Conflict management in Black African marriages in an urban context: an exploratory study

By

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Masters in Social Work
in the

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK AND CRIMINOLOGY
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
at the

UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA SUPERVISOR: PROF CE PRINSLOO

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Let me take the opportunity to thank my supervisor, Prof. Reineth Prinsloo, for her guidance, support and encouragement which she gave to me during the study. Your faith in the institution of marriage and family continue to inspire and encourage me to do more about the institution.

I would like to express my gratitude to the El-Bethel Christian Fellowship family for their love and support throughout the journey of my studies and I know you are the right people in my life. The couples from Gospel Fire Ministries and Pastor Zuma, I appreciate your time and efforts. I am especially indebted to the couples who willingly participated in the study by sharing their personal experiences with me.

Let me express my deepest appreciation to my family, my mother Ms. Annah Motjetse Moshatane, my brothers Moshe Spaumer and Willem Spaumer including every friend who supported me through this journey. To my son, Mofenyi Spaumer - you continue to inspire me to love and share the warmth you are giving me to the world. You have all shown me that it all is possible and with the right people like you, I know that more can be achieved.

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my God for His love and mercy. Accepting your love through Jesus Christ gave me Hope beyond all Hopes. I know that all things are possible if I believe.

ABSTRACT

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BLACK AFRICAN MARRIAGES IN AN URBAN CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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Conflict is an inevitable part of any relationship and it is this underlying force that brings about change and transformation within the relationship. Therefore, as couples develop strategies and routines that can help them in situations where conflicts arise, it is important to consider such strategies to empower other married couples. To solve conflict in African couples it is important that those conflicts be understood in their social context. The western psychotherapy places too much emphasis on the right of the individual, competition, self-actualisation, and individuality, these being concepts which are not acknowledged in the traditional Afro-centric perspective. It is important in assisting helping professionals to understand how culture influences couples in conflict, especially from Black African couples' perspective.

The research study aims to investigate how Black African couples manage conflicts in their marriages. The approach used in this research study is the qualitative approach where eighteen married Black African heterosexual couples and two groups of married women only and two groups of married men only were interviewed. The research was primarily interested in the meaning that the subjects give to their life experiences; therefore, the qualitative research approach was suitable for the study. To give insight into how Black married couples manage conflict in their marriage, the researcher made use of the collective case study design. Semi-structured interviews, one-on-one interviews as well as group interviews were conducted as primary data collection methods.

The findings in this study illustrate communication, finances and family as the major causes of conflict in Black African marriages. The systemic nature of the African marriage allows Black African couples to invite family members, friends, pastors or

third parties to mediate during conflicts as external intervention during conflict. The use of professionals like social workers or psychologists is considered as the last resort after family members, friends, pastors or third parties have been consulted. Communication, external intervention of pastors and staying humble during conflict are considered as some of the methods couples use to manage conflict which have proven to yield positive results.

The research results assist those in the helping professionals like social workers, counsellors and psychologists working with Black African couples to understand what the causes of conflict in their marriage are. It further brought to light the kind of mediators the helping professionals can use during conflict in African couples' relationships. Those providing professional services should always consider that in providing services to Black African couples they might not be the couple's first point of contact for help.

Key concepts

Marriage
Conflict management
Black African marriages
Urban context
Ecological systems theory

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

A marriage or intimate relationship consists of several processes, including communication and management of conflict. Conflict is a normal part of life and inevitable in close relationships (Benokraitis, 2011:282). However, conflict is usually associated with something negative as it is viewed as destructive and undesirable (Nel, Kirsten, Swanepoel, Erasmus & Poisat, 2012:19). Conflict can be potentially healthy and even beneficial as it is often a prerequisite for change, growth and development. Conflict management is one of the most important determinants of the well-being of a relationship and marital satisfaction (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:322), Marital conflict may be of such a nature that it results in psychopathological symptoms in parents and may result in psychopathological symptoms in children as well (Cumming & Davies, 2010:1). The maintenance of a marriage involves the ability to make creative use of conflict and if conflict is managed constructively, then growth and enrichment of development is achieved (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000:321). This research study is motivated by the desire to explore how conflict is managed in Black African marriages due to the lack of published research on the subject within the African context.

