

**UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA**

**Effects of marital conflict on children's upbringing in the new Abirem community in the Birim North District in the Eastern Region of Ghana**



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of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
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## DECLARATION

### Student's Declaration

I, Emmanuel Osei, do hereby declare that this dissertation, with the exception of quotations and references contained in published works, which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my own original work, and that has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere.

Signature:.....

Date:.....

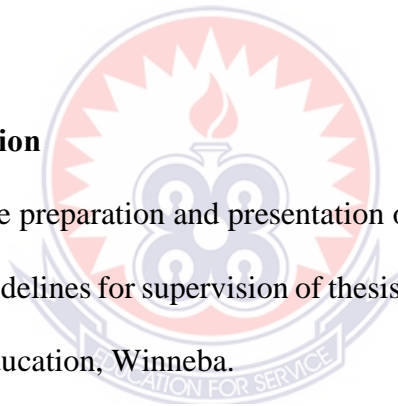
### Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were supervised in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of thesis/dissertation/project as directed by the University of Education, Winneba.

Supervisor's name: Dr. Ignatius Joseph Obeng

Signature:.....

Date:.....



## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Frimpong, my children and my best friend, Mrs. Beatrice Appiah, for their support and encouragement throughout my academic journey. God bless them.



## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to examine the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem community in the Birim North District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The design adopted for the study was a cross-sectional survey and qualitative research approach. A total sample of twelve (10) participants were selected for the study using the purposive sampling technique. Interview guide was the main tool used for the collection of data. The data was analysed qualitatively. The study, found that the major causes of marital conflicts were financial issues, infidelity, infertility, sexual issues, religious differences, and lack of trust among partners. It was also found that marital conflicts affected the upbringing of children. For instance, it creates an interaction problem for children and communication gap between children and their parents. Again, the study exhibited that married couples should seek help for conflict resolution from marriage counsellors and extended family members in order not for their feud to spill over to the children and affect their upbringing. The study recommends among other things that, married couples should focus on the welfare of their children and see to it that all necessary provisions needed for their upbringing are provided irrespective of the ensuing conflicts among them.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Conflict may be referred to as a disagreement or argument between two people or between groups of people that exhibit a protracted characteristic (Asamoah, 2019). According to Baldwin, Ellis, and Baldwin (2019), marital conflict is a situation whereby tension arises between marital partners in the course of the couple trying to execute their marital duties. When conflict becomes regular in marriage, it negatively impacts the quality of the marriage as well as the well-being of the children (Bayer, 2020). Couples are fighting more frequently now than they did a few years ago. Over a million conflicts occur every year, and nearly half of all marriages now end in divorce or separation as a consequence of marital conflicts (Martin, 2018). For first marriages, marital conflict rates in nations like the United States of America are 50 percent, and second marriages are 2.5 times more likely to terminate in divorce (Brown, 2012; Campbell, Shaw & Gilliom, 2016).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of marital conflicts varies considerably between urban and rural areas, according to data collected from 19 countries in Southern, Eastern, Central, and Western Africa. In general, there is a moderate to significant rise in marital disputes in Africa. (Basela, 2018). The incidence of divorce among married couples in Ghana demonstrates how pervasive marital conflicts are in the country's culture (Asante, 2019).

For a very long time in the African context, strong traditional family connections had served to keep the family together to ensure that all the children were raised in a family setting (Razavi & Jenichen, 2021). Even in areas where polygamy was prevalent,

every adult male was expected to have a legally married partner, and to be entirely responsible for the welfare and security of his family (Basela, 2018). Even if the wife was engaged in a production activity such as agriculture, each partner, especially a male, would be expected to provide for his family. As a result, marriage was seen as a fundamental aspect of civilisation (Basela, 2018).

The strong family bonds have, however, broken down due to recent shifts in lifestyles, technology, and people's attitudes toward marriage, family life, and life in general. This has made cooperative family care, child raising and child upbringing between the parents of the nuclear or monogamous family necessary (Holahan & Moos, 2019). Marriage life has become difficult to endure, and ongoing marital tensions, conflicts and family violence make running away the simplest option (Holahan & Moos, 2019).

According to Gerald, Krishnakumar and Buehler (2016), being a witness to violence and conflicts is not fundamentally distinct from being a victim. The authors claim that witnessing conflict has more of an impact than being the victim and children who grow up in homes with constant conflicts are more likely to engage in criminal activity than those in low-level conflicts. Children are impacted by their parents' behaviour throughout their entire upbringing when they regularly witness their parents arguing (Lorion & Saltzman, 2021). Children who experience marital conflicts also experience increased anxiety, heightened anger, loneliness and somatic complaints, as well as sadness, fear and depression, all of which ultimately have an impact on their behaviour and overall well-being (Fomby & Cherlin, 2017). Children who experience marital strife and eventual divorce suffer from a lack of parental love, care, and protection as well as the denial of their right to an education because their parents fail to pay for their tuition and provide them with the required school supplies. (Razavi & Jenichen,

2021). They might end up on the streets participating in criminal activities such as marijuana smuggling, drunkenness, homosexuality and robbery.

Ghana is not exceptional when it comes to marital conflict and divorce. Asante (2021) has indicated that more women than men are getting separated or divorced due to marital conflicts. In the 2021 Population and Housing Census of Ghana, the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) reported that 553,065 persons in Ghana have had their marriages dissolved while 405,090 have separated (GSS, 2022). While the couples may be free from the conflicts they were involved in with their partners, Asante (2021) argues that the upbringing of children is seriously affected in such families.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Globally, the challenge of marital conflict is a universal phenomenon that affects both developed and underdeveloped countries. Yet the causes and effects persist to varying degrees in different parts of the world (Donato et al., 2014). In an ideal situation, children should happily live with their parents and appreciate the love of their parents for healthier and prosperous growth. One of the tasks that should be fulfilled by parents is to bring up their children. This is because the upbringing of children is the sole responsibility of parents and should not be interfered with by the conflict ensuing between the husband and wife.

In families where marital conflict exists, it has severe consequences on children. For instance, Davidoff (2017) contends that marital conflicts can negatively affect the emotional and psychological well-being of children. Again, Barthassa (2014) is of the view that children may suffer mentally in homes that experience marital conflict as the constant quarrels may toucher their mental view and affect them later in life. More so, the majority of children may experience similar conflict in their future marriage as

they learn from what their parents do. The physical needs of children such as food, clothing, and education may also be affected should one of the parents especially the husband renege on his responsibilities. This situation has an impact on children's academic performance (Bank, Slayings, & Biddle, 2020).

Researchers have carried out several studies on marital conflicts and their effects on children (Barthassa, 2014; Hanson, 2019; Hines, 2017; Amato & Sobolewski, 2017; Ahmed, 2020). However, the focus of the studies above has been on how marital conflict and divorce have affected the education of children or the relationship existing between parents and children. These studies have not necessarily looked at how marital conflicts affect the general upbringing of children. This is the gap that this study sought to fill. It is in light of this that the study sought to investigate the effects of marital conflict on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Community in the Birim North District.

### **1.3. Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were to:

1. examine the causes of marital conflicts among married couples in the New Abirem Community.
2. ascertain the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Community.
3. identify measures that can be implemented to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Community.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

The study was based on the following research questions:

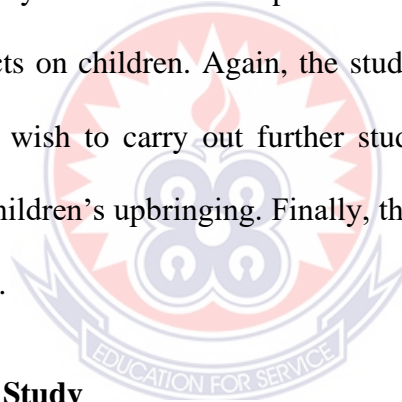
1. What are the causes of marital conflict among married couples in the New

Abirem Community?

2. What are the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Community?
3. What measures can be implemented to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Community?

### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The study may be significant in many ways. Firstly, the findings of the study may provide insight into how marital conflicts affect children. Secondly, the study will serve as a guide for stakeholders such as marriage counsellors, churches, and school authorities to guide policy formulation to help address the problem of marital conflicts and their adverse effects on children. Again, the study will serve as a reference for other researchers who wish to carry out further studies concerning the subject of marital conflicts and children's upbringing. Finally, the study will add to the body of knowledge in this field.



### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

The study was faced one major limitation. This involved the process used in the collection of data. The researcher had to contact families in the case study district. This involved much time and finance.

### **1.7 Organisation of the Study**

Chapter One of the study concentrates on the introduction and discussion of the background to the study, statement of the problem, objectives, research questions, significance of the study, delimitations of the study, limitations of the study and the definition of terms. Chapter Two reviews literature related to the topic. This includes the theoretical review, conceptual review, empirical review, and conceptual

framework. Chapter Three focuses on the methodological approach employed for the study. It discusses the research approach, research design, sample and sampling technique, data collection instrument, data collection procedure, data analysis method and ethical considerations. Chapter Four presents the analysis and discussion of the findings. Chapter five concludes the report and presents the summary, conclusions and recommendations of the study.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter concentrates on a review of literature related to the study. The review is discussed under the following topics:

- (i) Theoretical framework
- (ii) Conceptual framework
- (iii) Empirical Review

#### **2.2 Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted two theories and they are conflicts and functionalist theories. These theories are discussed below:

##### **2.2.1 The Conflict Theory**

Conflict theory is a perspective that views society as groups that are struggling to overpower, or resources (Schaefer, 2018). The key concepts are tension, inequality, and struggle. Society is the way it is because of inequality and this inequality should be actively opposed. This perspective views society as an arena of disparity that generates conflicts. Conflict theorists would describe marital conflict as the competition for resources and power within the marriage, where both parties cannot agree. According to Davies, Martin, Coe and Cummings (2016), the struggle over resources generates tension that results in marital conflicts. Again, a misunderstanding or disagreement happens in a marriage when one party displays some form of mistrust in the other party. Parties in a marriage, sometimes fight over certain things such as finances and the upbringing of children. Additionally, certain behaviours such as verbal assault and provocation and also create conflicts that lead to the breakdown of

the marriage union. The effects come on all members of the family, especially children.

