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EMOTIONAL DIVORCE AND SEXUAL DESIRE DYSFUNCTION AMONG ADULTS IN LAFIA METROPOLIS, NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA: MODERATING ROLE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract

Sexual desire dysfunction is one of the major public concerns in marriages and romantic relationships globally. Good sexual life is important among couples as it serves many purposes in marriage. Understanding the causes of sexual dysfunction is important for treatment plans to improve human existence. This study investigates the moderation role of interpersonal communication in the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Lafia metropolis, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study involved 392 (230males, females 162) adult participants, aged 18-60 years with a mean age of 2.08 and standard deviation of 0.50, who were selected through multi-stage sampling technique. Interpersonal communication, sexual desire dysfunction and emotional divorce scale were used for data collection. The study employed the cross-sectional survey design, and three hypotheses were tested using Hayes PROCESS macro. The result revealed a positive relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction, a negative relationship between interpersonal communication and sexual desire dysfunction, and an indirect effect of interpersonal communication on sexual desire dysfunction among adults is significant. Based on the findings, emotional divorce is a predictor of sexual desire dysfunction, and the interpersonal communication can also reduce sexual desire dysfunction.

Keywords: Emotional Divorce, Hayes Process Macro, Interpersonal Communication, Lafia, Nigeria, Sexual Desire Dysfunction

Introduction

Sexual desire is a multifaceted construct, experienced as a unitary subjective state, but varying in intensity and quality because of the interaction of intrapsychic, interpersonal, and situational influences (Sandra, Susan, Pamela & Regan, 1996). Sexual response is the normal responses a man or woman experiences that is sequential to physiological responses. Arousal is triggered by psychological, physiological and emotional factors finally culminating in orgasm (Diaz & Close, 2010). A sexual desire is the appetitive phase of the sexual response cycle, and it may reflect the person's drives, motivation and personality.

Sexual dysfunction is one of the major challenges among humans that is rarely discussed. Sexual behaviour is a major focus of both private and public discussion. Sexual feelings seem to be a crucial part of human development and daily functioning. Sexual activity is tied to the satisfaction of human's basic needs, and sexual performance is linked to self-esteem and feelings of inferiority (McMahon, 2014). Healthy sexual functioning is an important component of personal well-being which could be hampered by lack of the desire. It can produce a mutual and joint pleasure in couples and even help them cope more efficiently with the stresses and problems of daily life (McMahon, 2014). An important factor in a happy and successful marriage is having a pleasurable sex life, while a non-pleasurable sex life can lead to frustration and feelings of insecurity in couples. Dysfunctional sexual relationships may occur for different reasons, but problems with sexual desire are among the main factors that lead to difficulty in sexual functioning. According to statistics, sexual desire problems, especially low sexual desire, is the most common sexual complaint among women (Ayotte, 2010). This is a complicated and interesting phenomenon which has puzzled scholars for many years.

According to Beck, Sexual Health (2014) is a state of physical, emotional, mental, and social well-being in relation to sexuality. It is a significant predictor of physical and emotional health and overall quality of life. Sexuality seems to be instinctive in human beings and sexual function may be an important factor in determining health and wellbeing. O'Connor and Wright (2015) believe that the prevalence of sexual desire dysfunction is high, and it may lead to psychological problems.

Relationship compatibility seems to be when the two people find the relationship satisfying their physical,

emotional and social needs. To achieve relationship compatibility, it is necessary for the two people in relationship to satisfy the needs and desires of the partner, as such, marriage can continue as an important component of the society (Kafafi, 1999).