Management of conflict as well as family functioning within Black African relationships needs an approach within the African context. Traditional approaches to conflict management within Black African involve extended family systems which differ from Western approaches which seek assistance from independent councillors.

To contextualise the study, it is important to provide a definition of the main concepts of this study. However, these concepts will be discussed in more detail in the literature chapters to follow.

Marriage: The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2009:439) and Kunz (2013:20) indicate that marriage is a legally recognised relationship between an adult male and female that carries certain rights and obligations. In this study marriage will be considered as a union of an adult male and female adult.

Customary marriages: The Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 120 of 1998 define a customary marriage as one that is "negotiated, celebrated or concluded according to any of the systems of indigenous African customary law which exist in South Africa". This does not include marriages concluded in accordance with Hindu, Muslim or other religious rites.

Conflict: Conflict can be described as a serious disagreement or argument; an incompatibility between opinions or principles (*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2009:300). Greeff and Bruyne (2000:322) describe conflict as the process that begins when one party perceives that the other one has frustrated some concerns of his or hers. In this study, conflict will refer to the disagreement or arguments between two legally married people.

Management: Management is a process of managing or control of disorder (*The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2009:300). Conflict management will be looked at in this study as ways in which African married couples manage or control disagreements or argument in their marriage.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Marriages and families received more attention from a western perspective or approaches (the perspective and approaches will be used interchangeably to mean the same), focusing on the nuclear family and not much on the strengths of the Black African kinship family system (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:18). In the context of this study, Black African refers to black people who were born in Africa. In the case of Black African marriages and families, it is difficult to know how people who are having crises in their marriages were helped since little has been recorded and what is known has been translated orally, through folklore, traditions, art, singing and dance (Petty, 2006:111). Based on a search done on Ebscohost and other scholarly search engines by the subject specialist at the University of Pretoria's Library unit, there is no evidence on the topic as well as no previous research on the topic both nationally and internationally.

There has been research on conflict management styles and the way these styles are

used within the marriage in the African context, but there is nothing that seeks to understand how conflict is managed among Black African married couples. Although the publication by Draper (1989) is not a recently published reference, it still has importance due to the lack of current research on African marriages. Draper (1989:146-147) emphasises the importance for therapists not to apply western concepts of psychotherapy and counselling, as the individual in the Black African context is expected to invest in and in return be nurtured by the community and universe. Petty (2006:111) indicates that the western psychotherapy places too much emphasis on the rights of the individual, competition, self-actualisation, individuality and personal responsibility. However, such factors are not acknowledged in the traditional Afro-centric perspective, which in this study will be used as a frame of reference wherein a phenomenon are viewed from the perspective of African person. Even amid the acculturation of the western world-view, it will be important for helping professions to understand how culture influences couples in conflict from a Black African perspective.

Conflict is inevitably part of a relationship (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131). Conflict is a force underlying change and transformation. The challenge is how conflict is approached, managed and resolved (Nel et al., 2012:19). Conflicts in marriage may influence the vitality of a marriage and vary from couple to couple, though the intensity of the pain runs deep for all (Chapman, 2008:16). Couples faced with situations that bring about conflicts between them develop strategies and routines that can help them to deal with those conflicts (Kunz, 2011:54). When an individual decides to choose a long-term partner, he or she is inevitably choosing a specific set of unsolvable problems that he or she will be dealing with for the next ten, twenty or fifty years (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131). Every marriage consisting of two people from different family backgrounds is bound to have conflicts/problems, as the people coming together are not from the same family of origin. It will be important to note that even among those from similar family or parental backgrounds there are conflicts and differences.