This theory is appropriate to be used in this study because it elaborates on marital conflicts, their causes, and their effects. The focus of the theory is directly related to the study since the study seeks to look at how marital conflicts, their causes, and the effects they bring have on children, especially their upbringing.

### **2.2.2 The Functionalist Theory**

The Functionalist Theory states that society is structured in a way that is to be able to maintain stability, that is to say, its survival (Schaefer, 2018). The key ideas are balance and harmony. There should be no evolution or changes within the current scheme. Society's functioning now is the way it should be because everything serves its purpose. This perspective views society as a complicated system that promotes stability by guiding individuals with its social institutions that perform certain social functions. Anything that disrupts the current structure or functions is seen as a dysfunction. The Functionalist perspective perceives society as a whole with all the institutions working together for its development.

Relating this to marital conflicts and their effects on children's well-being, Cui, Donnellan and Conger (2017) notes that the family and marriage work together as social institutions. Both children and parents have roles they perform in a marriage. If one group fails to perform its role, there is a dysfunction that can lead to conflict or a breakdown, and that mostly affects children. The family is seen as the basic unit of every society. Marital conflict is not healthy for the family. Societies generally frown on marriage breakdown, while others do not. When there is conflict in the marriage that leads to divorce, there is some sort of disconnection between parents and children.

This theory is appropriate to be used in this study because its main focus is that marriage binds the family together where the needs and general well-being of children are catered for. When marital conflicts set in the marriage and lead to divorce, the binding agent is broken and the effect is mainly on the children. The study's focus is directly related to this view as it tries to ascertain the causes of marital conflicts and their resultant effects on the upbringing and well-being of children.

### **2.3 Conceptual and Empirical Review**

The conceptual review provides a general overview of the major concepts in marital conflicts. Detailed discussions are made on themes such as marital conflicts, types of marital conflicts, causes of marital conflicts, children and marital conflicts, effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing, measures that can be implemented to minimize the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing, and other related variables.

#### **2.3.1 Marital Conflicts**

Conflicts are considered to be normal in all human relationships. However, they become abnormal when issues are not addressed productively (Davies, Harold, Goeke-Morey & Cummings, 2021). Any person in a deep personal relationship will inevitably experience conflict and differences of opinion. However, conflict is not limited to instances of screaming, yelling, and fighting. It is described as any difference of opinion, ranging from noisy and potentially violent, negative arguments to very pleasant and positive dialogues (Davies et al., 2021). According to Asamoah (2019), conflict is any disagreement or argument between two people or between groups of people that exhibit a protracted characteristic. Baldwin et al. (2019) defined marital conflict as a marital conflict is a situation whereby tension arises between marital

partners in the course of the couple trying to execute their marital duties. In the view of Emery and O'Leary (2016), marital conflict is a situation whereby tension arises between marital partners in the course of the couple trying to execute their marital duties.

Any disagreement between partners, regardless of how minor it is may lead to marital conflict. Cummings (2018) argues that the presence or severity of that disagreement has a direct bearing on how well the marriage functions and how well its members' psychological well-being is affected. The phenomenon of marital conflicts disrupts the happiness of couples in marriage. Brown (2012) is of the view that it is most of the time experienced by women and is one of the least acknowledged human rights abuses in the world. According to data on family conflicts around the world, it is a common occurrence. The rate of conflict between couples has been rising steadily in recent years. Martin (2018) has stated that there are over a million marital confrontations per year, and nearly half of all marriages now end in divorce or separation due to conflicts. A study by Basela (2018) indicates that marital conflict rates may even be higher because some cases go unreported or are condoned. This is, especially in Africa and some other developing regions in the world. According to Sun and Li (2021), family life in Africa has undergone a drastic and worrying change as a result of modern civilisation. Because of the rise of women in the workforce and the increase in marital strife, African family life is now more diverse than it was a few years ago. Children's psychological health has also been impacted by these changes in the family, in addition to how families are structured (Basela, 2018). As revealed by Margolin (2017), lack of communication between the couple is typically the main cause of marital conflict. Children may experience unwarranted grief, guilt or uncertainty as a result of marital problems, which can have severe repercussions on them (Siti, Nor & Zalina, 2021).

Young children in particular struggle to comprehend the logic behind their parents' conflicts. They also struggle to feel secure in families that are going through conflict because history has shown that what appeared stable and good might crumble, leaving the children empty (Rodman, 2019).

Several issues have been brought forth about marital conflicts and the first is about the state of the relations in a marriage. According to Greenstein (2015), the issues of stability, satisfaction, and adjustment in marriage are also of great concern. This is because the absence of these variables in the marriage may trigger conflicts. Age at marriage, religious and cultural homogamy or heterogamy, as well as pre-marital cohabitation, have all been recognised as ingredients for stability and satisfaction (Benokraitis, 2017). The latter additionally emphasises that alcohol consumption, life cycle transitions, health changes, and the influence of children and other family members may all contribute to marital conflicts. Individuals recognise the value of marriage and family life. But marital conflicts can have physical, psychological and social effects. Women are found to report experiencing physical violence in marital conflicts and the results include bruises, tooth bites, scars and swollen faces. They experience bitterness, helplessness, frustration and devastation, psychologically (Razavi, 2021). They feel estranged from their marriages as a result of their experiences. While women desire to cut links with friends and relatives out of social embarrassment, men occasionally marry other women to prove their supremacy (Atinmo, 2020).

### **2.3.2 Types of Marital Conflict**

Cummings (2018) asserts that there are normally two types of marital conflict namely destructive and constructive. Violence, non-verbal conflict, retreat during the conflict, vocal hostility, aggression against objects and threats to family harmony are all examples of destructive marital conflict behaviours. Children's anger, concern, and grief are triggered by exposure to destructive marital conflicts. Due to a lack of emotional coping mechanisms or the use of learned aggressive behaviour to address issues, such conflict may place individuals at risk for developing adjustment problems (internalising and externalising disorders) (El-Sheikh, 2016).

Contrarily, Cummings (2018) indicates that constructive marital conflict includes positive conflict resolution, explanations of unresolved conflicts and strategies for successful conflict. Positive emotional responses, such as contentment, safety, and security, are promoted by the exposure to constructive conflicts (El-Sheikh, 2016). By teaching children problem-solving and effective communication techniques, constructive marital conflicts may aid them in developing problem-solving, coping and conflict-resolution abilities (Gerard et al., 2016). Studies repeatedly show that constructive conflicts promote positive adjustment, while destructive conflicts raise children's risk for adjustment disorders.

From another perspective, Ogwuche (2018) posits that if a disagreement ensues between married couples and is neglected, it may worsen to the point where it becomes a conflict, and ultimately a major issue that the couples are unable to handle. According to Ogwuche, marital conflicts can spread like a disease and may be caused by social discontent. Marital conflicts arise when spouses lack psychological equilibrium since it also affects their emotional outlook. Shertzer and Stone (2016) have also revealed

that two forms of conflicts may arise between a husband and wife in some marriage relationships. These include intra-personal conflict and inter-personal conflicts.

In intra-personal conflict, couples are unable to agree on a course of action. In a study by Otuji (2016), the researcher found that some men find it challenging to make solid decisions at home out of fear of the unknown because of their ill relationships with their wives. Such men, he observed, had already formed an unfavourable link with their wives and found it challenging to speak the harsh reality because doing so would offend them even though that is never their aim. Obe (2017) makes a similar point, noting that while it is beneficial for spouses to accept one another's opinions, it is also crucial to prevent any fake relationships since, in the end, the truth must be disclosed and if the couples have not engaged honestly, conflict may occur.

Concerning inter-personal conflict, this type of conflict occurs between or among couples who hold divergent opinions or orientations. Inter-personal conflict according to Atsu (2019), refers to a conflict that arises as a result of a couple living together with a family relation or group of friends. Conflicts may have a good connotation. So it is crucial to strive for a change of attitude, especially when they handle it constructively. Children, mothers-in-law, fathers-in-law, or other family members may cause conflicts, but Ogunsaya (2021) notes that disputes with the husband's or wife's friends may be the deadliest. In this situation, a friend of either spouse can use blackmail to put the other at risk, which could lead to conflict. It can be to inform either of the partners that one is cheating on the other. Such an event might lead to conflict. Even if the problems are caused by close associates, the guiding principle should be that since spouses share a house, conflicts should be handled maturely for a positive transformation (Erath, 2021).

