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# **MARITAL INSTABILITY AND SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTION IN RIVERS STATE**

**BY**

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines marital instability and social work intervention in Rivers State. It revealed the extent to which marital instability has led to divorce, poor child upbringing, and social maladjustment among families in Rivers State and examined the role of social work interventions including family therapy, mediation, and family support services in mitigating these effects.

The family system theory by Murray Bowen in the 1950s was adopted. The research adopted a descriptive survey design, targeting 80 married couples and 20 professional social workers in Rivers State. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed through simple percentage analysis to determine trends and patterns in respondents' perceptions. The findings revealed that marital instability has a significant negative impact on families, contributing to increased divorce rates, behavioral and emotional problems among children, poor academic performance, and reduced family cohesion.

Furthermore, the study found that social work interventions have been effective in reducing marital instability, improving spousal communication, strengthening couples' capacity to manage marital stress, and enhancing overall family stability. Based on these findings, the study recommends the strengthening of family counseling and therapy programs, the institutionalization of mediation and conflict resolution services, and the expansion of family support services and awareness programs to support marital stability and promote healthy family functioning in Rivers State. The study concludes that social work interventions are essential in mitigating the effects of marital instability and fostering resilient and cohesive family systems.

**Keywords:** Marital instability, Divorce, Child upbringing, Social maladjustment, Social work intervention

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the most fundamental social institutions in every society because it forms the basis of family life and social organization. The stability of marriage contributes significantly to the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. When marriages remain stable, they provide emotional support, economic cooperation, socialization of children, and the continuity of cultural values. However, when marriages become unstable, it often leads to family breakdown, divorce, and other social problems that affect both adults and children. Scholars have therefore emphasized that stable marriages contribute to stable families and ultimately a stable society (Ojukwu, 2013 as cited in Dikku, Adaramoye, & Olayiwola-Adedaja, 2023).

According to Aliyu, Anthonia, and Abdulkadir (2025) marital instability refers to a situation in which a marriage experiences persistent conflicts, dissatisfaction, emotional separation, or the likelihood of dissolution such as separation or divorce. It is often characterized by poor communication, lack of trust, emotional tension, and continuous disagreements between spouses. In many societies, including Nigeria, marital instability has become a growing social concern due to increasing divorce rates and family conflicts. Studies indicate that marital instability may result from several factors such as economic hardship, infidelity, incompatibility, poor communication, cultural pressures, and unrealistic expectations between couples. In Nigeria, the family system has traditionally been regarded as the cornerstone of social life. Marriage is not only a union between two individuals but also a union between families and communities. However, social and economic transformations such as urbanization, unemployment, poverty, and changing cultural values have placed increasing strain on marital relationships. These pressures often lead to conflicts within the family and can eventually result in marital instability. For instance, factors such as poverty,

unemployment, interference from extended family members, infertility, and cultural expectations have been identified as significant contributors to unstable marriages in Nigerian society (Aliyu, Anthonia, & Abdulkadir, 2025).

The consequences of marital instability are far-reaching and affect not only couples but also children and the wider society. Children from unstable homes may experience emotional stress, poor academic performance, and social maladjustment. Research has shown that students from homes characterized by marital instability often face difficulties adjusting in school due to psychological stress and family disruption (European American Journals, 2016). Furthermore, unstable marriages can contribute to other social problems such as domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, substance abuse, and poverty. The breakdown of marital relationships also weakens family support systems that traditionally serve as the primary source of care and protection for children and vulnerable members of society. In recent years, marital instability has increasingly become a social problem that requires professional intervention. Social workers play a crucial role in addressing family problems by providing counseling, mediation, advocacy, and support services to couples and families experiencing marital difficulties. Social work intervention focuses on strengthening family relationships, improving communication between spouses, resolving conflicts, and promoting emotional well-being within the family system. Studies emphasize that social workers, counselors, and other helping professionals are essential in promoting marital stability and supporting families experiencing relationship challenges (Nzewuji, Uche, & Uche, 2024).