Divorce is not just an event, but a process that takes place over time and ends in separation. Divorce can be studied from various religious, legal and cultural perspectives, but what has always been considered as divorce is the separation of a woman from her husband or the separation of a couple from their common life and the termination of marriage. Emotional divorce is a phase of a marital relationship where love, affection and affection give way to anger, sadness and hatred, and couples feel that positive feelings are gone forever and have been replaced by negative feelings. This type of divorce happens gradually and quietly even without the knowledge of the couples, and as the couples move away from each other, the stability of the marriage is endangered, people who have an emotional divorce are upset and angry with each other (Hashmi & Homayouni, 2017). Emotional divorce is when one of the partners in a relationship abandons the other partner either through desertion of emotional relationship or through abstaining from mutual conversation and loss of affection and psychological accommodation between the partners, while the man's other matrimonial rights such as maintenance and housing insurance are provided. (Al-Hakbani, 2013)

Al-Hakbani (2013) defined the emotional divorce as follows: the husband abandons his wife, whether it through desertion of the emotional relationship or through abstaining from mutual conversation and loss of affection and psychological accommodation between the spouses. According to Hadi (2010), emotional divorce is an imbalance and bad distributive justice regarding the rights and duties of the spouses. This leads to the disruption of married life and the disunity and loss of emotion. The couple may live in one house, but they are strangers to each other. Emotional divorce leads to further separation, which increases the psychological pressure on the couple. It also increases the difference and problems between them. One or both becomes irritable and behaves erratically and can become harmful to the other party. The couple cannot coexist with each other, making it more difficult to sustain life between them (Attieh, 2009).

Emotional divorce may pass through several stages, which may begin with the loss of affection and love

and then partial abandonment of the emotional practices of all types gradually, to complete abandonment. It also involves any sexual relationship and living outside the home and neglecting maintenance and care. This way, the wife is neither divorced nor married (Al-Hakbani, 2013). Although, the type of communication in emotionally divorced partners may lack some ingredients in normal communication that effectively bring two partners closer, yet information will still be exchanged making the purpose of communication to be achieved. For interpersonal communication to moderate the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction it must involve practical communication skills, such as active listening, expressing oneself clearly, and understanding the perspective of others. These skills are essential in building healthy relationships, resolving conflicts, and creating a respectful communication environment. Interpersonal communication is exchange of messages or information between two or more people to unite views on a problem (Berger & Charles, 2008). In today's digital age, interpersonal communication involves using technology and telephone or handsets. It allows individuals to communicate virtually, send messages, share content, and establish relationships with others in different parts of the world.

Explanatory theory by Basson (2000) recently proposed a model of female sexual response (Amato, 2007) and sexual arousal (Basson, 2001; Basson, 2002). The central tenets of her proposed alternative model are that women have lower biological need to be sexual and women often engage in sexual activity from a standpoint of sexual neutrality that are motivated to be sexual out of a desire for emotional closeness (intimacy) or other non-sexual reasons. This theory tries to explain the implication of emotional divorce in sexual desire response. When the partners are not emotionally close it will influence their desire for sexual activities. Thus, the model represents an attempt to resolve disparities between the sexual arousal concerns and women's actual experience (Basson, 2000).

The critics of Basson's model include Both and Everaerd (2002) who argued that desire is always responsive, although it will sometimes be experienced as spontaneous. They suggested that Basson's (2000) concept of motivation is therefore unnecessary (as well as being poorly explained). They also point out that women have sex for many reasons other than intimacy (Both & Everaerd, 2002;

Buss & Meston, 2007). Building on her models, Basson (2000) has tried to accommodate the complexity of the female experience by introducing additional sub-types and categories of desire and arousal within the confines of the traditional biomedical model (Buss & Meston, 2007). For instance, she further subtypes women with sexual arousal disorder into: those that the stimulus where not mentally exciting (no genital changes); those where the stimulus is not appreciated as mentally exciting (genital changes happening but not registered); those in which the stimulus is mentally exciting but no genital changes occur; and those where the stimulus is mentally exciting and genital changes occur but the woman is not aware of them (Basson, 2000). The first would seem to be more a problem of the partner and the fourth of little clinical relevance and thus there seems little gain to this additional differentiation. This theory proposed classification defies the law of parsimony, that no more causes or forces should be assumed than are necessary to account for the facts, (Buss et al., 2007). Golmohammadi and Alimardani (2022) investigated the evaluation of emotional divorce and sexual issues of couples. The study was to predict emotional divorce based on sexual satisfaction among couples undergoing couples therapy in Tehran. The method of this descriptive -analytical study was correlational. The statistical population included all couples who referred to two counseling centers for psychology and family therapy in Tehran in 1398, from which 120 couples were selected by available methods and answered the Multi -Questionnaire of Sexual Issues (MSQ) and Emotional Divorce. According to the research findings, it can be concluded that when sexual satisfaction and sexual awareness of spouses are reduced and sexual mental employment, internal sexual control, sexual control and motivation The more sexual, the more likely they are to have an emotional divorce.