### 2.3.3 Causes of Marital Conflicts

Differences in culture among a couple can occasionally lead to marital conflicts or divorce. Conflict that arises during family interactions with a member of the family is a sign of a dysfunctional system. If the symptom is allowed to continue, it would not only make the affected people miserable but also the other family members. These factors and several others are responsible for marital conflicts (Luijk, Arends & Prinzie, 2020). Some of the causes of marital conflicts identified by Lucas-Thompson, Lunkenheimer and Dumitrache (2017) include the following:

- (i) Cultural and ethnic norms: Cultural and ethnic norms affect how roles are played in a particular family system (Thornton, 2019). The nature of the relationship between the wife and her husband's family and vice versa can create marital conflict, make a marriage hold solidly or cause it to become very loose and ultimately fall apart. If cultural and ethnic differences are not well understood by the two people involved in the marriage, it creates challenges for its stability.
- (ii) Level of education of spouses: A couple's academic and social experiences might strengthen or weaken their marriage. Couples are more prone to disagreements, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of top delinquencies about their married life when they are not sufficiently exposed to or educated (Zemp, Johnson & Bodenmann, 2019). A communication gap could be caused by outside influences and a lack of decisive decision-making abilities. This could result from a lack of objectivity in how they handle problematic situations in their interactions, failing to recognise that the failure of their marriage is a reflection of them. The situation is different when disagreements are handled as rationally as possible, though.

- (iii) Communication gap: Couples' inability to freely voice their opinions is almost entirely due to the inadequate degree of interaction between them. The fear of the unknown could engulf the marriage, causing marital issues brought on by mistrust of a partner. According to Thornton (2019), communication in a marriage regulates the degree to which each person's contact can produce one's own goals for the benefit of another. It is important that couples freely communicate with each other on matters of importance and those that are not. Freely speaking out to one another helps maintain communication flow which is good for marriage sustainability.
- (iv) Infidelity: Infidelity in marriage is the act of being unfaithful to one's spouse. If one or both of the partners are unable to uphold their marriage vows, it may lead to resentment and tension in the marriage. Here, either the wife or the husband keeps company outside of the marital home, which causes heartache for either of them. Because of this, Zemp et al. (2019) revealed that marriage is ideal for those adults who are psychologically, morally, mentally, economically, socially and sexually mature to execute the duties and obligations of a married life. To maintain an upright status in marriage, moral justification is necessary. Therefore, a spouse whose moral life is questionable may cause harm to their marriage.
- (v) Infertility: Procreation is one of the justifications for marriage (Holahan & Moos, 2019). When a couple gets married, parents, friends, and even the couple themselves want to start a family. These relations start to murmur if this is delayed by some natural interference, which puts pressure on the partners and may lead to conflict as a result. If this conflict is not resolved in a way that will ensure understanding between the couples and the focus is

not placed on seeking help with childbirth, the union may disintegrate.

- (vi) **Breach of trust:** Trust is important in marriage because two people can only walk together if they agree. This implies that reaching an agreement is a crucial hurdle in a marriage. It could cause emotional harm to the other partner and result in a major violation of trust if one partner uses critical knowledge about the other spouse against him or her in a dispute or other issue (Razavi & Jenichen, 2021). It is therefore always important to keep what one's partner has confided in the other. Trying to betray this trust in a way that causes harm to the other can lead to problems in the marriage.
- (vii) **Sexual deprivation:** Intimacy and sex are a major part of the relationship and are also responsible for a better bond, understanding, and love. When there is absolutely no sex in your marriage, you and your husband may find yourselves drifting apart. A sexually deprived husband may try to find love and intimacy somewhere else as well. Couples are required by law to fulfill one other sexually since failing to do so could have a long-term negative impact on their relationship. According to Atsu (2019), to prevent infidelity, spouses should be expected to freely express their emotional needs. Healthy and pleasant family interactions are bred by the emotional fulfillment of couples. One way through which this is done is sex. For instance, when there is absolutely no sex in your marriage, you and your husband may find yourselves drifting apart. A sexually deprived husband may try to find love and intimacy somewhere else as well.
- (viii) **Conflict in marital roles:** Many couples struggle to adapt to certain structural changes on a material, social, and psychological level, which places one partner in undesirable situations. Some husbands make conscious efforts to

avoid their financial responsibilities, leaving the woman to handle all household issues. It would be demanding, crippling, and inconspicuous when it is clear that the wife now looks after the welfare of the house. This stance may cause disagreement and irritation, which could then result in marital conflict. According to Atsu (2019), even if the wife is from the working class, the husband has a responsibility to meet all of her requirements. However, one can argue that the former should volunteer to help in taking care of her, especially if she wants to lessen the man's stress and prolong his life.

- (ix) Financial issues: Any source of money should be disclosed to spouses because suspicion may arise. Conflicts may arise over who owns bank accounts. To avoid suspicion, sources of expenditures, whether exorbitant or magnificent, should be disclosed. When resources are scarce, having a high need for new items can be problematic (Obe, 2017; Luijk et al., 2020). Finance is one of the main causes of disputes, even breakdowns, and divorce, among the educated elite. According to Luijk et al. (2020), some women feel economically superior to their husbands. Many rich women have abandoned their marriages due to their assertion that they can live independently while disregarding their husbands. That is why our elders advise us that it is preferable to wed a fool who can make us happy rather than a wise person who can make us miserable. Therefore, even though it is not wrong for a woman to have financial power in the family a marriage, sometimes it leads to marital conflicts as the woman might feel superior to the man.
- (x) Religious differences: Religion has an impact on how couples view and handle difficult circumstances. Because religion has the power to alter how couples view and handle difficult situations, it plays a part in this cycle.

Spouses communicate more effectively if they each cope in a style that is compatible and grounded in similar beliefs (Patterson, 2004). Healthy communication like this keeps couples safe. Couples can overcome adversity more effectively as a unit when they recognize the benefits of religion. However, differences in religion can cause misunderstanding because of what each couple believes in especially concerning marital roles (Hanson, 2019).

### **2.3.4 Children and Marital Conflicts**

Marital discord has an impact on all children, regardless of their gender or age (Cummings, 2018). Both direct and indirect effects of marital strife are felt by children. Exposure to destructive marital conflict regularly has been linked to internalising issues such as depression and low self-esteem, externalising issues such as delinquency and aggression, and a decline in academic performance, social and intrapersonal adjustment, and general mental health in children's psychological functioning (Davies et al., 2021). A child who is repeatedly exposed to marital disagreement runs the danger of experiencing various negative consequences, including emotional maltreatment (Cummings, 2018). Contrary to popular assumption, children who are exposed to conflicts regularly are neither more tolerant of it nor accustomed to it than other children (Cummings, 2018).

Children who are exposed to their parents' heated exchanges regularly become more sensitive to the repercussions of marital conflicts. Those who are sensitive to the conflicts have lower thresholds for aggressiveness and distress exposure, making even the smallest arguments intensely distressing and arousing them. Children who are exposed to harmful conflicts between their parents regularly also make more attempts

to become involved in the argument or step in to break it up. In addition, when they see marital disputes, they exhibit increased physiological arousal and express mental suffering in the form of dread, rage and despair. In contrast, children who observe healthy instances of parental conflict gain from witnessing how their parents resolve it (Cummings, 2018). They pick up helpful conflict resolution techniques that they might apply to their own disputes in the future. Children's sense of security in the family as a source of stability, responsiveness, and affection is also strengthened by witnessing constructive conflict. Children who experience parental conflict are immediately impacted in several different ways.

Conflicts in families have widespread effects, especially on the children who witness them. Thankfully, constructive conflict not only prevents negative child outcomes or buffers negative effects (Barthassa, 2014) but is predictive of positive outcomes for children, including the promotion of children's pro-social behaviour (i.e., lower incidence of psychological problems and higher self-esteem), increased emotional security and parental warmth. Raising parents' awareness of their own conflict characteristics and building their capacity to handle conflicts with their spouse constructively is critical. The results of numerous studies support that parents can learn new ways of relating to one another for the sake of their children and that they make long-lasting changes as a result of their increased competence (Barthassa, 2014).

### **2.3.5 Effects of Marital Conflicts on Children's Upbringing**

According to numerous studies, marital conflicts have a negative impact on children's social functioning and is a significant predictor of adjustment, including internalising disorders like anxiety, depression, and withdrawal, externalising disorders such as aggression, delinquency and conduct disorders, and academic success (McCoy,

Cummings & Davies, 2021). According to Cui, Donnellan and Conger (2019), parenting styles may operate as a moderator in the relationship between marital conflict and children's development. The "spillover" theories can be used to attempt to explain the connection between marital conflict and children's functioning, both positive and negative aspects of inter-parental relationships are thought to affect parent-child relationships (Cox & Paley, 2017). When there is damaging marital conflict, parents frequently lack emotional availability and are less receptive to the needs of their children.

According to Coe, Davies and Sturge-Apple (2017), children's school adjustment is particularly crucial, and their inability to change socially as a result of weak social skills (such as cooperation, self-control, and assertiveness) and is a contributing factor in their poor school adjustment. To become socially competent, one must strengthen their social skills. Early social skill deficiencies are relatively persistent over time and can lead to internalising and externalising disorders, and low academic performance, among other problems. These effects could be signs of later-life issues that are more serious (Ghazarian & Buehler, 2021). The setting in which children are raised has a big impact on how their social skills develop.

An important aspect of marital problems has been the upbringing of poor children. Children from houses where divorce is common observe their separated parents interacting with one another with a certain level of confusion. They move back and forth between their parents' unpleasant new homes, conditioning one another against the other. Sometimes, it becomes necessary for them to alternately spend time with their mother or father. Cox and Paley (2017) note that both parents frequently attempt to pay the child to spy on the other's actions. The youngster may be persuaded to learn

how the mother spends her alimony or private lifestyle or whether the father appears to have a lot of money and a woman friend with little information on either side. Children's bad experiences of being "bought over" by their parents may also have an impact on how morally upright they feel. For instance, it may be that corrupt behaviour was encouraged in the children and the bad consequences may make such children unhappy as the habit became chronic and they were unable to succeed academically without the help of their lecturers or professors, as the case may be. They are, therefore, exposed to dread, loneliness, and uncertainty at an extreme level.