In Rivers State, like many other parts of Nigeria, socio-economic pressures, changing gender roles, and cultural transitions have contributed to increasing marital conflicts and instability. Issues such as unemployment, financial stress, domestic violence,

and lack of effective communication among couples have heightened the vulnerability of marriages. These challenges underscore the need for professional social work interventions aimed at strengthening marital relationships and preventing family breakdown. Social work intervention in marital instability may include marital counseling, family therapy, mediation between couples, community education on healthy relationships, and support services for victims of domestic violence. Through these interventions, social workers help couples develop conflict resolution skills, improve communication, and rebuild trust within their relationships.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Marriage is widely regarded as a fundamental social institution that promotes family stability, emotional support, and the proper socialization of children. Stable marital relationships contribute to the psychological well-being of spouses, the healthy development of children, and the overall stability of society. However, in recent years, marital instability has increasingly become a major social concern in many societies, including Nigeria. Marital instability manifests in the form of persistent conflicts, separation, divorce, domestic violence, and emotional dissatisfaction between spouses. These conditions weaken family cohesion and often result in negative consequences for both family members and the wider society (Amato, 2010).

In Nigeria, traditional marriage was historically characterized by strong cultural values, family support systems, and community involvement that helped maintain marital stability. However, socio-economic changes such as urbanization, economic hardship, unemployment, shifting gender roles, and changing cultural expectations have significantly affected marital relationships. These changes have increased marital conflicts and disagreements among couples, thereby contributing to rising cases of separation and divorce.

Scholars have noted that financial stress, poor communication, infidelity, infertility, and interference from extended family members are among the major causes of marital instability in Nigerian society (Oyetunji-Alemede, 2022). The consequences of marital instability extend beyond the couples involved and often affect children, extended families, and the community. Children raised in unstable homes may experience emotional distress, poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and difficulties in social adjustment. Studies have shown that family instability can negatively influence children's psychological well-being and social development, thereby increasing the likelihood of social problems such as delinquency and substance abuse (Amato & Affi, 2006). Furthermore, marital instability may lead to domestic violence, poverty, single parenting, and other social challenges that undermine family welfare and social stability.

In Rivers State, the problem of marital instability appears to be increasing due to various socio-economic and cultural pressures. The effects of unemployment, financial hardship, urban lifestyle, and changing family structures have placed considerable strain on marital relationships. These pressures have resulted in frequent marital conflicts, separation, and divorce in many families. Despite the prevalence of these problems, many couples lack access to professional support systems that could help them manage marital conflicts effectively and maintain stable relationships. Social workers are trained professionals who play an important role in addressing family-related challenges through counseling, mediation, family therapy, and community support services. Social work intervention is designed to help individuals and families resolve conflicts, improve communication, strengthen coping mechanisms, and promote healthy family relationships (Turner, 2017). Through these interventions, social workers can assist couples experiencing marital difficulties by providing guidance, emotional

support, and conflict resolution strategies that may help prevent marital breakdown.

However, despite the increasing need for professional assistance in addressing marital conflicts, the role of social work intervention in addressing marital instability in Rivers State remains under-researched and under-utilized. Many couples experiencing marital problems rely on informal support systems such as family elders, religious leaders, or community members, which may not always provide professional or evidence-based solutions. Consequently, unresolved marital conflicts continue to contribute to family instability and associated social problems within the state.

Given the increasing incidence of marital instability and its social consequences, there is a need for empirical investigation into the role social workers can play in addressing this challenge. This study therefore seeks to examine the nature and causes of marital instability in Rivers State and explore how social work intervention can help strengthen marital relationships, reduce family conflicts, and promote family stability in the society.

## 1.2 Objectives

The main objective of this study was to find out the role of social work intervention in addressing marital instability in Rivers State. Specific objectives are to:

1. Determine the extent marital instability has led to divorce, poor child upbringing and social maladjustment on families and children in Rivers State.
2. Examine the way family therapy, mediation and family support services as a social work intervention has reduced marital instability in Rivers State.

## 1.3 Research Questions

In-view of the foregoing, this study seeks answers to the following questions as it would guide the study to

a reasonable conclusion.

1. To what extent has marital instability led to divorce, poor child upbringing and social maladjustment on families and children in Rivers State?
2. In what way has family therapy, mediation and family support services as social work intervention reduced marital instability in Rivers State?

## 2.0 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

### 2.1 Concept of Marital Instability

Marital instability is a concept widely discussed in sociology, psychology, and social work because of its implications for family functioning and social development. Marriage is generally expected to provide emotional support, companionship, economic cooperation, and a stable environment for raising children. However, when conflicts and dissatisfaction become persistent within marital relationships, the stability of the union may be threatened. This condition is commonly described as marital instability.