Ragab, el-ta Radwa (2025). explore the effect of sexual satisfaction and role of family performance on emotional divorce and difficulties in emotion regulation among married women at Zagazig University. This descriptive correlational study was conducted on 262 worker women. Data were collected through four tools: Socio-demographic data sheet, the difficulties in emotion regulation scale-short form, the emotional divorce scale, family role performance scale and sexual satisfaction scale. The results indicated that less than half of women had

moderate to severe levels of emotional divorce (44.2%) and 51.5% had moderate to severe levels of emotional regulation difficulties. Women emotional divorce and emotion regulation difficulties are positively correlated with each other ($r=0.382$) and negatively correlated with sexual satisfaction, husband role performance and wife role performance. The study concluded that emotional divorce and difficulties in regulating emotions are significantly predicted negatively by sexual satisfaction and the performance of the roles of the wife and husband. The study recommended that women and their husbands might participate in psychosocial intervention programs and counseling sessions to prevent emotional divorce and to promote emotional regulation and sexual satisfaction.

AL-shahrani and Hammad (2023) investigated relationship between emotional divorce and alexithymia among married women in Saudi Arabia. Data were collected from 305 married women in Saudi Arabia ($M = 33.24$ years; $SD = 4.87$ years), using the Emotional Divorce Scale and the alexithymia scale. Results revealed that 78.36% of the participants experienced moderate to severe levels of emotional divorce. Working women, those who had been married for more than ten years, and those with five or more children exhibited a higher incidence of emotional divorce as compared to their counterparts. A linear regression analysis indicated that alexithymia was significantly associated with emotional divorce in this sample

A dyadic study by Brandão et al. (2024). found that perceived emotional invalidation within relationships significantly increases psychological distress (including anxiety and depression) in both partners. Using an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with 240 couples, the study showed that one partner's emotional neglect affects both individuals' mental health and relationship satisfaction.

A study by Latifian et al., (2024). found that emotional divorce is significantly correlated with psychological distress factors such as domestic violence and behavioral problems (e.g., internet addiction) among married women. The cross-sectional study demonstrated that emotional disconnection is not isolated but occurs alongside multiple psychosocial stressors.

Research by Shahi and Maryam Rostamnezhad (2024) found that emotional blackmail significantly reduces marital quality, with marital burnout acting as a mediator. Women experiencing emotional

manipulation reported higher levels of psychological distress and emotional exhaustion, especially among those seeking divorce (Shahi & Rostamnezhad, 2024). Pellón-Elexpuru et al. (2024) found that individuals in high-conflict marital breakdowns show elevated psychological symptoms (stress, emotional dysregulation) and physical health complaints. The study highlights that co-parenting conflict intensifies emotional distress

Marital distress significantly Daniel and Micheal (1997) investigated influence of interpersonal communication on sexual adjustment in cohabiting heterosexual couples was investigated. Male and female partners from 76 heterosexual couples independently completed measures of their own and their partners' sexual preferences, as well as measures of sexual and general relationship adjustment, sexual difficulties, marital role preferences, depression, and social desirability. Results indicated that sexual satisfaction in both partners was associated with men's understanding of their partner's preferences and agreement between their preferences. The influential role of men's understanding was supported by hierarchical regression, convergent and discriminant evidence, and multiple regression models that accounted for 51% and 63% of variance in men's and women's sexual satisfaction. General relationship adjustment of both partners was associated with women's understanding of men's marital role preferences. An explanation of understanding's function is proposed, accounting for gender differences within and across sexual and general realms of relating

