



**EFFECT OF IMAGO RELATIONSHIP THERAPY (IRT) ON MARITAL
DISSATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED INDIVIDUALS LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS IN
THE SANKERA AXIS OF BENUE STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) on marital dissatisfaction among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the Sankera axis of Benue State, Nigeria, with specific focus on economic capability and educational disparities. The study was guided by two research questions and two corresponding hypotheses, and anchored on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory and John Bowlby's Attachment Theory. A quasi-experimental pre-test, post-test control group design was adopted. The population consisted of 33,195 married individuals living with HIV/AIDS across Katsina-Ala, Logo, and Ukum Local Government Areas, while a sample of 50 participants was selected using a multi-stage purposive sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed Marital Dissatisfaction Scale (MDS), validated by experts and found reliable with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.911. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that Imago Relationship Therapy significantly improved economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the experimental group compared to the control group. The study also found that Imago Relationship Therapy significantly reduced marital dissatisfaction arising from educational disparities. The study concluded that Imago Relationship Therapy is an effective intervention for improving marital adjustment among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS, particularly in relation to economic cooperation and educational imbalance. It is therefore recommended that Imago Relationship Therapy be integrated into counselling practices and marital intervention programmes within HIV/AIDS support services to enhance relationship stability and family well-being.

Keywords: Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT); Educational Disparity; Economic Capability.

Introduction

Marital dissatisfaction continues to pose a serious challenge among couples globally, cutting across psychological, economic, cultural, and social dimensions. When unresolved, it often leads to emotional distress, reduced family stability, separation, and divorce. Research has shown that persistent marital conflict negatively affects not only the spouses but also children, resulting in

depression, poor academic performance, behavioural difficulties, and reduced social adjustment (Rafatu & Sanusi, 2016).

In contemporary society, marital satisfaction is closely linked to the ability of couples to manage life pressures such as economic hardship and educational imbalance. Whisman (2019) noted that marital discord significantly reduces emotional well-being and increases the risk of relationship breakdown, while Amato and James (2019) associated poor marital quality with both psychological and physical health challenges.

Within African societies, marriage is a central social institution that ensures continuity, stability, and communal identity. However, increasing cases of marital dissatisfaction reflect deeper structural challenges, including economic instability and educational inequality between spouses. Many marriages are built on expectations shaped by cultural norms and personal experiences, and when such expectations are unmet, marital conflict often emerges (Vaterlaus, 2017).

The situation is more complex among couples living with HIV/AIDS, particularly in resource-constrained settings such as the Sankera axis of Benue State, Nigeria. Economic capability becomes a major determinant of marital stability, as the cost of treatment, reduced work capacity, and unemployment place significant financial pressure on households. Studies have shown that economic strain is closely associated with poor health outcomes and reduced adherence to treatment, further worsening marital tension (BMC Health Services Research, 2024).

Educational disparities also contribute significantly to marital dissatisfaction. In many parts of the Sankera axis, men tend to have higher educational attainment than women due to long-standing cultural practices that limit female education. This imbalance often results in differences in understanding, communication ability, and decision-making within marriages. Low literacy levels can therefore hinder effective communication and mutual understanding between partners, leading to misunderstanding and emotional disconnection.

Among couples living with HIV/AIDS, these challenges are intensified by stigma, psychological stress, and reduced economic productivity. Consequently, marital dissatisfaction becomes more pronounced, especially where there is poor communication and unequal access to knowledge and resources. In response to these challenges, Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) has been identified as a structured therapeutic approach aimed at improving emotional connection, communication, and mutual understanding between partners. Despite its global recognition, limited empirical studies have examined its effectiveness in addressing economic and educational dimensions of marital dissatisfaction among couples living with HIV/AIDS in the Sankera axis of Benue State, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the availability of medical interventions for HIV/AIDS, married individuals living with the condition in the Sankera axis of Benue State continue to experience persistent marital dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction is strongly influenced by economic and educational challenges that affect relationship stability and family functioning.

Although several studies have examined the socioeconomic and psychosocial challenges of people living with HIV/AIDS, little empirical attention has been given to how structured therapeutic interventions such as Imago Relationship Therapy can address marital dissatisfaction arising from economic and educational disparities among couples in the Sankera axis of Benue State, Nigeria. This creates a significant research gap that this study seeks to fill by examining the effectiveness

of Imago Relationship Therapy in improving economic-related and education-related marital satisfaction among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to explore the effect of imago relationship therapy on marital dissatisfaction among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria. It is on this light that the researcher seeks to determine the following objectives:

1. Effect of imago relationship therapy on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria
2. Effect of imago relationship therapy on educational disparities among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Based on the objectives of the study, the following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent does Imago Relationship Therapy influence economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue State, Nigeria?
2. How does Imago Relationship Therapy affect educational disparities among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H₀₁: Imago Relationship Therapy has no significant effect on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue State, Nigeria.