Several researchers have revealed that children from homes with marital conflicts or separated parents do not enjoy a successful marriage life. People whose parents have divorced are more likely to experience a relationship breakdown than people from stable marital homes (Hanson, 2019; Campbell et al., 2016; Bayer, 2020; Barthassa, 2014). This suggests that the former does not have the benefit of having parents supervise how they play the part of husband or wife daily. Growing couples will be thrown off the path of building great relationships if they do not have a sample model to follow.

### **2.3.6 Measures to Minimise the Effects of Marital Conflicts on Children's Upbringing**

Children are mostly affected in marriages that face conflicts. They must be given protect to prevent or minimise such effects on their upbringing. Researchers believe that putting in place measures for conflict resolution and provision of academic care among others can help protect children in homes prone to marital conflicts (Donato et al., 2014; Fomby & Cherlin, 2017; Ghazarian & Buehler, 2021).

Donato et al. (2014) recommended that parents develop the ability to negotiate disagreements peacefully by employing less combative behaviours. Marriage counselors who specialise in conflict resolution can be consulted in this regard. This will lessen the number of parental conflict behaviours that kids are exposed to, which will help them develop better emotional coping mechanisms and prevent emotional adjustment problems in the future (El-Sheikh, 2016).

In the view of Fomby and Cherlin (2017), there is the need to create much stability in the home so that it will keep the children in without going out. Instability in the home as a result of marital conflicts has been found to push some children out of the house to the street participating in criminal activities such as marijuana smuggling, drunkenness, homosexuality, and robbery (Razavi & Jenichen, 2021).

Other researchers such as Ghazarian and Buehler (2021) believe that focusing on academic care, in terms of providing materials and tuition fees can ensure that the academic performance of children from homes prone to marital conflicts is not adversely affected. This is because, in situations where all the parents renege on their children's responsibilities concerning their academics, they get seriously affected.

#### **2.4 Implications of Previous Studies on Marital Conflict and Children's Upbringing**

Previous studies on marital conflict and its effects on children's upbringing consistently highlight the vulnerability of children's development in conflict-prone households. Research by Davidoff (2017), Barthassa (2014), and Fomby and Cherlin (2017) indicates that frequent or intense marital conflict significantly increases children's risk of emotional distress, such as anxiety and depression. Behavioral problems, including aggression and defiance, and poor academic performance are

common consequences of exposure to persistent parental discord. These findings underscore the necessity of early interventions that safeguard children's emotional and psychological well-being in unstable family environments.

Furthermore, research has demonstrated that marital conflict often has intergenerational effects. Gerald et al. (2016) and Cummings (2018) found that children from homes with chronic marital disputes tend to replicate similar patterns in their own future relationships. This suggests that unresolved parental conflict can perpetuate cycles of dysfunctional family dynamics, reinforcing the need for parents to model healthy conflict resolution strategies.

The nature of the conflict itself plays a critical role in determining its impact. Cummings (2018) and El-Sheikh (2016) differentiate between destructive conflict—characterized by violence, yelling, and withdrawal—and constructive conflict, which involves calm negotiation and resolution. Destructive conflict erodes children's sense of security, whereas constructive conflict can teach them valuable problem-solving skills. These findings indicate that interventions should focus not only on conflict elimination but also on fostering constructive communication between spouses.

Parental conflict has also been found to negatively impact parenting behavior. Studies by Cox and Paley (2017) and McCoy et al. (2021) highlight how marital discord reduces emotional availability and warmth toward children. This spillover effect diminishes the quality of parent-child interactions and can disrupt the family unit. Programs designed to improve marital relationships may, therefore, have indirect yet significant benefits for parent-child relationships, fostering a healthier family dynamic.

Social and cultural contexts shape how marital conflict unfolds and affects children. Basela (2018) and Sun and Li (2021) emphasize that societal norms influence how conflict is expressed, reported, and resolved. While Western interventions focus on individual therapy or legal mediation, culturally sensitive approaches in African and rural settings must account for extended family networks, traditional roles, and local dispute resolution practices. This highlights the need for community-specific strategies to address marital instability in culturally diverse environments.

Despite the abundance of studies on marital conflict, many have neglected holistic child welfare, focusing narrowly on academic performance or emotional well-being. Hanson (2019) and Ahmed (2020) suggest that prior research has not sufficiently examined children's social, moral, and physical development within conflict-ridden households. This gap underscores the importance of more comprehensive studies that address the full spectrum of child upbringing, as explored in this research.

Additionally, there has been limited attention to marital conflict in rural African communities. Much of the existing literature is based on Western populations or urban African settings, leaving rural contexts underexplored. Extended family systems, traditional roles, and limited access to formal counseling in rural areas create unique conditions that require tailored interventions. The research gap in understanding how conflict affects children in such environments further justifies the significance of studies like this.

Existing research highlights the severe consequences of marital conflict on children's emotional, behavioral, and academic development, the potential for intergenerational transmission of conflict behaviors, and the role of cultural contexts in shaping conflict outcomes. However, previous studies have often overlooked rural settings and failed

to provide a holistic view of child development. This creates a compelling need for studies such as this, which seek to address these gaps and offer culturally relevant insights into managing marital conflict effectively.

### **2.5 Similarities between the Essay and Previous Studies and the Gap Identified**

Both the essay and prior studies, such as those by Barthassa (2014) and Hanson (2019), emphasize the negative impact of marital conflict on children, particularly their emotional and psychological well-being. Like earlier research, the essay confirms that children exposed to marital discord are more likely to experience anxiety, depression, aggression, and poor academic performance. Furthermore, the causes of marital conflict identified in the essay—financial issues, infidelity, infertility, and lack of trust—align with those discussed in prior literature. The essay also employs conflict theory and functionalist theory, which are consistent with theoretical frameworks used in previous sociological and psychological studies.

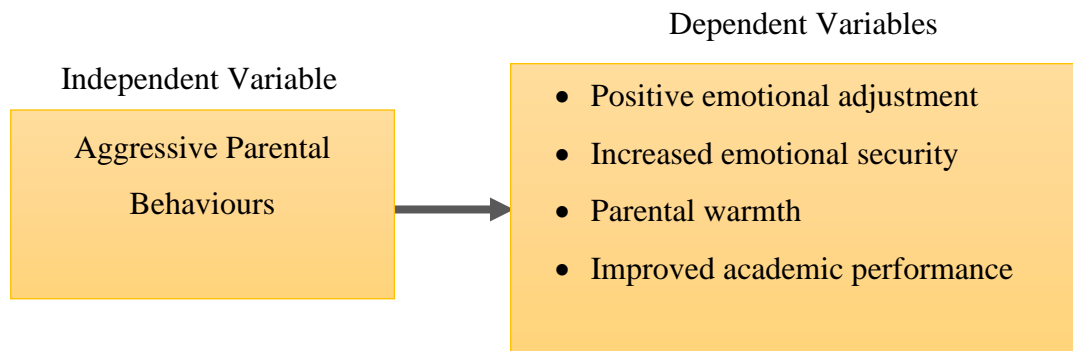
Despite these similarities, the essay differs from earlier studies in several ways. Most previous research has focused on Western contexts, such as the USA and Europe, whereas this study specifically examines marital conflict within a rural Ghanaian community, New Abirem in the Birim North District. While earlier studies tend to focus narrowly on the effects of marital conflict on academic performance or psychological well-being, this work expands this scope by exploring general upbringing, including moral, social, and physical development. Additionally, the methodology used in this study is distinct. While many previous works relied on quantitative methods or large-scale surveys, this study employed a qualitative, cross-sectional approach using interviews. Another unique aspect of this work is its focus on local solutions and interventions; the study discusses the role of extended families and

local counselors in mitigating conflict, a culturally relevant factor that is often absent in Western-focused research.

The essay also addresses several research gaps that exist in previous studies. While much prior research has focused mainly on academic outcomes or parent-child relationship quality, this essay broadens the scope by considering how marital conflict affects the overall upbringing of children, including their emotional security, moral guidance, and basic welfare. Additionally, there has been a lack of empirical research specifically examining rural Ghanaian families, and this study helps to fill that gap by using primary data from the New Abirem community. Another critical gap addressed in this work is the absence of insights into community-based or culturally appropriate mechanisms for conflict resolution in earlier studies. By highlighting the role of elders and traditional support systems, this research contributes valuable knowledge about localized interventions that help manage marital conflicts within the Ghanaian cultural context.

## **2.6 Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework presents a diagram in which all the key variables in the study are put together to explain the relationships that exist among them. The key variables in this study are marital conflicts (Independent variable) which is measured by aggressive parental behaviours (APB) and children's upbringing (dependent variable) which is measured by positive emotional adjustment (PEA), increased emotional security (IES), parental warmth (PW), and improved academic performance (IAP). The conceptual framework is shown in Figure 1.



*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*

Source: Author's Own Construct



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodology for conducting the study. The chapter discusses the research approach, design and study area. It also discussed the population, sample and sampling technique, instruments for data collection, data collection procedures and Ethical consideration. The rest are the data collection process, methods for data analysis, and ethical considerations.

#### **3.2 Research Approach**

According to Ryan (2013), a research approach serves as a roadmap for the research process. A research approach may be mixed, quantitative or qualitative. According to Hulley, Cummings and Newman (2013), a quantitative research approach refers to a research strategy that emphasizes the use of quantitative variables in the collection and analysis of data. On the other hand, the qualitative research approach entails information gathering to provide a thorough understanding of a specific research issue that cannot be quantified. This approach is used by researchers because it enables them to do an in-depth analysis of the views expressed by participants in a study (Patton, 2020). However, this approach lacks objectivity because of the small sample size that is involved in the data collection and analysis. The researcher adopted the qualitative researcher approach for the study.

