategies men adopt to avoid paying consequences for their harmful actions against their partners. Men are expected to deny, minimize, or deflect blame for their behaviours in legal or social contexts where abuse may be sanctioned. In contrast, the feminist theorists argued that women who are being abused by their partners are likely to blame themselves and unlikely to justifiably excuse their own aggressive behaviour.

### **Concept of Gaslighting Behaviours**

The term, gaslighting was derived from a 1939 play by Patrick Hamiton, known in America as “Angel Street” and later developed into the film “gaslight” in

1944 by Alfred Hitchcock (Thomas, 2018). Gaslighting behaviours are forms of psychological or emotional abuse in which a person or group causes someone to question their own sanity, memories, or perception of reality (Sweet, 2019). In general sense, to gaslight refers to the act of undermining another person's reality by denying facts, thoughts, the environment around them, or their feelings. According to Breines (2012), gaslighting is psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability.

Gaslighting primarily occurs in romantic relationships, whereby a husband may decide to use certain emotionally abusive words or statements to undermine the perception of reality of wife. Gaslighting can confuse and cause the victim doubt his or her self-worth and overall judgement of mental health. After communicating with the gaslighter, the gaslightee may feel dazed and wonder if there is something wrong with him or her. Such individual may be encouraged to think that he or she is just too insensitive and full of blames. People who experience gaslighting may feel confused, anxious, or as though they cannot trust themselves. Being subjected to gaslighting can cause anxiety, depression, decreased self-worth and other mental health concerns including addiction and thoughts of suicide.

### **Deceitfulness and Marriage Harmony of Intra-Ethic Spouses**

Lying and distortion are the bedrock of gaslighting behaviour. Kaur (2023) opined that people who engage in gaslighting are often habitual and pathological liars with narcissistic tendencies. Even when they are not telling the truth, gaslighters can be very convincing. They can present statements that look so real and worth believing, with the intent of making the gaslightee to start second-guessing himself or herself. Pace (2020) averse that marriages are based on open communication trust and a common goal; but if a partner always lies to another, then the foundation of comfort and security is replaced with doubt.

Lying in marriage cracks the bond that makes the marriage whole. Stafford (2015) proposed that men who lie in relationships do it to prevent fight blame, and to conceal their wrong deeds. They tend to become persistent and blatant liars to their female spouse just to get confused unsteady and doubtful. In one of the studies conducted by Amadi and Amadi (2014), the authors found that dishonesty and negligent behaviour of spouses enhances conflict and instability in marriage. Eyo (2018) also found that persistent lying to a marriage mate is an addictive behaviour which can instigate feelings of divorce and separation.

### **Contemptuousness and Marriage Harmony of Intra-Ethic Spouses**

Contempt is poison for marriages. According to Navarra and Gottman (2011), behaviours such as disrespecting, cursing, mockery and anything else that makes a married partner feel bad about himself or herself reflect contemptuous intentions. Contempt from a marriage partner particularly the husbands with whom wives are supposed to feel secure and protected could put the future of marriage in doubt. Contempt is so destructive to relationships. The contemptuous person believes they are better, more helpful, more thoughtful, more considerate and smarter than their spouse.

Marriage cannot thrive in an environment of disrespect and insults; and no one deserves to be put down or disregarded by their spouse. According to Goodman, (2020) contempt in marriage is the single most corrosive behaviour in a relationship. Male gaslighters in a relationship often display contemptuous behaviour by spreading rumors and gossip about their wives to friends while presenting to be caring and kind before the wife. Unfortunately, the husband friends and other people who may have heard such couple resort to making subjective judgment about the wife or even bully without knowing the full story. Melwani and Jennifer (2012) added that treating a spouse with disdain, mockery, name-calling, aggressive humour and sarcasm are all examples of contemptuous behaviour.

Marriage is a sacred bond based on communication, trust, understanding, commitment, sacrifice, togetherness, oneness, sincerity and the likes. Both parties

in marital relationship are expected to avoid contemptuous behaviour in order to have peace and harmony in the family. As revealed from the finding by Ozad, Gulen, Maryam, and Simon (2020), contemptuous behaviour by the husband against the wife would rather lead to poor interpersonal relationship, absent of positive communication, lack of dialogue and poor conflict resolution which reduces peace and harmony in marriage. This finding is in agreement with the earlier finding of Diehl (2012) that marriages fail in present time because of contemptuous behaviour and lack of intimacy by married couples.