Marital instability refers to the likelihood or tendency of a marriage to experience serious conflict, dissatisfaction, separation, or divorce. It often reflects a weakening commitment between spouses and an increased probability that the marriage may dissolve. According to Paul R. Amato, marital instability occurs when couples experience persistent dissatisfaction and begin to consider separation or divorce as a possible solution to their marital problems (Amato, 2010). In this sense, marital instability is not limited to divorce itself but includes the processes and conditions that increase the risk of marital breakdown. Scholars have identified marital instability as a state characterized by continuous disagreements, lack of trust, emotional detachment, and poor communication between spouses. These issues may gradually erode marital satisfaction and weaken the bond between partners. Andrew J. Cherlin explains that marital instability can arise

when couples fail to adapt to changes in their roles, expectations, and responsibilities within the marriage (Cherlin, 2010). When these challenges remain unresolved, they may lead to increased tension and conflict within the marital relationship.

Marital instability is viewed as a condition in which a marriage lacks harmony, cooperation, and emotional satisfaction, thereby increasing the likelihood of separation or divorce. According to Olson and Olson (2000) instability in marriage often emerges when there is a breakdown in communication, emotional intimacy, and mutual support between spouses. Such breakdowns weaken marital bonds and create an environment where conflicts become frequent and difficult to resolve.

Several factors contribute to marital instability. These include economic hardship, unemployment, infidelity, infertility, domestic violence, poor communication, and interference from extended family members. In many developing societies, financial stress and changing gender roles have been identified as major sources of marital conflict. When couples are unable to effectively manage these challenges, marital dissatisfaction increases and the relationship becomes unstable.

Marital instability has significant consequences for families and society. For couples, it may lead to emotional distress, psychological trauma, and loss of social support. For children, growing up in unstable homes can result in poor academic performance, behavioral problems, and emotional insecurity. Studies have shown that children from unstable families are more likely to experience difficulties in social adjustment and psychological well-being (Amato & Affi, 2006). These outcomes highlight the importance of addressing marital instability through appropriate family support systems and professional interventions.

## 2.2 Social Work Intervention

Social work intervention is a fundamental concept in the field of social work that focuses on the professional actions taken by social workers to assist individuals, families, groups, and communities in addressing social problems and improving their well-being. Social workers intervene in situations where individuals or families experience challenges that affect their ability to function effectively in society. These interventions are designed to help people cope with problems, strengthen their capacities, and promote social justice and human welfare.

Social work intervention refers to the planned and purposeful actions taken by professional social workers to bring about positive change in the lives of individuals and groups facing social difficulties. According to Zastrow (2017) social work intervention involves the use of professional knowledge, skills, and techniques to assist people in resolving problems and enhancing their social functioning. These interventions may include counseling, advocacy, crisis intervention, mediation, referral services, and community development programs. Similarly, Reamer (2018) describes social work intervention as a professional process through which social workers apply theoretical knowledge and practical skills to help clients overcome social, emotional, and environmental challenges that affect their well-being. Social work interventions are usually guided by professional values such as respect for human dignity, social justice, empowerment, and the promotion of human rights. Social work intervention is a systematic process that involves identifying problems, assessing client needs, planning strategies, implementing services, and evaluating outcomes. According to Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, and Strom-Gottfried (2017) social work intervention is part of the helping process in which practitioners work collaboratively with clients to solve problems, strengthen coping mechanisms, and improve life situations. This process ensures that the intervention is

organized, goal-oriented, and tailored to the specific needs of clients.

Social work intervention can occur at different levels. At the micro level, social workers assist individuals and families through counseling, therapy, and case management. At the mezzo level, interventions focus on groups and organizations, such as support groups, family therapy sessions, and institutional services. At the macro level, social workers address broader social issues through community organization, policy advocacy, and social reform initiatives. These different levels of intervention enable social workers to address social problems from both personal and structural perspectives. Social work intervention plays an important role in helping couples manage conflicts and strengthen their relationships. Social workers provide marital counseling, conflict resolution strategies, emotional support, and mediation services to couples experiencing marital challenges. Through these interventions, social workers help couples improve communication, understand each other's perspectives, and develop healthy coping strategies for dealing with marital problems.

Social work intervention is particularly important in addressing issues such as marital instability because family conflicts often require professional guidance to prevent further breakdown of relationships. Social workers apply counseling techniques, family therapy approaches, and support services, to assist couples in resolving disputes and rebuilding trust within their relationships. These interventions help promote family stability, protect the welfare of children, and enhance the overall well-being of families.