#### **3.3 Research Design**

According to Bryman and Bell (2011), research design refers to the creation of a plan for the gathering, measuring, and analysis of data. In the view of Magigi (2015), the research design refers to a detailed blueprint through which a researcher works towards

the research objectives of a study with a fit among its objective, approach and tactics or the general plan of how the research questions would be answered. The research design used for this study was a cross-sectional survey. A cross-sectional survey is a type of research design in which a researcher collects data from different research participants at a single point in time (Hulley et al., 2013). The purpose of the cross-sectional survey research design is to examine the current or past characteristics of a phenomenon in a study (Ryan, 2013). Since the researcher focused on investigating the effects of marital conflict on children's upbringing, the cross-sectional survey research design was deemed appropriate to be adopted.

### 3.4 Study Area

The study area was the New Abirem community which is located in the Birim North District in the Eastern Region of Ghana. The town is the capital of the district. According to the 2021 population and housing census, the Birim North District has a population of eighty-two thousand six hundred and sixty-nine (82,669). The map of the Birim North District showing the New Abirem Community is shown in Figure 2

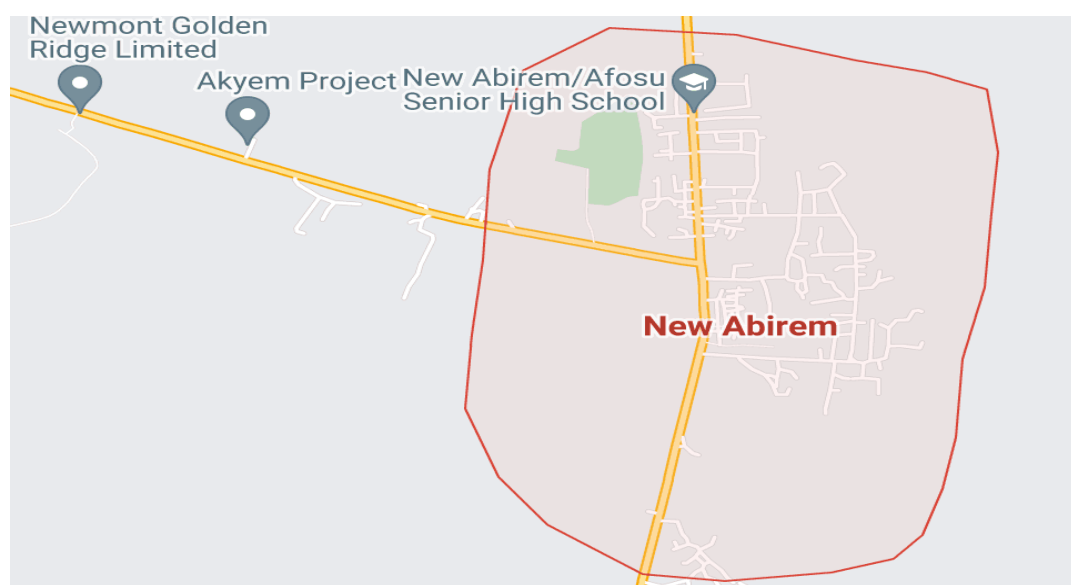


Figure 2: Map of the Birim North District showing the new Abirim Community  
Source: Google map

### **3.5 Population**

The term, “population” refers to the entire set of individuals or objects that the researcher wishes to study (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012). It may also refer to a group of people, situations, or things that researchers focus on to observe certain characteristics (Sileyew, 2019). The population of this research study included selected families from the Abirim township. The population unit included married couples. Five married couples formed the population. The total population for the study, therefore, was ten (10). According to Pandey and Pandey (2018), in a qualitative study, using a total number of 7-12 participants is generally acceptable.

### **3.6 Sample and Sampling Technique**

Sampling is the process of choosing a suitable representative subset of a population to ascertain its parameters or characteristics (Creswell, 2017). A sample can take the form of a probabilistic method or a non-probabilistic method. The purposive sampling method was employed to select the participants from the population using the purposive sampling approach. According to Sileyew (2019), purposive sampling is a sampling technique where the researcher focuses on particular groups in the population when choosing the participants. These groups are able to provide the information the researcher needed to address his or her stated objectives.

The number of components, or those chosen from the population to act as study respondents, is referred to as the sample size (Bryman & Bell, 2018). The total sample size is ten (10) since each couple is made up of a man and a woman.

### **3.7 Instrument for Data Collection**

Interview guide was used as the research instrument for collecting data for the study. An interview guide is a list of questions that a researcher wants the participants of the

study to answer based on specific topics related to the objectives of the study (Patton, 2020). The interview guide was made up of three separate sections which each section containing a list of questions related to the three objectives outlined in the study.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation and methods used to ensure the quality of a study (Pilot & Beck, 2014). Criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and the interpretations of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is similar to the concept of internal validity in quantitative research. Involving participants in the verification of the data and interpretations to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Spending sufficient time in the field to build trust with participants and gain a deep understanding of the context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This immersion helps in gathering in-depth and accurate data. Another way involves participants reviewing the data and the researcher's interpretations to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Birt et al., 2016). Engaging participants in verifying findings can strengthen the study's credibility.

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings can be applied to other contexts. It is analogous to external validity or generalizability in quantitative research. Providing detailed and rich descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings allows readers to determine if the findings are transferable to other settings (Holloway & Galvin, 2017). This involves describing the cultural, social, and economic context of married couple in New Abirem Community in the Birim North District in depth. Selecting a diverse range of participants who can provide

comprehensive insights ensures the findings encompass various perspectives (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016).

Dependability concerns the consistency and stability of research findings over time and across different contexts. Maintaining a detailed record of all research activities, decisions, and changes throughout the study process (Nowell et al., 2017). This includes documenting how data were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Coding the data, taking a break, and then recoding the same data to check for consistency in the results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability refers to the degree to which the findings are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest. Reflecting on the researcher's own biases and how these may affect the research. Maintaining a reflexive journal helps in documenting personal reflections, biases, and decisions made during the research process (Berger, 2015). Similar to dependability, keeping a comprehensive record of all steps taken in the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation, ensures that the findings are traceable and can be confirmed by others (Nowell et al., 2017). All these criteria outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were followed.

### **3.9 Data Collection Procedure**

Interview guide was used by the researcher to directly collect data from the participants. The participants were put into five groups for the interview. Each group included members of a family. Therefore, there were five separate interview sessions during the data collection. After obtaining informed consent, the participants were asked for their demographic information. In the interview guide, respondents were asked to describe their views based on the objectives of the studies in the interview

guide. The questions were related to the three objectives outlined in the study - the causes of marital conflict among married couples, the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing, and measures that could be implemented to minimize the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing. The researcher recorded the interview using an available audio recorder device.

### **3.10 Method of Data Analysis**

In essence, data analysis describes how researchers try to better explain, understand, and extract meaning from their findings (Carey, 2017). An interviewing guide was used to qualitatively analyze the data. The recorded audio was transcribed by the researcher. First, each participant's interview was examined for significant and recurrent themes and concepts. Additionally, conclusions were drawn from the audio that has been transcribed as well as the interview notes. Comparisons between interviews and content analyses were performed later. The number of themes was reduced to a manageable number for the analysis by identifying recurring themes, eliminating them, and combining closely related themes (Strauss & Corbin, 2020).

### **3.11 Ethical Considerations**

To complete research with appropriate guidelines, the ethics of the research is very important. Approval was sought from the academic board of the University of Education, Winneba for this research work to be conducted. Ethics must be taken into account for research to be done according to the right procedures. Secondly, approval was sought from the individual participants. Before participating in the experiment, the researcher made sure that every participant had freely given their consent. The purpose and scope of the research were explained to the participants in advance.

Participants' privacy was also protected. There were proper citations for all secondary data from earlier studies carried out by other researchers.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and discussion of the data collected from the participants. There are five sections in this chapter. The first section presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. The second section presents the analysis of data related to the first objective, that is, the causes of marital conflicts among married couples. The third section presents the analysis of data related to objective two, that is the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing. The fourth section analyses the third objective that is, the measures that can be implemented to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing. The fifth section presents the discussion of the findings.

#### 4.2 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

The socio-demographic factors considered in this study include age, the number of years married, and level of education. A total of 10 participants were recruited to participate in the study. The majority (n=7) were aged 41-50 years, while the remaining three participants (n=3) were aged 31-40 years. As it relates to years of marriage, 2 of the couples were married for 5 years whereas another 2 have married for 9 years. The last couple have been married for 18 years. Concerning the level of education participants, 3 of them had basic education, 2 had had secondary education and 5 had tertiary level of education.

*Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of participants (n=10)*

Variable	Category	Frequency
Age (Years)	31-40	7
	41-50	3
Duration of Marriage	5 years	2
	9 years	2
	18 years	6
Level of Education	Basic education	3
	Secondary education	2
	Tertiary education	5

Source: Field survey, (2023)

Participants decided not to disclose their identity. As such, the researcher chose to call the participants Couple 1, Couple 2, Couple 3, Couple 4, and Couple 5. However, H and W (Husband and Wife) were added to each couple if a husband or wife presented any view on the questions. Therefore, there were C1H and C1W, C2H and C2W, C3H and C3W, C4H and C4W, C5H and C5W.