### **Blame-Shifting and Marriage Harmony of Intra-Ethic Spouses**

Blame-shifting is another common gaslighting tactic. An individual who is good at gaslighting may have behaviours or actions that are displeasing consisted or shift to another person without admitting or accepting the blame. Blame-shifting in relationships reduces intimacy between spouses as well as widening communication gap. A marriage can never be healthy as long as blame is an integral part of the relationship. Hawkins (2015) described it as a cancer in the very fiber of a marriage, eroding integrity of the relationship. The author added that blame-shifting erodes self-esteem of in marriage partner promotes depression and anxiety, prevents truth telling, stops change and accurate reflection and reduces sense of trust in relationship. Being blamed for everything in a relationship is often a way to exert control over one's partner and can lead to severe emotional turmoil in a relationship.

In an empirical study conducted by Fast and Tredens (2010), the authors revealed that acute level of blame-shifting from the husband to the wife can affect a romantic bond severely; hence, leading to fight, low self-esteem and even depression which can cause disharmony in the family. Elizabeth and Sean (2019) also added that men are often blame-shifters from their shoulders to those of their wives; and that such condition could introduce severe marital challenges and disharmony in the family.

## **Statement of the Problem**

Marital harmony has become a far fetching feat in recent times due to the fissiparous and cataclysmic behavioural dispositions of some spouses. This is evidenced from the fact that, the law courts are day in day out crowded with people willing to terminate their marriage union. Marital discord negatively affects spouses' smooth harmonious relationship, and primary school teachers are no exception to this. In many homes in the study area, some spouses yell and shout at each other while others go out in search for extra-marital partners. It is very common to find spouses particularly the males, deceiving their wives so as to cover-up their ill conducts. While some male spouses display total disregard to the feelings of their wives, others resort to shift every blame on their female spouses even though they are not guilty. All this ugly incidences seems to create increase risks of marital disharmony and divorce. Therefore, the problem of this study is to investigate a dyadic approach of gaslighting behaviours and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Mkpato Enin Local Education Committee of Akwa Ibom State.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised for the study:

1. What is the relationship between deceitfulness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Mkpato Enin Local Education Committee?
2. What is the relationship between contemptuousness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Mkpato Enin Local Education Committee?
3. What is the relationship between blame-shifting and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Mkpato Enin Local Education Committee?

## **Research Methods**

The study adopted a correlational research design. According to Udoh and Joseph (2005), this design is applicable whenever the researcher wishes to find out the magnitude and direction of relationship that exists between the dependent and independent variable. The population of this study comprised all the 2,207 female teachers from the 49 public primary schools in Mkpato Enin Local Education

Committee (source: Planning, Research and Statistics Unit, State Secondary Education Board, 2021/2022 session).

A sample size of 220 teachers was selected for the study through a multi-stage sampling procedure. At the first stage, the sample size was determined statistically using the postulation of Nwana (1995) that if the population is a few thousands, a 10 percent sample will do; and if several thousands (10,000 and above), a 5 percent or less sample will be representative of the population. Hence, 10 percent of the population (220 teachers) was deemed suitable. At the second stage, a simple random sampling technique (balloting method) was used to select 20 public primary schools out of 49. At the third stage, the same balloting method was used to select 11 female teachers per school for instrument administration, which gave a total of 220 sampled respondents.

The researchers' developed instrument titled "Gaslighting Behaviours and Marriage Harmony of Intra-ethnic Spouses Questionnaire (GBMHISQ)" was used for data collection, with the overall reliability coefficient of 0.73 for items in section A and 0.84 for items in section B, using Cronbach's Alpha statistics. Data generated were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software (version 25). In answering the research questions, the r-value or co-efficient value obtained was used to determine the magnitude or weight of relationship between variables of the study.

The research questions were answered using the decision rule presented by Nunnally (2011) as follows:-

Coefficient (r) - Relationship

00 to -0.09 - Zero relationship

-0.1 to -0.22 - Very weak negative relationship

-0.23 to -0.34 - Weak negative relationship

-0.35 to -0.49 - Negative relationship

-0.50 to -0.70 - Low negative relationship

-0.71 to -0.99 - Very low negative relationship

## Results and Discussion of Findings

**Research Question 1:** What is the relationship between deceitfulness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee?

**Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis on the relationship between deceitfulness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses**

Variables	N	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value	Remark
		$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$			
Deceitfulness (x)	220	5416	61121			
				146632	-0.21*	Very weak negative relationship
Marriage Harmony of Intra-ethnic Spouses (y)	220	5494	74718			

Result in Table 1 shows a very weak negative relationship between deceitfulness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee. This is shown on the correlation coefficient of -0.21. The implication of this result is that primary teachers are less likely to enjoy a more loving, caring and respectful and peaceful marriage if their husbands tend to be highly deceitful and vice versa.