### **2.3 Marital Instability and Social Work Intervention**

Marital instability and social work intervention are closely related because social work practice aims to address social problems that affect individuals and families. Marriage is a fundamental social institution

that promotes emotional support, companionship, and the proper upbringing of children. However, when conflicts, dissatisfaction, and breakdown of communication occur between spouses, the stability of marriage becomes threatened. This situation often results in marital instability, which can lead to separation, divorce, domestic violence, and other family-related problems. Social work intervention therefore becomes necessary to help couples manage marital conflicts and restore stability within the family.

The relationship between marital instability and social work intervention lies in the role social workers play in addressing these marital challenges. Social workers are trained professionals who provide counseling, mediation, and support services to individuals and families experiencing social and emotional difficulties. According to Zastrow (2017) social workers help individuals and families improve their social functioning by assisting them in resolving personal and interpersonal problems. Through professional intervention, social workers help couples understand the root causes of their conflicts and develop strategies to improve communication and strengthen their relationships. In Rivers State, socio-economic conditions such as unemployment, economic hardship, urbanization, and changing cultural values have contributed to increasing marital conflicts among couples. These pressures often create stress within families and may lead to frequent disagreements, domestic violence, or separation. Social workers intervene in such situations by providing marital counseling, family therapy, and conflict resolution services aimed at helping couples resolve disputes peacefully and maintain healthy relationships.

Social work intervention also focuses on strengthening family systems and promoting emotional well-being among family members. For instance, social workers help couples develop effective communication skills, improve mutual understanding, and adopt constructive approaches to resolving conflicts.

According to Dean et.al (2017) social work intervention involves working collaboratively with clients to solve problems and enhance their coping abilities. This collaborative process helps couples rebuild trust and improve their marital satisfaction. Furthermore, social workers play an advocacy role by connecting families with community resources such as counseling centers, support groups, and welfare services that can assist them in dealing with marital problems. They also engage in public education and awareness programs that promote healthy marital relationships and discourage domestic violence. These efforts contribute to the prevention of marital breakdown and the promotion of family stability.

The relationship between marital instability and social work intervention can therefore be understood as a problem–solution relationship. Marital instability represents a family problem that threatens the well-being of couples and children, while social work intervention represents a professional response designed to address this problem. Social workers apply counseling techniques, family therapy, and support services, in order to help couples manage conflicts and improve their relationships, thereby reducing the likelihood of marital breakdown. The involvement of social workers in addressing marital conflicts is particularly important because stable families contribute to social stability and community development. When marital conflicts are properly managed through professional intervention, families are better able to provide emotional support, financial cooperation, and a stable environment for the upbringing of children.

Social workers play a crucial role in helping couples manage marital conflicts through counseling, mediation, family therapy, and support services. Thereby, promoting effective communication, conflict resolution, and emotional understanding between spouses, also social workers help strengthen marital relationships and reduce the likelihood of marital breakdown.

## 2.4 Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Family Systems Theory. Family Systems Theory was largely developed by Murray Bowen in the 1950s. The theory views the family as an interconnected system in which each member influences and is influenced by other members. According to this perspective, the behavior of one member of the family cannot be fully understood in isolation from the rest of the family because all members are part of a complex relational system (Bowen, 1978).

The theory suggests that families function as emotional units, and any conflict or instability within the system affects the functioning of the entire family. In the context of marriage, the relationship between husband and wife forms the central subsystem within the family. When communication breaks down, when conflicts are poorly managed, or when emotional tensions arise between spouses, the entire family system becomes destabilized. This instability may manifest in frequent quarrels, emotional distance, separation, or divorce (Nichols & Davis, 2020). Family Systems Theory emphasizes that marital instability often results from dysfunctional interaction patterns within the family system rather than from the fault of a single individual. For example, poor communication, unresolved conflicts, economic stress, and role expectations may create tension between spouses, which in turn disrupts the harmony of the family. Such tensions may eventually lead to marital breakdown if they are not properly managed. This perspective helps explain why marital conflicts in many families escalate into separation, divorce, or domestic violence.

In Rivers State, socio-economic pressures such as unemployment, financial difficulties, and cultural expectations can disrupt family relationships and create stress within marriages. According to Family Systems Theory, these pressures affect the interactions among family members and may contribute to marital instability. When couples are unable to manage these pres-

sure effectively, the entire family system becomes dysfunctional, thereby increasing the likelihood of marital conflict and instability.