### **4.3 Causes of Marital Conflicts among Couples**

The focus of the first objective was to find out the causes of marital conflicts. This objective was very significant because knowing the root cause of marital conflict helped couples to find solutions to them, in order to promote a peaceful marriage and a peaceful home that will support the upbringing of children. The literature pointed out several causes of marital conflicts. In each, there are specific conditions that lead to the cause. Even though a few of the causes come from outside of the marriage, the

majority are created within the marriage. As such, it is the couple who initiate such causes which later harm the marriage. In view of this, the researcher asked the participants two questions to solicit their views on the causes of marriage.

In the first question, participants were asked to explain what they understood by marital conflict. Several explanations for marital conflicts were given. Nevertheless, the responses of the participants, generally indicated that they understand the concept of marital conflicts. The following are the views of participants on how they understood marital conflicts.

For instance, this is what C1H had to say, *“I know that when we talk about marital conflict, then we are talking about the misunderstanding between a husband and his wife”*. C1W also explained, *“Marital conflict can be anything from misunderstanding to fighting among the married people”*.

C2H said, *Conflicts in marriage occur when the wife and the husband do not agree on one thing. However, some couples also engage in conflicts that are not bad”*. C2W also indicated, *“Marital conflict is any disagreement or dispute that arises between couples in marriage”*. The view shared by C3H when he said, *“Conflicts in general, and marital conflicts are the same. I believe that these are simple arguments that do not bring compromise on an issue”*.

To C3W, *“issue that does not lead to oneness between a husband and his wife is conflict. It can be on any matter that concerns the two or the entire family”*. This is how C4H presented his views, *“If married couples have differences on major issues that bother on serious family matters, then that lead to marital conflicts. Usually, if one of them takes an entrenched position, the conflict will break out.”*

C4W explained, *“Marital conflicts can manifest in the form of arguments based on the misunderstanding of issues among couples. Whether the issue that caused the conflict is small or big, it lead to bad results”*. C5H stated, *“In marriage, there will be conflict all the time. It only occurs when the couples disagree on many matters some big and some small. But no matter what the matter is, it can cause havoc to the marriage.”* C5W said, *“Conflicts in marriage is any misunderstanding between husband and wife that eventually leads to separation of the two”*.

In the second question, participants were asked to mention and explain the factors that cause marital conflicts. Participants indicated that the causes of marital conflicts were based on several factors and may be peculiar to the couples involved. Below are the views expressed by the participants on this question.

C1H said:

Money or financial issues are one of the causes of marital conflicts. This is because if money becomes scarce in the marriage, especially when the man does not want to honour his financial obligation, the woman will not take it kindly, and this can lead to conflict. Apart from this, sexual issues are also causes of conflicts in marriages.

C1W opined:

Some conflicts in marriage are caused by differences in values and interests. Due to differences in people’s upbringing, we may not have the same values. In the same way, the interests of the two parties may differ. If a compromise is not reached on such issues, conflict is bound to occur in the marriage.

C2H shares this view,

Marital conflict is caused by several factors. For example, some couples usually have conflicts because of certain issues in the children's training. At times, it is financial issues. But it is also important to know that religious differences among certain couples can lead to conflicts and eventually lead to the dissolution of the marriage.

C2W maintained:

Conflicts may be from causes such as domestic violence and power struggle. In marriages where the husband or wife is domineering, abuse is rampant. If one couple seems to have all the powers in the family, misunderstanding may ensue and this leads to conflicts.

To C3H:

Three of the major causes of conflicts in marriage are sex, money, and a lack of trust between the couples. If one partner refuses to perform their sexual obligation, this is likely to cause conflict. In Addition, if the husband does not provide money as it should, this will lead to conflict. If the wife or the husband does not trust one another on many issues in the marriage, conflicts will always take place.

C3W also said:

I believe that among all causes of conflicts in marriage, misunderstanding about sexual intimacy remains the big one. Men will also have problems with women who refuse them sex and this has been one of the sources of conflicts in many marriages.

C4H remarked:

Conflicts in marriage are normal. However, these conflicts can be caused by issues on marital roles, that is, what the man is supposed to do and what the woman is also supposed to do. If there is no clarity on this, it may lead to conflicts. Again, infidelity or unfaithfulness on the part of the couples is also a source of marital conflicts. Cheating on a partner is bad and it is a major cause

of the majority of divorces. However, when one couple does not satisfy the other sexually, cheating cannot be stopped.

In the view of C4W:

There are marriages that have hit the rock because of extended family influences. If for instance, in-laws from any side of the couple cause troubles of any kind that affect one of the couples, remember that it can cause conflict. This is especially true when couples are unable to conceive. I have several friends whose marriages have ended because of this.

In the view of C5H:

Differences in the education level of the married couples, cultural and religious differences, and poor communication are all examples of causes of marital conflicts. Again, sexual matters, lack of childbirth, and another host of issues can be added to the list.

C5W added that the following:

Apart from the difference in the level of education, if one couple comes from a high social class, the one in the high class may show tendencies of disrespect and this can cause conflict in the marriage.

#### **4.4 Effects of Marital Conflicts on Children's Upbringing**

Conflicts are inevitable in every human relationship. As such, marriage between two people from different backgrounds is not immune from conflicts either. The literature reveals that marital conflicts have several negative impacts on the marriage and family. When conflict ensues in marriage, children are the main group of people who are mostly affected. The effects can cause disorders in their development which can create a lasting impact on their adult lives. This is because the family which is supposed to play the role of upbringing has been disintegrated by the conflict in the marriage. Therefore, the focus of this objective was to find out the effects that marital conflicts have on the upbringing of children. As such, two main questions were asked in this

objective. The questions centered on the effect of marital conflicts on children and the ways marital conflicts affect children's upbringing.

Participants were first asked to express their views on the effects of marital conflicts. The main focus of the explanations provided by participants centered on the fact that conflicts in marriage has two major effects. One is divorce and the other is poor children's upbringing. Below are the views of the participants. For instance, C1H said;

Many divorce cases in Ghana are a result of unresolved marital conflicts. Some are very trivial issues while others are big. When divorce happens, there is separation. Taking care of the children becomes a problem.

C1W also said, *"Conflicts in marriage may end in divorce or separation. Even if they do not lead to any of these two, they take away the peace in the marriage."* According to C2H:

No matter the magnitude of a conflict between a husband and a wife, the results of that conflict can derail the beauty of the marriage. Many marriages have hit the rock because of conflicts. If the couples can solve their differences on time, it should not lead to any bigger problems. On the other hand, if left unchecked, it can bring divorce.

The view shared by C2W was, *"Conflicts in marriage break the marriage. When this happens, every other thing in the marriage is affected including the welfare of the children"*.

C3H averred:

Because unresolved marital conflicts usually lead to separation among couples, one effect on children is that it can create a sense of insecurity in the children. You know children become very unstable in marriages ridden by conflicts. This may negatively affect their growth and maturity.

C3W shared the following view, *“In all, there is nothing good that comes from marital conflicts that promotes the marriage. The effects have always been negative. It can lead to divorce or separation or impair the growth of children”*.

C4H said:

When conflict in marriage reaches a certain point, it makes both couples lose their happiness. Even though not all marital conflicts lead to divorce, staying in a conflict-prone marriage is dangerous because it can lead to physical harm being inflicted on one another.

C4W also contended:

I see marital conflicts as a disease that destroys the future of children. When it happens, the neglect of children becomes common and without financial support, emotional support, and all the other things they need to get in other to grow, children’s lives become miserable.

C5H averred:

The effects that marital conflicts bring to the marriage may include divorce, but not always. However, some conflicts may linger for a long period without breaking the marriage. To me, I believe that ultimately, both couples will have to work on themselves in other to stay together in peace.

In the view of C5W:

All forms of marital conflict are not healthy for marriage life. Love should lead in everything. But when conflicts come, that should not be taken as a light matter. This is because it can affect the marriage by separation or divorce.

In the second question for objective two, participants were asked to explain how marital conflicts affect the upbringing of children. Participants' responses indicated that marital conflicts affected the social life of children, inter-parental relationships, and the future marriage plans of children. Participants also mentioned that marital

conflicts create child delinquencies and poor academic performance. Below are the views expressed by the participants on this question.

According to C1H said:

There is no marriage that is full of conflict will create a peaceful home that can help the upbringing of children. For instance, children whose parents are always fighting may be affected by their emotions because of the experiences they go through. The situation affects their social functioning and causes depression and anxieties in the children.

C1W also maintained:

Marital conflicts can decrease parent-child relationship. I am saying this because, in my neighbourhood, we have children who are more interested in their friends than their parents. The reason has been because conflict in the marriage has separated them and the children have no one to call their friends except their peers. But I think this friendship should first start with parents”.

C2H expressed this view:

Many children who live in homes characterised by marital conflicts may also in the future experience the same in their marriages. This is true, especially in homes where the couple fight in the presence of their children. As they have open hostilities, the children may be learning it subtly or unconsciously. The same may be repeated in their future marriages because they think it is ok to do that.

C2W indicated:

One area of children’s upbringing that can be affected by marital conflict is their mental health. For instance, children may experience depression, anxiety, or substance abuse all because they lack the emotional support of their parents who are not together to provide that”.

C3H said:

Marital conflicts affect children in three ways. First, it divides the attention of the couples so much that they pay little or no attention to the upbringing of the children. This affects the children psychologically. Again, when the conflict eventually leads to divorce, children may suffer in their welfare and academic work. Because the parents are no longer staying together, if one neglects his or her responsibilities towards the children, their upkeep and academic work will suffer especially where the children are with their mother.

C3W held this view:

Marital conflicts affect children's academic performance. This is because every child needs support from their parents in their academic work, especially at the basic level. If there is no unity or togetherness, that aspect of the child's upbringing will easily die. This can affect them because poor academic performance will affect the prospects of the child's work life.