Families, like other systems, are divided into subsystems such as parents, siblings, and kin who join to perform various family functions. Hepworth, Rooney, Rooney, Strom-Gottfried and Larsen (2006:246) indicate that a member of the family system influences and is influenced by every other member, creating a system with unique properties and that is governed by both implicit and explicit rules that specify roles, power structure,

forms of communication, and ways of problem solving, decision making, and negotiating. Roles, power structure and communication patterns are the dynamic processes of the system and the interrelated and interdependent fundamental parts (Hepworth et al., 2006:246). Conflict in marriages occurs in a person or family and situation context. Internal and external factors can impinge upon, disrupt family functioning, and influence family dynamics and, as such, when families experience a disruption, family dynamics direct toward restoring equilibrium.

Conflict management can be influenced by cultural background (Greeff & de Bruyne, 2000:324). Increasing urbanisation among Black Africans living in towns or cities have acculturated into a western world-view and moving away from their cultural socialisation (Charema, 2004:501). The acculturation of Black African people into a western world-view has the potential of getting rid of indigenous trends that are important for the sustenance of marriages. In an interview with Manyaka (2011), he indicated that among young married couples there is confusion about the actual method to use when there is conflict in their marriage, because of not knowing which view to follow between the western and African world-view. In the interview, Manyaka (2011) indicated that in a marriage there is often a tendency of wanting to implement the view that suits the individual in the relationship.

In the case of a Black African marriage, the two families (not just the parents of the children concerned) and the children negotiate the marriage of any two people. Negotiations involve extended family members like the aunts and uncles from both families (Bekker, 2001:42). Petty (2006:114) indicates that in Black African marriages those who provided counselling and support were uncles, aunts, grandparents, elders in the community, traditional healers, church elders and ministers, that were called on in times of family distress. Even these highly-esteemed members were mostly connected to the family in some way. They were highly respected for the wisdom that they had accumulated in their own lives (Petty, 2006:114). When there is conflict in a Black African marriage, the elders will act as a jury or the board to the mediation. They are members from among the immediate or extended family of the married couple, they would listen to the opposing views with empathy, inductively, deconstructive, unpacking and hermeneutically to resolve any conflict in the marriage (Nwoye, 2006:449). They were also called upon to give advice when a young man experienced problem in his marriage.

When families were unable to resolve their disputes on their own, they turned to the elders in the community for counsel and guidance.

Traditional healers are consulted to deal with many problems, which manifest themselves in the form of bad luck, illness or constant hardship (Petty, 2006:115). Where there is conflict in a marriage, the traditional healer will be consulted to find the cause and solution of the conflict. The traditional healer will provide counselling in the form of giving advice and suggesting solutions, without giving the individuals involved the opportunity to become active in finding solutions to their problems (Petty, 2006:115). When the outcome of counselling is unfavourable, the person seeking guidance is blamed in place of the counsellor or traditional healer.

Values and beliefs, fears and suspicions, interests and needs, attitudes and actions, relationships and networks should be taken fully into consideration when dealing with conflict management either in the family or in societies (Brock-Utne, 2002:6). Origins and root causes of the conflicts need to be explored, so that a shared understanding of the past and present is developed.

Research on how Black African married couples deal with conflict is necessary since, based on a search done by the subject specialist for Social Work at the University of Pretoria Library, there is more information available about conflict management or conflict resolution in marriages from the perspective of the western world. Africa is more of a patriarchal society (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:17). It will be important to understand how married couples manage to grow despite their differences, which sometimes, if not most of the times, result in conflicts. It is important to understand Black African concepts of conflict resolution methods, techniques and processes (Brock-Utne, 2002:5). Charema (2004:50) emphasises that there is increasing urbanisation where Black African people living in urban areas have adopted the western world-view, moving away from their cultural socialisation.