**Research Question 2:** What is the relationship between contemptuousness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee?

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis on the relationship between contemptuousness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses**

Variables	N	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value	Remark
		$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$			
Contemptuousness (x)	220	5416	63553			
				143261	-0.32*	Weak negative relationship
Marriage Harmony of Intra-ethnic Spouses (y)	220	5494	74718			

Result in Table 2 shows a weak negative relationship between contemptuousness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee. This is shown on the correlation coefficient of -0.32. The implication of this result is that female married teachers are less likely to live

together peaceful with their husbands if they experience a lack of respect and disregard in their marital home.

**Research Question 3:** What is the relationship between blame-shifting and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee?

**Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis on the relationship between blame-shifting and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses**

Variables	N	$\sum x$	$\sum x^2$	$\sum xy$	r-value	Remark
		$\sum y$	$\sum y^2$			
Blame-shifting (x)	220	5416	73923			
Marriage Harmony of Intra-ethnic Spouses (y)	220	5494	74718	76984	-0.27*	Weak negative relationship

Result in Table 3 shows a very weak negative relationship between blame-shifting and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee. This is shown on the correlation coefficient of -0.27. The implication of this result is that female married teachers are less prone to enjoy atmosphere of mutual civility and respect in marriage if their husbands are blame-shifters and do not take responsibility for their own actions.

### Discussion of Findings

The researchers made a joined discussion of findings from the research questions and discussion of findings.

Result from the research question one revealed a very weak negative relationship between deceitfulness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee. This is shown on the correlation coefficient of 0.75. This is because the action of keeping the truth hidden, especially to get an advantage creates a loss of intimacy, distrust and hurtful feelings between spouses. This finding is in agreement with finding of the study conducted by Amadi and Amadi (2014), that deceitful and negligent behaviour of spouses enhances conflict and instability in marriage. This finding is also in agreement with the finding of Eyo (2018), that persistent lying to a marriage mate is an addictive behaviour which can

instigate feelings of divorce and separation. Hence, it is therefore observed from this finding that deception can be more damaging to the attainment of marital harmony.

Result from the research question two revealed a weak negative relationship between contemptuousness and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Uyo Local Education Committee. This is because when a spouse, particularly the husband disregard the feelings and emotions of their wife and treat her with disdain, such condition could trigger feelings of repressed anger, resentment, hate, and other unhealthy behaviour on the part of the wives, which can lead to marital instability. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Ozad, Gulen, Maryam, and Simon (2020) that contemptuous behaviour by the husband against the wife would rather lead to poor interpersonal relationship, absent of positive communication, lack of dialogue and poor conflict resolution which reduces peace and harmony in marriage. This finding is also in agreement with the earlier finding of Diehl (2012) that marriages fail in present time because of contemptuous behaviour and lack of intimacy by married couples. Therefore, it is observed from this finding that contemptuous behaviour displayed by a male spouse can bring about negative thought and feelings of disengagement in marriage on the part of the wife.

Result from the research question three revealed a weak negative relationship between blame-shifting and marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses in Mkpato Local Education Committee. This is because no one would appreciate being abused and victimized. This finding is in tandem with the finding of the study conducted by Tredens (2010) that acute level of blame-shifting from the husband to the wife can affect a romantic bond severely; hence, leading to fight, low self-esteem and even depression which can cause disharmony in the family. This finding also conform to the finding of Elizabeth and Sean (2019), that men are often blame-shifters from their shoulders to those of their wives; and that such condition could introduce severe marital challenges and disharmony in the family. Hence, it is therefore observed that persistent blame-shifting in a relationship can lower ones self-esteem and can lead to emotional breakup and disharmony in marriage.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the finding of the study, it is therefore concluded that gaslighting behaviours has a form of psychological manipulation or abuse can distort peaceful co-existence of the family. It is noted from this study that deceitfulness, contemptuousness and blame-shifting are all gaslighting behaviour which can be very thwart or disrupt marriage harmony of intra-ethnic spouses.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were drawn from the findings:

1. Both male and female spouses should shun deceitful behaviour because deliberate deceptiveness or being crafty to a spouse can distort marital harmony.
2. Male spouses should reshape feelings of contempt into healthy means of communication while avoid comments and gestures that would show greater disregard to the feelings and emotions of their females spouses.
3. Husbands should not allow their headship position to overwhelm their mental reasoning and ability of taking responsibility for their actions.

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