C4H also said:

Children need protection and love from their parents during their developmental stages. This is especially critical because, without this, their social and emotional adjustments will suffer. In addition, parental conflicts may encourage child delinquency and a decline in academic performance especially among adult children. Making the protection of children a priority despite the existence of conflict among parents is very critical to the upbringing of children.

C4W indicated:

I totally agree with my husband on the academic of the children. I am a teacher myself so I know the challenges children from homes plunged by marital conflicts go through. Besides this, I think that it makes the children feel depressed because they worry so much about the troubles in the home.

C5H was of the view that,

The effects of marital conflicts usually are not suffered only by the two parties in the marriage. Usually, the children also suffer. It is said that when two elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers. In certain cases, marital conflicts overshadow the welfare of children because the parents may not pay much attention to their physical, emotional, and academic needs. This seriously affects their upbringing and development”.

C5W said:

Children may experience several challenges that can affect their upbringing when marital conflicts are common in marriages. For instance, I have seen some children in marriage-prone conflicts who have gone astray due to lack of parental care. The reason is that the conflict takes away the attention of the parents from the children and this denies them the needed care.

#### **4.5 Measures that can be Implemented to Minimise the Effects of Marital**

##### **Conflicts on Children’s Upbringing**

Researchers of marital conflicts believe that there are measures that can be adopted to help resolve conflicts in marriages. However, unless the couples are willing to adopt such measures, the marriage will continue to suffer the consequences of such conflicts. They pointed out that the earlier the conflict is resolved, the better the marriage stands the chance of surviving. Also, children in the marriage will enjoy a better upbringing if the marriage is stable. The ability of married couples to identify such measures to end their marital conflicts is key in helping to ensure a peaceful home. In addition, a peaceful home would provide parents the opportunity to give a good upbringing to their children. It is in light of this that this section seeks to find out measures that can be adopted to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children’s upbringing. Therefore, with this objective, participants were asked to suggest measures that can be adopted to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children’s upbringing.

Participants mentioned that to minimise marital conflicts on the upbringing of children, feuding couples need to seek support for conflict resolution, separate their differences from the welfare of children, and seek help from extended family members, among others. Below are the views expressed by the participants on this question.

C1H indicated:

Parents who have differences among themselves should not let it spill over to their children. In all earnest, they must seek experts who can help them resolve their conflicts to sustain their marriages. This will grant them the peace of mind to focus on the welfare of their children.

C1W also said:

The extended family has a role to play in resolving marital conflicts. In other not for the differences of conflicts between the couples to affect the upbringing of children, family elders have to always step in to help resolve conflict early before it gets worse.

C2H shared this view:

The first thing that should come to the mind of married couples is that when a fight breaks out between them is the welfare of the children. The conflict should have nothing to do with the welfare of the children especially when it comes to providing their educational needs. More so, conflict among parents should not take away the attention the children need. This will not go well for the children if they are consistently neglected making it difficult for them to adjust emotionally.

C2W also said:

I believe that marriage couples can seek help from professional counsellors. This is because, if the conflicts are resolved, it will give them the time, energy, and attention to take care of their children.

C3H contended:

Couples need, to first of all, prioritise the welfare of the children in every circumstance, by making sure that they are adequately provided with all that are required for their growth and development. There have been instances that we have witnessed marital conflicts leading to the total neglect of the children, especially by the men. They refuse to honour their financial responsibilities, thereby making it difficult for the women to provide for the needs of the children.

According to C3:

Even though married couples may be adults, there are certain issues that they need to seek support from elderly family members before they degenerate into something else. It is said that when two elephants fight it is the grass that suffers. In this context, the children will suffer for their conflicts. To resolve this and ensure that the children are well taken care of emotionally, psychologically, and physically, they are to seek help from the elders of the extended family.

C4H added:

Providing for the children's educational needs; providing for their food and clothing; providing for the children's health needs; and providing for their emotional needs. This should be regardless of whether or not there is a conflict between the couples.

C4W indicated:

If married couples can bring up their children in a way that will not damage the future of the children, they need to seek help when they face challenges such as conflicts. There is conflict in every marriage. Therefore, there is the need to seek for help when they are overwhelmed.

C5H said:

Parents must ensure that they establish a stable home in order not to keep them out. This is because, especially with adult children, instability in the house can

make them stay out for long. The effects of that can be negative peer influence that can affect the life of the child or children.

C5W also added her views:

What my husband said is in order. But to add to what he said, every marriage that is characterized by conflicts reflects in the upbringing of the children. It is always negative. There is the need to understand each other and chat a peaceful path that will help bring togetherness so that they can focus on bringing up the children in the right way.

## **4.6 Discussion of Results**

In this section, the researcher discusses the findings based on the research objectives, relating it to the literature. This helped the researcher to show the similarities and differences in the findings as compared to the findings of other researchers in the literature.

### **4.6.1 Causes of Marital Conflicts Among Married Couples**

This study found that participants were knowledgeable about marital conflicts and provided explanation for it which agrees with reports by Baldwin et al. (2019). Nonetheless, despite their knowledge of it, the participants did not differentiate between normal and abnormal marital conflicts as explained by Davis et al. (2021). The study also found the causes of marital conflicts. Participants mentioned some of the causes as financial issues. This view agrees with Obe (2017), whose study found that finance is one main causes of disputes among married couples, and lack of understanding among couples in their financial plans and expenditure has led to marital breakdowns and divorce. This is true because it was also mentioned by participants that when financial obligation is not met, especially on the part of the husband, this challenge occurs in the marriage. This challenge affects children since providing for their needs, for instance, school needs will be seriously affected.

Infidelity and lack of sexual satisfaction were also found to be causes of marital conflicts. These findings corroborate the study Zemp et al. (2019) and Atsu (2019). Even though infidelity has been linked with one partner not being faithful to the other as Zemp and his colleagues claim, Atsu believes that it is immoral for one partner to cheat. However, Atsu further argued that when couples do not satisfy each other sexually, infidelity is bound to happen. This creates conflicts in the marriage and do not promote peace in the home. Other causes of marital conflicts the study found were infertility, religious differences, and poor communication among couples. Holahan and Moos (2019) found that infertility in marriage may be a natural occurrence. But couples who do not seek proper information on it and find a solution to same may end up fighting and accusing each other of being the cause. In addition, Patterson (2004) reports that poor communication and religious differences can lead to conflict if not handled well by couples. Participants mentioned that communication plays a significant role in marriage and as such when it is not effective, it creates challenges among couples. This confirms the views of Patterson.

These findings align strongly with the Conflict Theory, which emphasizes the struggle for resources and power within social relationships (Schaefer, 2018).

According to Conflict Theory, marriage can be viewed as a battleground where partners negotiate power, responsibilities, and resources. For example, when the husband does not fulfill his financial duties, or one spouse dominates decision-making, this imbalance of power and unmet expectations creates tension and leads to conflict. The study participants echoed this when they indicated that financial stress and power struggles were major issues in their homes. In this sense, conflict is not random but

arises from systemic inequality and competing interests, exactly as Conflict Theory proposes.

Similarly, the Functionalist Theory helps explain why certain roles and expectations, when unfulfilled, disrupt the family system. This theory posits that every part of society (including the family) has a function that contributes to social stability. When parents fail to perform their assigned roles—such as financial provision or emotional support—the family system becomes dysfunctional. Participants' views on conflicts over marital roles and responsibilities confirm this theoretical position. For instance, when a husband abandons his role as the primary breadwinner, it creates strain in the relationship and disrupts the overall stability of the family.

#### **4.6.2 Effects of Marital Conflicts on Children's Upbringing**

In the study participants indicated that marital conflicts may lead to divorce or separation of the couples. Secondly, participants indicated that it affects the upbringing of children at home. The findings agree with Cox and Paley (2017). These researchers reported that marital conflicts have been a big problem in the upbringing of children. This is because when divorce happens due to marital conflicts, children from such homes find it difficult to interact with their parents since the latter not stay together. Ghazarian and Buehler (2021) added that this unpleasant situation affects the development of children as there is a communication gap when children are not able to interact frequently with their parents.

Additionally, the study again found that the psychological and emotional development of children is affected due to conflicts among parents. The findings are supported by McCoy et al. (2021), whose study reported that children's social functioning such as adjustment becomes weak, creating internalised disorders such as anxiety, depression,

and withdrawal as well as externalised disorders such as aggression, delinquency, conduct disorders, and poor academic. Participants mentioned that the attention deficit created by marital conflicts produces the above-mentioned disorders which impair the development of children. In addition, Cui et al. (2019) contends that the physiological needs of children are absent in homes where marital conflicts have led to divorce. The provision of children's food, clothing, and healthcare needs becomes a problem, especially when the husband neglects his financial responsibilities. These points above were mentioned by participants (Cui et al., 2019). These findings can also be interpreted through the lens of Conflict Theory.

From this perspective, children become indirect victims of their parents' power struggles. As the parents compete or fail to resolve their differences, the children are neglected—losing access to care, emotional security, and sometimes financial support. This “spillover” effect illustrates how power conflicts between parents can generate structural disadvantages for children, affecting their development.

On the other hand, the Functionalist Theory explains how marital conflict disrupts the broader social function of the family unit. In a functionalist view, the family serves as a primary agent of socialization, responsible for nurturing children and preparing them for societal integration. However, as participants noted, when conflict leads to poor communication and separation, the family fails in this role. The lack of structure, support, and harmony in the home environment becomes a **dysfunction**, leading to long-term developmental harm for the children.