1.3   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework applicable to the context of this research study is the Ecological system theory of Bronfenbrenner as discussed by Kunz, 2011:16).
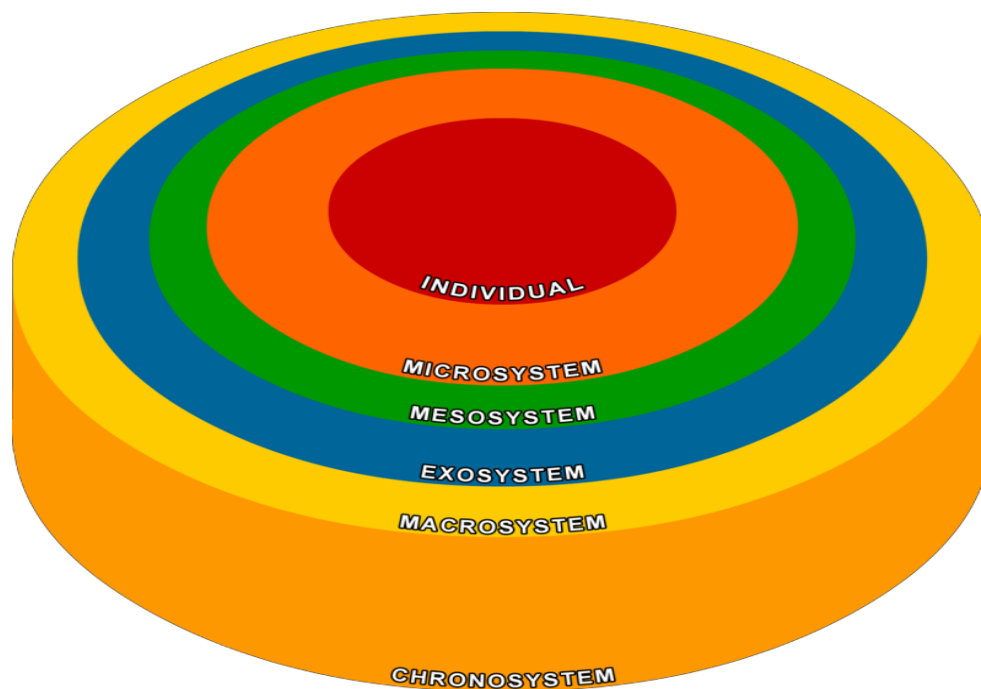
Figure 1: The Ecological System theory of Bronfenbrenner (Kunz, 2011:17)

To study the conflict management in marriages it is important to look beyond the couple's immediate environment and consider the interaction between the couple's biological makeup and wider external factors (Kunz 2011:16-17). Five environmental systems influence the family, which Kunz (2011:16) explains as follows:

- The microsystem is the couple's immediate relationships or organisations that the couple interacts with such as family members or colleagues.
- The mesosystem describes how various parts of the couple's microsystems interact.
- The exosystem includes outside influences that the couple may not interact with personally but have a significant impact on them.
- The macrosystem describes the culture in which the individuals live including the relative freedoms permitted by the national government, cultural values and the economy, all which may affect the couple positively or negatively.
- The chronosystem represents models that examine the impact of normative and non-normative life transitions on family processes and couple development over time.

When working from the traditional Afro-centric perspective, it will be to consider that behaviour and functioning can only be explained from an ecosystem point of view (Petty, 2006:114). Humans are part of a physical, social, cultural and spiritual environment and can only be understood within these contexts (Petty, 2006:113). The strength of the ecological systems theory lies in its ability to explore the complex interconnectedness of sub-systems (Davies, 2000:342). Intervention with two people in a marriage requires that they must be understood as part of an informal system. Conflicts in marriage can arise because the system broke down or failed to produce sufficient resources to allow the system to continue working as before (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:513). In identifying how conflicts are managed in marriages, the social worker can work with the clients by identifying the different systems that the users are part of. The social worker will then be able to analyse how the different systems interact, and which part of those systems causes problems. This will provide a broader context to assist in the assessment of the system functioning.

During therapy, clients should always be viewed as a product of wider forces (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:513). When solving or managing marital conflicts, it is important to consider the kind of system each person in the marriage is coming from and this should be done by exploring how conflicts were managed in the systems they came from. Marital partners come from self-regulating systems and they function according to rules and regulations from their pre-marital family systems. In implementing the systems theory, the social worker will need to understand how conflicts were managed in the couple's family of origin.