H₀₂: Imago Relationship Therapy has no significant effect on educational disparities among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue State, Nigeria.

Research Methods

The study adopted a pre-test, post-test, control group quasi-experimental research design to examine the effect of Imago Relationship Therapy (IRT) on marital dissatisfaction among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue State, Nigeria. This design is considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the independent variable (Imago Relationship Therapy) and the dependent variables (economic capability and educational disparities) without random assignment of participants. The experimental group received Imago Relationship Therapy intervention, while the control group was exposed to a placebo treatment in the form of health education on regular medical check-ups. Both groups were assessed before and after the intervention using a structured Marital Dissatisfaction Scale to determine changes resulting from the treatment.

The study area was Sankera axis in Benue State, comprising Katsina-Ala, Logo, and Ukum Local Government Areas, selected due to its high population of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS and the presence of several treatment facilities. The population of the study consisted of 33,195 married HIV-positive individuals, from which a sample of 50 participants was drawn using a multi-stage sampling technique involving convenience, quota, and simple random

sampling methods. Data were collected using a validated Marital Dissatisfaction Scale focusing on economic capability and educational disparities, with high reliability established through a pilot test (Cronbach Alpha = 0.911). Data analysis was carried out using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (ANCOVA) at 0.05 level of significance to determine the effect of Imago Relationship Therapy while controlling for pre-test differences.

Data presentation, analysis, and interpretation

In this section research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation, while analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to test the hypotheses of the study at .05 level of significance.

Research question one

What is the effect of imago relationship therapy on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores on the effect of imago relationship therapy on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean
		mean	std. dev	mean	std. dev	gain
EXP	50	2.98	1.15	2.34	1.25	-0.64
Control	50	2.78	0.59	2.59	0.61	-0.19
Mean difference		0.20		0.25		0.45

Source: Field work (2025).

Table 1 shows that the pretest effect of imago relationship therapy on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria in the experimental group is 2.98 with standard deviation of 1.05, while those in the control group have mean score of 2.78 with standard deviation 0.59. The difference between the pretest scores of the two groups is 0.20, an indication that the two groups have same level of concept, before treatment. After the effect of the pretest has been statistically removed, the posttest mean score on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS of the experimental group is 2.34 with standard deviation of 1.25, while that of the control group is 2.59 with standard deviation 0.61. The difference between the posttest mean score on economic capability of the two groups is 0.25. Meanwhile, the difference between the pretest and posttest economic capability in the experimental group (who received rational imago relationship therapy) is .64, while that of those who did not receive the Therapy is 0.19. The married individuals that received Imago relationship therapy improved on their economic capability by 0.45 over those that did not receive imago relationship therapy. This implies that the economic capabilities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS improved, with the imago relationship therapy more than their counterparts that did not.

Research Question two

What is the effect of imago relationship therapy on educational disparities among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores on the effect of imago relationship therapy on educational disparities among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria

Group	N	Pretest		Posttest		Mean
		mean	std. dev	mean	std. dev	gain
EXP	50	2.68	0.58	2.14	0.56	-0.54
Control	50	2.41	0.85	2.87	0.58	+0.46
Mean difference		0.27		0.73		0.08

Source: Field work (2025).

Table 1 shows that the pretest educational disparities scores of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria in the experimental group is 2.68 with standard deviation of 0.58, while those in the control group have mean score of 2.41 with standard deviation 0.85. The difference between the pretest scores of the two groups is 0.27, an indication that the two groups have same level of educational disparities, before treatment. After the effect of the pretest has been statistically removed, the posttest mean score educational disparities of the experimental group is 2.14 with standard deviation of 0.56, while that of the control group is 2.87 with standard deviation 0.58. The difference between the posttest mean score on educational disparities of the two groups is 0.73. There is a difference 0.54 between the pretest and posttest educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the experimental group (who received imago relationship therapy), while that of those who did not receive the Therapy have a positive difference of 0.46. The implication of these results is that that the educational disparities of the married individuals living with HIV/AIDS that received imago relationship therapy improved, whereas the educational disparities of the married individuals living with HIV/AIDS that did not receive imago relationship therapy heightened by 0.46.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant effect of imago relationship therapy on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria.

Table 3: One-way ANCOVA of score of economic capability of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria.