Lack of sexual desire is the most common sexual complaint among women partners in Nasarawa State. This is a complicated and interesting challenge which concerned the researcher since the problem can lead to further problems like divorce, separation, sexually transmitted diseases and death. High sexual desire disorder is another major problem that has led to frequent sexual crises among couples or adults in a relationship. The secretive nature of the disorder and the religious taboo attached to it have also obstructed research efforts in this problem that can affect human procreation. Some studies have been conducted on sexual desire disorder that involved other variables in other States and cities, but none investigated the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire disorder, and the moderating role of interpersonal communication, making the researcher embark on the study.

The aim of the study is to investigate the moderating role of interpersonal communication in the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Investigate the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria
- ii. Assess the moderating role of interpersonal communication in the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

Hypotheses

- i. There will be a significant relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.
- ii. Interpersonal communication will significantly moderate the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

METHOD

Participants

The population for the study was strictly adults aged 18-60 years living in Lafia metropolis. The study employed 392 adult participants who were selected through stratify, simple and purposive sampling techniques. The males are 230 (58.7%), females 162 (41.3%). SSCE 112 (28.5%), OND/NCE 90 (22.9%) and HND, B. Sc, B. Ed, B A 120 (30.6%), M. Sc, M. Ed, M.A 40 (10.2%), 20 (5.1%). The process of selection was done through stratified, simple, convenient and purposeful sampling techniques.

Instruments

Three instruments were used for the data collection: (1) emotional divorce scale, (2) Interpersonal communication Scale and (3) sexual desire disorder scale. Interpersonal Communication Skills Inventory developed by Bienvenu (1971). Emotional divorce questionnaire: A 36 - item emotional divorce questionnaire was designed by Mohammadi, Jokar, Kamalabadi and Golestaneh (2014). This scale has 36 items and has the dimensions of criticism and blame, silence and confrontation, emotional reaction, emotional intercourse, strength and resources, loss and depression and frustration, the third angle, limiting and sexual problems. Each of the dimensions

has 4 questions with a five-point Likert scale (never to always) and each item has a value between 1 and 4 with questions such as: (I/my spouse blames each other for the problems in our life.) It measures emotional divorce with Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.82$

The interpersonal communication skills inventory is designed to provide individuals with some insights into their communication strengths and potential areas for development. This inventory is intended to be viewed only by the individual who completes it. To ensure reliability, the number of items on the scale are 17 with a good Cronbach alpha of $\alpha = 0.80$ among the five domains. The validated scale meets the basic requirements for competent interpersonal communication skills and addresses skills related to both the expression and perception of communication signals in relationships. This inventory is a standardized scale of measurement. This scale has both direct and indirect scoring system; usually=1 seldom=2 and sometime=3.

The sexual desire dysfunction scale by Infrasca (2011) is a standardized scale. The five-point response scale of the questionnaire was scored in two ways. It has direct and reverse scoring system starting from always=1, often=2, sometime=3, rarely=4, never=5. The direct items are 1, 2,3,4,5,6,8,14,15,16,17,19. The reverse items are 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 18, which were scored always=5, often=4, sometime=3, rarely=2, never=1. The scale showed good validity (degree of accuracy with which a test measures what it is designed to measure). Cronbach alpha values of 0.85 indicated excellent internal consistency reliability.

Procedure

The researcher distributed 400 questionnaires but only 392 were collected. The researchers involved three (3) trained research assistants that helped the researcher in the administration of the questionnaires. Informed consent and the purpose of the research was explained to the participants. The researcher along with the three research assistants moved from organization to organization with the researcher in Lafia metropolis administering the questionnaires according to how the local governments were divided into strata. The researcher and the three research assistants only administered the questionnaires to only adults available at the time of administration of the questionnaires. The participants were asked to fill in the biodata and to respond to the option that best fits them. This research observed ethical standards,

including obtaining informed consent and ensuring privacy and confidentiality.