Homeostasis as a systems concept describes the function of a system to maintain or preserve equilibrium or balance (Hepworth et al., 2006:246). The study will explore how Black African married couples maintain equilibrium or balance when there is conflict in their relationships. Hepworth et al. (2006:246) further indicate that when faced with disruption, a system tends to try to regulate and maintain system cohesion. The study also explores how Black African married couples develop mechanisms that serve to maintain balance (homeostasis) in their structures and operations.

The ecological system theory assists people in the helping professions to understand the relationship between various parts of a system and between different systems.

Davies (2000:342) indicates that this will assist to understand the impact of an action "here" and how it can be understood in relation to its impact "there". It can be possible that each person in the marriage can advocate for his or her family of origin system to be implemented in the new relationship, and this can result in conflict in marriage if there is no compromise. The systems theory looks at family conflicts as products of relationships between all the family members. To bring change in a family, it will require changing how all the family members behave in relation to each other rather than pinning blame on a single member.

1.4 RATIONALE AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

A spousal subsystem is the basic unit of the family as it is central to the life of the family in the early years and continues to play a significant role over the life span of the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2002:32). Social work services focus on meeting the needs of as well as building on the strength of, individuals, families, communities and other social groups through the provision of a comprehensive range of services and programmes that extend beyond the inherent capacity of individuals and their support network (Department of Social Development, 2006:31). The understanding of conflict management in Black African marriages possibly may inform prevention services and rehabilitation services to couples and their families. The study will be helpful to those involved in family therapy, as the knowledge gained can result in prevention intervention aimed at strengthening and building the capacity and the self-reliance of the clients. It may provide information for developing programmes for early intervention.

In the context of the Black African family, it will be important to understand the origins and the roots of conflicts and how they are managed. It is also important to understand how the gradual erosion of the values that existed within traditional Black African families and the replacement of these values by modern ones may have influenced the conflict management methods amongst Black African families. The study seeks to explore if there are methods in the indigenous culture of the Black African family that can contribute to the experiences needed to withstand crises in marriages. It further seeks to explore the processes of marital conflict management in Black African families. Research studies within the context of the western marriage and family cannot provide the necessary point of departure to understand and intervene in the context of the Black

African marriage. This research study may assist the professional working in marriage and family intervention to understand the Black African family system's approach to managing conflict in the family.

Africa is more of a patriarchal society (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:17). It will be important to understand how married couples manage to grow despite their differences, which sometimes, if not most of the times, result in conflicts. It is important to understand Black African concepts of conflict resolution methods, techniques and processes (Brock-Utne, 2002:5). Charema (2004:50) emphasises that there is increasing urbanisation where Black African people living in urban areas have adopted the western world-view, moving away from their cultural socialisation. The aim of the study is to bring to light methods and intervention strategies that Black African couples apply in resolving conflict in marriages. Understanding the strength of conflict management in Black African marriages is consistent with the values and principles of the social work profession, which look at the enhancement of quality of life and developing the full potential of every individual, group or community (Hepworth et al., 2006:261). This study will further bring to understanding the indigenous knowledge of conflict management in Black African marriages.

To achieve the above, it will be necessary to explore and understand the cultural process of marriage negotiations and the process of conflict management among Black African people. It will be important to understand not only the actions the couple take in conflict management, but also the role of external systems such as religious and therapeutic systems in communities. Chapman (2008:17) indicates that for most couples in conflict, the ultimate solution will depend not only upon their own actions but also upon the support of the religious and therapeutic community.

The study is exploratory and aims to gain rich individualised data regarding an unexplored field (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). The research question is based on the research problem or area of interest and reduces the problem for it to be handled in a single study. The research question for this study is: How do Black African couples in an urban context manage conflict in their marriage? The study explores the phenomenon within the Mamelodi-Nellmapius community in the Tshwane Metropolitan Area, Gauteng Province, South Africa. The reason for choosing this community is that the researcher

is working as a social worker in the community and is responsible for family preservation.