#### **4.6.3 Measures that can be Implemented to Minimise the Effects of Marital Conflicts on Children's Upbringing**

Despite the challenges marital conflicts pose to the upbringing of children, participants explained that certain measures can be adopted to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on the upbringing of children. It was found that irrespective of the differences in couples due to their conflicts, participants mentioned that children's welfare should be prioritised. Secondly, couples with marital conflict should seek help for conflict resolution or support from the extended family. According to these views by participants, it is important to say that if married couples pay much attention to the welfare of their children even when they still have issues, it will have no or little effects on the development of the children. This will help them find ways to resolve their differences and get things right as time goes on.

The above agree with Donato et al. (2014), whose study found that when parents find ways to resolve their marital conflicts, it gives protection to children and minimise the effect on their upbringing. By this, Donato and his colleagues maintain that the couples can focus on the welfare of the children. Fomby and Cherlin (2017) added that when children get the needed attention from home, it prevents them from going out. This protects, especially the adult children from participating in anti-social behaviours such as criminal activities, prostitution, and armed robbery, among others.

Here, the Functionalist perspective offers strong support. Functionalism emphasizes the role of social institutions (e.g., family, religious bodies, elders, and counselors) in maintaining social equilibrium. When these institutions are engaged in conflict resolution, they help to restore balance and ensure that the family can return to its function of raising emotionally and socially healthy children.

From a Conflict Theory perspective, these interventions also serve to mitigate the unequal power dynamics between spouses by providing neutral platforms for dialogue and negotiation. For instance, extended family members or counsellors may act as mediators to help resolve conflicts that arise due to dominance or control by one partner.



## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the summary of the study. It also presents major findings, conclusions and recommendations.

#### **5.2 Summary**

##### **5.2.1 Research Objectives**

The objectives of the study were to:

- (i) to examine the causes of marital conflicts among married couples in the New Abirem Township.
- (ii) to ascertain the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Township.
- (iii) to identify measures that can be implemented to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Township.

##### **5.2.2 Research Procedure**

The study was conducted to examine the effects of marital conflicts on children's upbringing in the New Abirem Township in the Birim North District. The design adopted for the study was a cross-sectional survey and qualitative research approach. A total sample of ten (10) participants were involved in the study. An interview guide was used as an instrument for the collection of data. The data was analysed qualitatively, using the thematic approach.

### 5.2.3 Major Findings

Based on the objectives of the study, the major findings include the following:

- (i) It was found that participants were knowledgeable about the concept of marital conflicts. This knowledge was born out of the fact that all the participants were married and as such may have experienced conflicts once in their marital lives. Some of the causes of marital conflict that were discovered in the study included financial issues, infidelity, infertility, sexual issues, religious differences, and lack of trust among partners.
- (ii) The study found that marital conflicts affected the upbringing of children in many ways. For instance, marital conflicts were found to create an interaction problem for children and their parents especially when such conflicts lead to divorce. It was again found that this situation leads to a communication gap between children and parents making the children lose the attention of parents. The lack of attention affects the social functioning of children leading to anxiety, depression, aggression, and poor academic activities among others. It was also found that when marital conflicts lead to divorce, it affects children's physiological needs such as food, clothing, and healthcare. The above findings were supported by the findings of previous researchers as found in the literature.
- (iii) The study was found that couples should seek help for conflict resolution from marriage counsellors and extended family members in order not for their feud to spill over to the children. Participants also mentioned that the welfare of children which encompasses their emotional and psychological needs, physiological needs, and their academic needs should be prioritized by parents even though there may be conflict in their marriage. This was found to provide a good way to help the upbringing of the children.

### 5.3 Conclusions

Based on the findings from the study, the following conclusions were made;

- (i) The study concludes that marital conflicts are common in many marriages and are caused by factors such as financial issues, infidelity, infertility, sexual issues, religious differences, and lack of trust among partners. However, there are underlying factors that cause these conflicts. It is therefore important for married couples to find solutions to these challenges by for instance, in terms of financial challenges, seek ways to generate income through savings or extra work to enable lasting peace in the family in order to help the upbringing of children.
- (ii) The study concludes that marital conflicts have several effects on the upbringing of children, including the creation of interaction problem for children, loss of attention of parents, and a lack of physiological needs such as food, clothing, and healthcare among others. The persistent of marital conflict among parents creates these effects that serve as challenges for the upbringing of children. By holistically looking at these effects and working towards mitigating them, their impact on the developmental process and the general upbringing of the children will be minimal.
- (iii) There are measures such as counselling and extended family interventions that can help resolve marital conflicts. If married couple adhere to these measures by implementing the advice provided by counsellors and elders of families family elders, there are chances that lasting peace in marriages will be achieved. This will in turn promote the upbringing of children and ensure their smooth development into adulthood.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

Based on the findings and the conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) It is recommended that when married couples are faced with marital conflicts, they should immediately seek assistance from marriage counsellors or elderly family members to help them resolve their differences. This will help minimise their differences and create a cordial environment in the marriage and in the family in general. This is to help keep focus on the children and put in place measures to improve their upbringing.
- (ii) It is recommended that couples should focus on the welfare of their children and see to it that all necessary provisions needed for their upbringing are provided. For instance, their emotional such as love, physiological such food and clothing, and academic needs such as books need to be catered for. In this way, the children's development stands the chance of not being hindered.
- (iii) It is recommended that couples implement all measures provided by marital counsellors and family elders in relations to the conflicts that have ensued among them. These advices can provide a peaceful environment for the upbringing and development of their children. In addition, it will help the children to feel loved and accepted in their own family because this love in the family bonds children and the parents together. This will promote a health family live.

#### **5.5 Implications of the Study**

Marital conflict has direct consequences for children, making them victims of unresolved disputes between parents. Whether the conflict leads to separation or persists within the home, it disrupts children's emotional development, social behavior,

academic performance, and general well-being. Additionally, poor parenting and neglect often emerge as byproducts of marital strife, as parental focus shifts away from child-rearing, resulting in inadequate care, educational neglect, and weakened emotional bonds. Furthermore, children raised in conflict-ridden households may internalize these behavioral patterns, replicating them in their future relationships and perpetuating a generational cycle of marital instability.

Educators and school authorities must recognize that many behavioral and academic challenges among students may stem from family conflicts. Poor academic performance or indiscipline should not always be attributed to laziness or defiance, as disrupted home environments often play a significant role. To support affected children, schools in communities like New Abirem should collaborate with social workers, psychologists, or guidance counselors to establish psychosocial support systems.

For marriage counselors and religious or traditional leaders, it is crucial to adopt a proactive and family-centered approach to counseling. The study highlights the importance of interventions that address not only the couple's marital issues but also the overall welfare of their children. In culturally communal settings like New Abirem, extended family members and elders play a pivotal role in mediating and resolving conflicts. Leveraging these traditional support systems can enhance conflict resolution efforts and provide families with culturally relevant guidance.

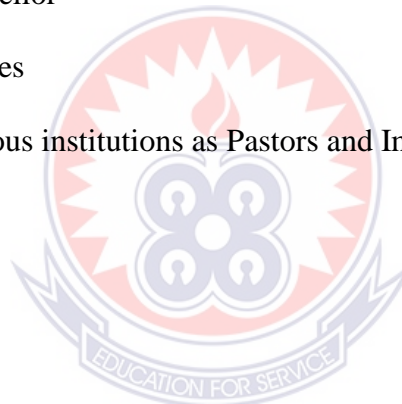
Policymakers and social service providers should prioritize child-focused family policy interventions, ensuring that children's rights to education, emotional support, and security are protected regardless of marital disputes. Local governments or NGOs operating in the Birim North District should consider introducing community

education programs that promote conflict resolution, responsible parenting, and awareness of children's developmental needs. Additionally, integrating local traditions into formal interventions can make conflict-resolution mechanisms more culturally sensitive and effective.

### **5.6 Recommendation for Future Research**

Future research can be carried out to ascertain the role of the extended family in providing support for the upbringing of children through the resolution of marital conflicts among couples. Recommendations should be made to babies or organisations/institutions, etc.

- (i) Marriage counsellor
- (ii) Heads of families
- (iii) Heads of religious institutions as Pastors and Imams



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## APPENDIX

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Introduction

I am Emmanuel Osei, a student of University of Education, Winneba. The topic for my research project is, “effects of marital conflict on children’s upbringing in the New Abirem Township in the Birim North District”. The purpose of this interview is to help me acquire information about the topic for my thesis to enable me to complete my program of study. Thank you for spending your time to take this interview.

#### Section A: Participants’ Background Information

*Kindly provide the following personal information:*

1. Age

Husband: .....

Wife: .....

2. Number of years married: .....

3. Level of education

Husband:.....

Wife:.....



#### Section B: Causes of Marital Conflicts Among Married Couples

*The following questions are to solicit information on the causes of marital conflicts among married couples.*

4. Kindly explain your understanding of marital conflicts.

.....  
.....

5. Explain the causes of marital conflict.

.....

**Section C: Effects Of Marital Conflicts On Children’s Upbringing**

*The following questions are to solicit information on the effects of marital conflicts on children’s upbringing.*

6. Indicate your views on the effects of marital conflicts.

.....  
.....

7. Explain how marital conflicts affect the upbringing of children.

.....  
.....

**Section D: Measures That Can Be Implemented To Minimise The Effects Of Marital Conflicts On Children’s Upbringing**

*The following questions are to solicit information on the measures that can be implemented to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children’s upbringing.*

8. Indicate some of the measures you think can be implemented to minimise the effects of marital conflicts on children’s upbringing.

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