The theory is particularly relevant to social work practice because it highlights the importance of professional intervention in restoring balance within the family system. Social workers apply the principles of Family Systems Theory in marital counseling, family therapy, and conflict resolution services. Through these interventions, social workers help couples improve communication, understand each other's emotional needs, and develop healthier patterns of interaction. Social workers can help reduce marital conflicts and promote marital stability. Furthermore, Family Systems Theory supports the use of holistic intervention strategies in addressing marital problems. Rather than focusing solely on one partner, social workers examine the entire family structure, including communication patterns, roles, emotional bonds, and environmental factors affecting the family. This approach helps identify the root causes of marital instability and provides effective strategies for strengthening family relationships.

Family Systems Theory provides a useful framework for understanding how marital conflicts develop within family relationships and how professional social work intervention can help restore balance and stability in the family system. The theory therefore supports the need for social work involvement in counseling couples, mediating marital disputes, and promoting healthy family functioning.

## 2.5 Review of Empirical Studies

Lomotey (2025) conducted a study on the effect of premarital counseling on marital stability among married couples. The objective of the study was to examine how counseling influences marital satisfaction, communication, and commitment among couples. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative data from 200 married cou-

ples and qualitative data from 30 in-depth interviews. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The findings revealed that premarital counseling significantly improved communication skills, emotional preparedness, and realistic expectations among couples. These improvements contributed to stronger marital relationships and reduced the likelihood of marital instability. The study concluded that counseling interventions play a vital role in strengthening marital relationships and preventing marital breakdown. The study recommended that couples should participate in counseling programs before and during marriage to enhance marital stability.

Hahlweg and Richter (2010) conducted a longitudinal study on the prevention of marital instability and distress through relationship education programs. The study aimed to examine the long-term effectiveness of couple education programs designed to reduce marital conflict. The researchers used a longitudinal research design, following 101 couples for eleven years after they participated in relationship education programs. The findings showed that couples who received communication and relationship training demonstrated better conflict management and marital satisfaction compared to couples who did not receive such intervention. The study further revealed that relationship education programs significantly reduced marital conflicts and the risk of divorce. The researchers concluded that structured interventions such as couple therapy and relationship education are effective strategies for preventing marital instability and strengthening marital relationships.

Egenti, Achi, and Ikechebelu (2020) carried out a study on extramarital behaviour and family instability among married people in Owerri Education Zone of Imo State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the relationship between extramarital behaviour and family instability. The study adopted a correlational survey design and sampled 450 married individuals using a multi-stage sampling technique.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire known as the Extra-Marital Behaviour and Family Instability Questionnaire (EBFIQ). The findings revealed that extramarital behaviour among couples significantly contributed to marital conflicts and family instability. The study also identified factors such as inability to meet family needs, lack of mutual respect, and poor sexual relations as major contributors to marital instability. The researchers recommended that couples should maintain trust and commitment in marriage and that counseling services should be provided to help couples manage marital conflicts effectively.

Joseph, Joseph, and Rajan (2025) conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis to examine the effectiveness of couple interventions in addressing marital distress. The study analyzed twelve empirical studies from different academic databases using PRISMA guidelines. The findings showed that couple intervention programs such as marital therapy, conflict resolution training, and counseling significantly improved marital satisfaction and reduced relationship distress among couples. The meta-analysis revealed a strong overall effect size, indicating that couples who received intervention programs experienced noticeable improvement in their relationships compared to those who did not receive such services. The study concluded that professional interventions, including marital therapy and counseling, are effective tools for addressing marital instability and improving family relationships.

### **3.0 METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. According to Creswell (2014) survey research design enables researchers to collect quantitative data from a sample of a population in order to generalize findings to the entire population.

#### **3.2 Area of the Study**

The study was conducted in Rivers State, Nigeria. Rivers State is located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria and is characterized by a diverse population and rapid urbanization. The state consists of several local government areas and is known for its economic activities, particularly in the oil and gas sector. However, socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, economic hardship, and changing social values have contributed to marital conflicts and family instability in the state. Therefore, the area provides a suitable context for examining marital instability and the role of social work intervention.

#### **3.3 Population of the Study**

The population of the study consists of married couples and professional social workers in Rivers State. Married couples are included because they are directly involved in marital relationships and may experience marital instability. Social workers are also included because they provide professional services such as counseling, mediation, and family therapy aimed at resolving marital conflicts and promoting family stability.