Also, at the time of completing the questionnaires, while emphasizing completing all the questions, the participants were free to withdraw from the research at any time, and they were assured that the information would remain confidential, which was fully respected.

Design and Statistics

Correlational design was used for the study to assess relationship between the emotional divorce, sexual desire dysfunction and interpersonal communication as a moderator variable. The design also enables the researchers to know the direction of the relationship

between the variables and percentage contribution of each of the variables on the dependent variable. PROCESS Macro moderation analysis by Andrew (2022) was used to analyze the data. The PROCESS macro statistical analysis tested the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria and their percentage contribution of the independent variable on the dependent variable. The PROCESS Macro analysis was also used to determine the moderating role of interpersonal communication in the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria.

RESULTS

Table 1: PROCESS Macro Regression Analysis showing the relationship between Emotional Divorce and Sexual Desire Disorder

Variables	<i>R</i>	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
Sexual Dysfunction	.484	.214	39.5287		8.8642	.000
Emotional Divorce				.484	3.4601	.000

Criterion variable: Sexual Desire Disorder

The results presented in Table 1 showed that there was a significant positive relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire disorder among adults ($R = .484 = R^2 = .214 = \beta = .484$, ($F(3, 387) = 39.5287$, $t = 3.4601$, $p < .05$). This finding implies that emotional divorce is a predictor of sexual desire disorder among adults. According to this result, the higher the level of emotional divorce the higher their sexual desire disorder. The result also indicated that 21.4% variation in sexual desire disorder is attributed to emotional divorce. That shows that the higher the emotional divorce among the adults the higher sexual desire disorder. The hypothesis stated for the study is accepted.

Table 2: Summary of PROCESS Macro analysis showing the moderating role of Interpersonal Communication in the relationship between Emotional Divorce and Sexual Desire

DV	Predictors	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<u>95%CL</u>	
					LLCI	ULCI
Sexual Desire Dysfunction	Constant	33.468	8.8642	.000	26.045	40.8917
	Emotional Divorce	.4	3.4601	.000	.5	.1678
	Interpersonal Communication	.1067	-	.000	0.461	-.0861
	Moderation	-.2868	2.8089	.001	-.12876	.0052
		.0035	3.1960		.0013	
	<i>R</i>					.4843
	<i>R</i> ²					.2346
	ΔR^2					.0202
	<i>F</i>					39.5287
	ΔF^2					10.2144

Criterion Variable: Sexual Desire Dysfunction

As shown in table 3, the model was significant ($R = .4843 = R^2 = .2346$ ($F(1:387) = 39.5287$, $p < .05$) Interpersonal Communication significantly moderate the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire disorder

($\Delta R^2 = .0202$, $\Delta F^2(387) = 10.2144$, $\beta = -.2868$, $t = -2.8089$, $p < .001$). This means that interpersonal communication is likely to reduce the effect of emotional divorce on sexual desire dysfunction from 23.4% to 2.02%.

Table 3: Conditional effect of Emotional Divorce on Sexual Desire dysfunction at values of interpersonal communication (moderator)

Interpersonal Communication	β	<i>P</i>	<u>95%CL</u>	
			<i>LLCI</i>	<i>ULCI</i>
Low	.1136	.0001	.0561	.1712
Average	.1620	.0000	.1197	.2043
High	.2623	.0000	.1969	.3276

p ≤ .05

The moderation was probed further by testing the conditional effect of emotional divorce at three levels of interpersonal communication, one at standard deviation below the mean (low), at mean (average) and at standard deviation above the average (high). As shown in table 4, emotional divorce was significantly related to sexual desire disorder at all levels of interpersonal communication. When interpersonal communication was low. Low ($\beta = .1136$, $p < .01$), average ($\beta = .1620$, $p < .01$) and high ($\beta = .2623$, $p < .01$). This means that one can efficiently communicate and still be emotionally divorced, leading to sexual desire disorder.