1.5 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF RESEARCH STUDY

1.5.1 Goal of the study

The goal of this study is to explore conflict management in Black African marriages within an urban context.

1.5.2 Objectives of the study

The following objectives serve to achieve the goal of exploration:

- Conceptualise the kinship family system within the Black African context;
- Contextualise 'Black African marriages' to obtain a theoretical frame of reference in understanding how conflicts are managed in Black African marriages;
- Explore and discuss conflict management within the context of marriages;
- Explore how Black African married couples experience conflict and how they conceptualise it;
- Explore how couples react to conflict in their marriage and how it influences their systemic functioning; and
- Compare participants' responses with existing information about conflict management in intimate relationships to establish a frame of reference for understanding conflict management in Black African marriages.

1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH AND TYPE

The research approach chosen for this study was the qualitative approach because the primary goal of qualitative studies is to describe and understand rather than explaining human behaviour, as it was intended with this study. In a qualitative study, the approach allows for a different view of the selected theme and in which the participants have a more open-ended way of giving their views and demonstrating their actions (Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit, and 2004:5). In qualitative research, the researcher keeps a focus on learning the meaning that the participants hold about the problem or issue, not the meaning that the researcher or authors of literature brings to the research (Fouché &

Delport, 2011:65). Using the qualitative approach, the researcher understood how Black African couples manage conflict in their marriage. Henning et al. (2004:5) reiterate qualitative research is the type of inquiry in which the qualities, characteristics or properties of a phenomenon are examined for better understanding and explanation. A qualitative approach provided the opportunity for the researcher to explore how Black African married couples in an urban context manage conflict in their marriage. The approach provided insight and allowed the researcher to achieve rapport and thus reach a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Research may be labelled as either basic or applied and they are the broad goals of research, with exploration, description and explanation as the objectives of such knowledge generating research (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:94-96). An applied study regarding management of conflict in Black African marriages provides information that could be used in social work service delivery with these clients. Explorative research was conducted to gain insight into a situation, phenomenon, community or individual (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:95). This kind of study was necessary to provide basic information about conflict management in Black African marriages. In explorative research, the researcher aims to become conversant with basic facts and to create a general picture of conditions (Fouché & De Vos, 2011:96). The reason for this research was that there is lack of information regarding the phenomenon.

1.7   RESEARCH DESIGN

The researcher used the case study as research design to obtain an intimate familiarity with the social worlds of Black African married couples and searched for patterns in their lives, words and actions in the context of the case (Fouché & Schurink, 2011:320). The case study design provided the opportunity to explore how Black African married couples manage conflicts in their marriage. The research design is a procedural plan, structure and strategy of investigation (Kumar, 2011:44). Fouché and Schurink (2011:320) indicate that a case study is an exploration or in-depth analysis of a bounded system or a single or multiple case, over a period. The case studied provided meaning that the subjects gave to their life experiences.

The research design for this study was a collective case study in that it provided further

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understanding to the researcher on conflict management in Black African marriages. The researcher explored the personal accounts of Black African married couples in an urban context on the management of conflict through individual interview and focus groups. A rich narrative was desirable to provide insight into how Black African couples resolve/manage conflicts in their marriage.

1.8   RESEARCH METHODS

For this study, a qualitative approach was used to understand the point of view of the research participants who were legally married Black African couples in an urban context. As described by Fox and Bayat (2007:52), the population is a group of individuals who share common characteristics and represent the whole or sum of the total cases involved in the study. Purposive sampling was used because it was based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample was composed of elements that contained the most characteristics representative or typical attributes of the population (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). Eighteen couples who met the criteria were selected randomly in the community of Tshwane, Pretoria East (Nellmapius and Mamelodi). Focus groups of married men and women were chosen to provide further insight into the phenomenon being studied. Semi-structured interviews were used to gain a detailed picture of research participants' beliefs about the phenomenon. To capture data for analysis, field notes and a digital recorder was utilised. The purpose of the study was to provide insight into how Black African married couples in an urban context manage conflict in their marriages.