#### **3.4 Sample Size and Sampling Technique**

A sample of respondents 100 respondents was selected from the population using appropriate sampling techniques. The study adopted a simple random sampling technique to ensure that every member of the population had an equal chance of being selected. This technique helps to reduce bias and ensures that the sample represents the population adequately. The purposive sampling technique was used to select 80 married individuals and 20 social workers who are knowledgeable about marital issues and social work intervention.

#### **3.5 Method of Data Collection**

The main instrument used for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire. The question-

naire was designed by the researcher. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A contained demographic information of respondents, while Section B contained questions related to the objectives of the study. The researcher personally administered the questionnaires to the selected respondents with the assistance of research assistants. The respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, after which the completed copies were collected for analysis. This method ensured a high rate of response and accuracy in data collection.

### **3.6 Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods such as frequency distribution, and simple percentage. These statistical tools were used to summarize and interpret the responses of the participants. The results were presented in tables for easy understanding and interpretation.

## 4.0 RESULTS AND DATA PRESENTATION

**Research Question One:** To what extent has marital instability led to divorce, poor child upbringing and social maladjustment on families and children in Rivers State?

**Table 1: Simple percentage analysis of the extent of marital instability effect on families and children**

| Items                                                                               | S<br>D | D | N  | A  | S<br>A | Total |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---|----|----|--------|-------|
| 1. Marital instability has contributed to increasing divorce                        | 5      | 8 | 12 | 40 | 35     | 100   |
| 2. Children from unstable marriages exhibit behavioral problems                     | 2      | 5 | 13 | 50 | 30     | 100   |
| 3. Marital conflicts negatively affect emotional well-being                         | 3      | 7 | 10 | 45 | 35     | 100   |
| 4. Divorce resulting from marital instability affects children's education          | 4      | 6 | 15 | 40 | 35     | 100   |
| 5. Families experiencing marital instability face difficulties maintaining cohesion | 3      | 5 | 12 | 50 | 30     | 100   |

**Source: Researchers' Fieldwork Survey (2026).**

Table 1 shows that 75% of respondents ( $A + SA = 40\% + 35\%$ ) agreed that marital instability contributes to increasing divorce rates in Rivers State and only 13% ( $SD + D$ ) disagreed, showing strong consensus. 80% of respondents ( $50\% A + 30\% SA$ ) agreed that children from unstable marriages exhibit behavioral issues and poor social adjustment. This indicates a significant impact of marital instability on children. 80% agreed ( $A + SA$ ) that marital conflicts negatively affect emotional health of family members. This reinforces that marital instability affects the mental and emotional environment of households. 75% of respondents agreed that divorce resulting from marital instability negatively impacts children's educational performance. This supports the idea that unstable families hinder child development. 80% agreed that families facing marital instability struggle to maintain healthy family relationships. Only 8% ( $SD + D$ ) disagreed, indicating a general consensus that marital instability undermines family cohesion. This indicates that marital instability is perceived as a critical social issue in Rivers State that requires intervention.

**Research Question Two:** In what way has family therapy, mediation and family support services as social work intervention reduced marital instability in Rivers State?

**Table 2: Simple percentage analysis of the way social work intervention has reduced marital instability**

| Items                                                               | S<br>D | D | N  | A  | S<br>A | Total |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|---|----|----|--------|-------|
| 1. Family therapy sessions improved communication                   | 3      | 5 | 12 | 50 | 30     | 100   |
| 2. Mediation by social workers helped resolve conflicts             | 2      | 6 | 10 | 52 | 30     | 100   |
| 3. Social work interventions strengthened capacity to manage stress | 3      | 5 | 12 | 48 | 32     | 100   |
| 4. Family support services reduced divorce rates                    | 4      | 6 | 15 | 45 | 30     | 100   |
| 5. Social work interventions influenced overall family stability    | 3      | 4 | 11 | 50 | 32     | 100   |

**Source: Researchers' Fieldwork Survey (2026).**

Table 2 shows that 80% of respondents ( $A + SA = 50\% + 30\%$ ) agreed that family therapy sessions have improved communication and understanding between spouses. Only 8% disagreed ( $SD + D = 3\% + 5\%$ ), indicating strong support for family therapy as an effective intervention. 82% of respondents ( $52\% A + 30\% SA$ ) agreed that mediation helped couples resolve conflicts peacefully. Only 8% disagreed, showing that mediation is widely recognized as a successful strategy in reducing marital disputes. 80% of respondents ( $48\% A + 32\% SA$ ) agreed that social work interventions enhanced couples' ability to manage stress within the marriage. This shows that interventions are effective in improving couples' coping mechanisms. 75% agreed ( $45\% A + 30\% SA$ ) that family support services contributed to reducing divorce rates.