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta squared
Corrected Model	3.37 ^a	2	1.69	10.00	0.00	0.21
Intercept	23.049	1	23.05	136.66	0.00	0.64
Pre-test group	0.09	1	0.09	0.56	0.46	0.01
Error	2.82	1	2.82	16.70	0.00	0.18
Total	12.99	77	0.17			
Corrected Total	741.41	80				
	16.361	79				

a. R Squared = .206 (Adjusted R Squared = .186)

Table 3 is a one-way between groups analysis of covariance to compare the economic capabilities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS. After adjusting for the pre-test scores, there is a significant difference between the two groups on participant posttest economic capability $F(1, 77) = 16.70$, $p = 0.00$, with large effect size (partial eta squared = 0.18). The effect size shows that 18% of the variance in economic capability of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS is based on the treatment (imago relationship therapy) used. Similarly, there was a weak relationship between the pretest and posttest scores on the participant, as indicated by a partial eta squared value of 0.01. Thus, the hypothesis of There is no significant effect of imago relationship therapy on economic capability among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria is, hereby, rejected. That is, imago relationship therapy has significant effect on economic capability. This indicates that imago relationship therapy is capable of changing economic capability of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria.

Hypothesis two: There is no significant effect of imago relationship therapy on educational disparity among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria.

Table 4: One-way ANCOVA of score of educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria.

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig	Partial Eta squared
Corrected Model	8.81 ^a	2	4.41	16.27	0.00	0.30
Intercept	18.44	1	18.44	68.09	0.00	0.47
Pre-test group	4.66	1	4.66	17.19	0.00	0.18
Error	5.80	1	5.80	21.43	0.00	0.22
Total	20.85	77	0.27			
Corrected Total	586.39	80				
	29.67	79				

a. R Squared = .297 (Adjusted R Squared = .279)

Results in Table 4 show a one-way between groups analysis of covariance to compare the educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria. After adjusting for the pre-test scores, there is a significant difference between the two groups on participants posttest educational disparities $F(1, 77) = 21.43$, $p = 0.00$, with large effect size (partial eta squared = 0.22). The effect size shows that 22% of the variance in educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria is based on the treatment (imago relationship therapy) used. Similarly, there was a strong relationship between the pretest and posttest scores on the participants educational disparities, as indicated by a partial eta squared value of 0.18. Thus, the hypothesis of There is no significant effect of imago relationship therapy on educational disparity among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria is, hereby, rejected. That is, imago relationship therapy has significant effect on educational disparity. This indicates that imago relationship therapy is capable of improving educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS

Discussion of Findings

The Discussion of Findings was done based on the variables of the study

Findings on Effect of Imago Relationship Therapy on economic capabilities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria the study established that married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria, the married individuals that received Imago relationship therapy improved on their economic capability by 0.45 over those that did not receive imago relationship therapy. This implies that the economic capabilities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS improved, with the imago relationship therapy more than their counterparts that did not. Also hypothesis tested implies that after adjusting for the pre-test scores, there is a significant difference between the two groups on participant posttest economic capability with large effect size (partial eta squared. The effect size shows that 18% of the variance in economic capability of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS is based on the treatment (imago relationship therapy) used.

The findings is in agreement with Awoke, Emmanuel, Nnadozie and Ali (2023) who investigated on the effect of imago therapy and emotional focused therapy on marital adjustment of couples among primary school teachers in Abia state who found that imago therapy and emotional focused therapy combined significantly improve marital harmony among the maladjusted couples in Abia state. It enhances factors such as couples' expectations of each other, parenting styles, financial issues, friends, sexual relations, and relationships with relatives.

The findings on effect of Imago Relationship Therapy on educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS, shows the difference between the pretest scores of the two groups indicates that the two groups have same level of concept, before treatment. The difference between the pretest and posttest educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in the experimental group (who received imago relationship therapy) is higher than those who did not receive the Therapy. The implication of these results is that married individuals living with HIV/AIDS that received imago relationship therapy improved on educational disparities, whereas the educational disparities of the married individuals living with HIV/AIDS that did not receive Imago Relationship Therapy did not improved. Also the hypotheses tested After adjusting for the pre-test scores, there is a significant difference between the two groups on participants posttest educational disparities the effect size shows that 22% of the variance in educational disparities of married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Sankera axis, Benue state, Nigeria is based on the treatment (imago relationship therapy) used.

The study contradict the study conducted by Cheng Zhang (2023) on the research titled The Impact of Education Level on Marital Satisfaction results show that education level had a positive and significant impact on marital satisfaction, and the basic conclusions did not changed when the measurement of education level changed or the data was changed. After the endogenous problem was solved, the effect still remained significant. The mechanism analysis shows that education level could affect individual marital satisfaction through income and spiritual abundance.

The findings of this study is in line with what Chidozie E. Nwafor (2023) carried out a research on the Influence of Couple's Education Attainment on Marital Satisfaction where One hundred and ninety one (191) participants were drawn from five faculties of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The findings show that the level of education attainment significantly influences marital satisfaction.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that Imago Relationship Therapy has a significant effect on marital dissatisfaction among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS in

Sankera axis, Benue State, Nigeria, particularly in relation to economic capability and educational disparities.

Recommendations

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

1. Imago Relationship Therapy should be adopted as an effective counselling intervention for improving economic cooperation and reducing marital dissatisfaction among married individuals living with HIV/AIDS, particularly in resource-limited communities such as Sankera axis.

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