Discussion

Hypothesis one was tested to find if emotional divorce will predict sexual desire disorder among adults in Lafia Metropolis, the finding revealed that emotional divorce is positively correlated with sexual desire dysfunction. This means that emotional divorce predicts sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Lafia Metropolis. This result of the study agreed with the work of Golmohammadi and Alimardani (2022) that investigated the evaluation of emotional divorce and sexual issues of couples. The study was to predict emotional divorce based on sexual satisfaction among couples undergoing couples therapy in Tehran. Result concluded that when sexual satisfaction and sexual awareness of spouses are reduced, they are likely to have an emotional divorce. The present study proved that emotional divorce clearly predicted sexual dysfunction even though past research could not.

The result of the present study agreed with Ragab, el-ta Radwa (2025) that explore the effect of sexual satisfaction and role of family performance on emotional divorce and difficulties in emotion regulation among married women at Zagazig University. Their results indicated that emotional divorce and difficulties in regulating emotions are

significantly predicted negatively by sexual satisfaction and the performance of the roles of the wife and husband.

The present study agrees with AL-shahrani and Hammad (2023) that investigated relationship between emotional divorce and alexithymia among married women in Saudi Arabia. The findings revealed that 78.36% of the participants experienced moderate to severe levels of emotional divorce resulting in psychological distress.

This study is in line with a study by Brandão et al. (2024) which stated that perceived emotional invalidation within relationships significantly increases psychological distress such as anxiety and depression in both partners. The present study is in an agreement with Latifian et al., (2024) that unveiled that emotional divorce is significantly correlated with psychological distress factors such as domestic violence and behavioral problems among married women. Their study demonstrated that emotional disconnection is not isolated but occurs alongside multiple psychosocial stressors.

Research by Shahi and Rostamnezhad (2024) is also in line with the new findings. According to their result, emotional blackmail significantly reduces marital quality, with marital burnout acting as a mediator.

The study is also in agreement with Pellón-Elexpuru et al. (2024) that individuals in high-conflict marital breakdowns show elevated psychological symptoms (stress, emotional dysregulation) and physical health complaints. The study highlights that co-parenting conflict intensifies emotional distress.

Hypothesis two was tested and the result indicated that interpersonal communication moderates the relationship emotional divorce and sexual dysfunction. From the result, it revealed that interpersonal communication is an important variable that can enhance the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults.

Implications

The study has both theoretical significance and practical significance among adults, couples and the public. The result of the research will be generalized, and it will serve as an empirical study for other researchers trying to investigate the moderating role of interpersonal communication in the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study added to existing literature on sexual desire disorder. The study also fills a gap in literature yet to be covered by other researchers in the role of Interpersonal communication moderate the relationship between emotional divorce and sexual desire dysfunction among adults in Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The study will also help adults to improve their problems with sexuality. The study will also help government on how to improve societal wellbeing through solving sexuality problems based on the findings of the research

Limitation of the Study

The study has contributed immensely to knowledge; however, it is limited in some respects: there are many other factors that can also cause sexual desire dysfunctions since emotional divorce contributed only 21.4% of sexual dysfunction among adults. The study used adults including the ones that may not have been in relationship, which may affect the result.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concluded that emotional divorce is a predictor of sexual desire dysfunction among adults. Interpersonal communication can reduce the effect of sexual dysfunction among adults; interpersonal communication reduces the relationship between emotional divorce is a predictor of sexual desire dysfunction among adults.

The research has the following recommendations based on the findings of the study:

- i. Adults in relationships should learn to be emotionally intelligent to understand their partners' emotions. This process will help both partners to discuss issues bothering them.
- ii. Adults in relationships should learn how to improve their communication to reduce sexual desire dysfunction among adults.

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