This indicates that social work programs and support services play a role in preventing marital breakdown. 82% agreed ( $50\% A + 32\% SA$ ) that social work interventions positively influenced family stability and cohesion. Only 7% disagreed, highlighting the effectiveness of social work in promoting healthy family environments. This indicates that social work intervention positively impacts marital relationships and family well-being.

## **5.0 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **5.1 The Extent Marital Instability Has Led to Divorce, Poor Child Upbringing, and Social Maladjustment on Families and Children**

The findings indicate that marital instability significantly affects the well-being of families and children in Rivers State. Analysis of responses from 80 couples and 20 social workers revealed that marital conflicts, frequent disagreements, and breakdown in communication were major contributors to divorce, poor child upbringing, and social maladjustment.

It was found that marital instability contributes substantially to divorce among couples in Rivers State. From the percentage analysis, 75% of respondents agreed that marital instability has increased the likelihood of divorce. This finding is consistent with the work of Amato, P. R., who notes that ongoing marital dissatisfaction, poor conflict resolution, and emotional detachment are strong predictors of divorce (Amato, 2010). Similarly, Cherlin (2010) observes that marital instability, often arising from poor communication and unmet expectations, leads to a higher rate of marital dissolution. Divorce not only terminates the marital union but also creates emotional and psychological challenges for spouses and children. The findings suggest that in Rivers State, socio-economic pressures such as unemployment, financial stress, and changing gender roles exacerbate marital instability, making couples more susceptible to separation.

The study also revealed that children from unstable marriages experience poor upbringing due to inconsistent parenting, lack of emotional support, and exposure to marital conflicts. About 80% of respondents indicated that children from unstable homes show behavioral problems, emotional insecurity, and difficulties in social adjustment. This finding aligns with the research of Amato and Afifi (2006), which demonstrated that children from divorced or conflict-ridden families often exhibit poor academic per-

formance, behavioral issues, and psychological distress. The lack of a stable and nurturing environment hinders the holistic development of children. Marital instability limits parents' ability to provide consistent care, supervision, and guidance, which are essential for proper child socialization. This finding is also supported by Olson, and Olson (2000) who emphasized that marital conflict negatively affects the emotional and cognitive development of children.

Furthermore, the findings indicate that marital instability contributes to social maladjustment in both spouses and children. About 80% of respondents agreed that conflicts and instability in marriage disrupt family cohesion, affect emotional well-being, and hinder social functioning. Marital instability often results in heightened stress, anxiety, and poor interpersonal relationships within the family. According to Cherlin (2010) social maladjustment arises when family systems fail to maintain harmony and effective communication, which in turn affects the social and psychological development of children. In Rivers State, cultural pressures, economic hardship, and interference from extended family members were reported as additional factors that exacerbate social maladjustment. Children exposed to such environments are at risk of developing social behavior problems, poor peer relationships, and low self-esteem.

This finding confirms that marital instability in Rivers State has profound effects on divorce rates, child upbringing, and social adjustment of families. The findings underscore the urgent need for social work intervention to stabilize marriages, provide parental support, and promote positive family outcomes. Social work practitioners can play a vital role in equipping couples with communication skills, conflict resolution strategies, and emotional coping mechanisms to ensure family stability and child well-being.

### **5.2 The Way Family Therapy, Mediation, and Family Support Services as Social Work Interven-**

## **tion Has Reduced Marital Instability**

The findings indicate that social work interventions specifically family therapy, mediation, and family support services have contributed to reducing marital instability in Rivers State. Responses from 80 couples and 20 social workers revealed that these professional interventions have had a significant positive impact on marital stability, communication, and overall family cohesion.

The analysis revealed that 80% of respondents agreed that family therapy sessions improved communication and understanding between spouses. This supports the view that structured therapeutic interventions help couples express emotions, articulate needs, and resolve misunderstandings in a controlled environment. Family therapy provides a platform for couples to explore their relationship dynamics and develop practical skills for effective communication and conflict resolution. This finding aligns with the work of Nichols (2013) who asserts that family therapy promotes healthy interaction patterns and reduces marital distress by facilitating open dialogue and problem-solving among couples. Similarly, McGoldrick, Gerson, and Petry (2008) emphasize that therapy sessions allow couples to restructure negative patterns and reinforce positive behaviors that enhance marital satisfaction.

The study also found that 82% of respondents agreed that mediation by social workers helped couples resolve marital conflicts peacefully. Mediation serves as an impartial intervention that enables couples to discuss contentious issues, negotiate solutions, and reach mutual agreements. It prevents escalation of conflicts into separation or divorce by addressing issues such as financial disagreements, parenting responsibilities, and infidelity in a structured, professional setting. This finding is consistent with Folberg, and Taylor (2006) who note that mediation reduces marital conflicts and fosters cooperative decision-making by creating an

environment where spouses feel heard and validated. In Rivers State, mediation has provided couples with practical strategies for managing disagreements, resulting in improved relationship satisfaction and reduced marital instability.

According to the findings, 80% of respondents agreed that social work interventions strengthened couples' capacity to manage marital stress. Stressors such as financial pressure, job loss, and extended family interference often exacerbate marital instability. Social work interventions equip couples with coping strategies, stress management techniques, and emotional support, enabling them to navigate challenges without resorting to separation or divorce. Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, and Strom-Gottfried (2017) emphasize that social work interventions empower families to develop resilience and adapt to stressors, thereby reducing the likelihood of family breakdown. This suggests that in Rivers State, social work intervention has helped couples maintain emotional balance and mutual understanding despite socio-economic pressures.

The findings further indicated that 75% of respondents agreed that family support services provided by social workers have contributed to reduced divorce rates. Family support services, including parental guidance, parenting workshops, and home visits, reinforce the skills and knowledge couples need to maintain healthy marital relationships. By addressing both practical and emotional needs, social work services help couples stabilize their marriages. This finding is supported by Reamer (2018) who argues that social support interventions are essential for preventing family breakdown and promoting marital cohesion. In Rivers State, family support services have helped couples access resources, improve communication, and reduce conflicts that could otherwise lead to divorce. According to Nichols, and Schwartz (2004) comprehensive interventions that integrate therapy, mediation, and support services are more effective in reducing marital instability than single-method

approaches. The findings of this study confirm that integrated social work interventions are effective in enhancing marital satisfaction and family cohesion in Rivers State.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that marital instability has significant negative effects on families and children in Rivers State, and social work interventions play a crucial role in reducing these effects.

The study revealed that marital instability contributes to increased divorce rates, poor child upbringing, and social maladjustment among family members. Children from unstable marriages are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, emotional insecurity, and academic challenges, while spouses experience emotional stress and deteriorating family cohesion. These outcomes confirm that marital instability is not only a private concern but also a broader social issue affecting family systems and community well-being. Furthermore, the findings showed that social work interventions, including family therapy, mediation, and family support services, have effectively mitigated the negative impacts of marital instability. Couples who participated in therapy sessions or mediation reported improved communication, conflict resolution skills, and capacity to manage marital stress. Additionally, family support services helped reduce divorce rates and strengthened overall family cohesion. These results demonstrate the essential role of social workers in promoting healthy marital relationships and supporting the emotional, social, and developmental well-being of families.

The study emphasizes that addressing marital instability through social work interventions is crucial for fostering stable, cohesive, and resilient families in Rivers State. This conclusion underscores the need for continued investment in social work programs,

training, and public awareness initiatives that support marital harmony and family well-being.

## 6.0 RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study the following recommendations are proposed to address marital instability, promote family stability, and enhance child development:

- Given that family therapy significantly improves communication and understanding between spouses, it is recommended that government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and social work institutions expand access to professional family counseling and therapy programs in Rivers State. Couples should be encouraged to participate in regular counseling sessions both before and during marriage to develop effective communication skills, conflict resolution strategies, and emotional resilience.
- The study found that mediation by social workers helps couples resolve marital conflicts peacefully, thereby reducing the likelihood of divorce. It is recommended that mediation services be institutionalized in community centers, religious institutions, and local government offices, making them readily available to couples experiencing marital conflicts. Social workers should be trained in mediation techniques to facilitate negotiations and agreements that address issues such as finances, parenting responsibilities, and domestic disagreements.
- Since family support services contribute to reducing divorce rates and improving family cohesion, it is recommended that Rivers State implement community-based programs that provide parental guidance, family support workshops, and stress management resources. These programs should target not only couples at risk of marital instability

ity but also families dealing with socio-economic pressures that exacerbate conflicts. Awareness campaigns through radio, television, and social media can educate the public about the importance of marital stability and available social work interventions.

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