1.9   CONTENTS OF RESEARCH REPORT

Chapter 1: General introduction

Chapter 2: Literature study: The nature of Black African marriages and family functioning within the context of system functioning in the Ecological System theory.

Chapter 3: Literature study: Communication and conflict management in marriage and intimate relationships

Chapter 4: Research methodology and empirical study

Chapter 5: Summary, conclusions and recommendations

1.10   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- A serious limitation within the context of this study is the lack of publications on Black African marriages. The researcher had to rely on older resources and publications from a Western perspective. Since this is regarded as a limitation and it hindered the integration, the researcher therefore emphasises the necessity of this research study to address the lack of published research on the topic.

- The relatively small sample does not allow the researcher to generalise the research findings to the larger population.

- Only one community with most research participants being from the same culture with similar views were interviewed. The study did not represent all Black African marriages.

- Due to the research study only focusing on Black married couples in South Africa, specifically in Mamelodi and Nellmapius, it will be important to conduct similar research in urban areas which are closer to rural areas to compare the results.

- The study focused on heterosexual couples; it will be important to conduct such research among other types of couples to compare the results.

- Purposeful sampling was used to identify research participants. The researcher selected participants that best suited the identified criteria for inclusion in the sample, excluding the rest of the population.

CHAPTER 2
BLACK AFRICAN MARRIAGES AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Marriage continues to be important in Black African people's lives. It is therefore imperative to look at marriage from an African perspective and the meaning attached to it. Amongst Africans, marriage is not only about the couple getting married, but it also involves and joins the two families where the couple originates from. Marriage is also not only the process of the two people as there are traditional processes that should be followed and observed before the marriage can be legitimised. The Ecological Systems Theory conceptualises social work practice in a way that gives equal weight to the individuality of people. The family at large has influence on the individual's behaviour, to appreciate an individual, you will need to understand the family as a whole. A family is more than a collection of the individual's behaviour and is best understood within the context of the whole. It is difficult to understand a family looking at only one m\ember. The entire system should be examined to understand why one member is having a problem. It will therefore be important to look at how a family reaches agreements and negotiates differences within the context of the joining of two families.

In this chapter, the researcher will firstly look at the Ecological Systems Theory as a foundation for human functioning, the central concepts from this theory and some of the concerns of this theory. The latter includes a traditional concern for social justice which becomes a necessary complement to the ecological system model as the approach can be misused if it is employed in the absence of articulated social values. Secondly, the systems in the African family context will be explored and discussed. This section focuses on the family systems, which in the African context refer to more than the nuclear family, namely the relatives and extended family members. African marriage is a system, which mainly refers to the customary marriage and the components of relationships within the system of marriage which amongst others include the practice of *lobola*, choosing a partner and gender roles. Lastly, this chapter will cover mediation in African marriages which talks about the cultural heritage of *Ubuntu* that has provided the foundation of leadership, problem solving, decision making and other African rituals

that encourage confession.

2.2   THE ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY

As introduction to the discussion of systems in human functioning, the researcher will focus on a general discussion of systems.

2.2.1   Systems theory as a basis for human functioning

All people or groups of people in systems share a reciprocal influence on one another; systems theory recognises that everything in a system is constantly influencing everything else (Rothery, 2008:90). Ecological systems (or eco-system) theory has been arranged as a contemporary effort to conceptualise social work practice for the whole profession in a way that gives equal weight to the individuality of clients as people and to the social level, physical, and environments that determine their well-being (Rothery, 2008:96-98). A family must be recognised within the whole that is greater than the sum of the parts, as each person's role in the family is crucial for maintaining a balance in functioning between all members (Howe, 2012:36). A family is more than a collection of individuals; a family is a whole, larger than the sum of its parts and this indicates that individuals' behaviour is most clearly understood within the context of the whole (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2002:24). Rothery (2008:96-98) indicates that in systems, causes are circular rather than linear as systems possess structure, consisting of predictable patterns of behaviour and boundaries. Given the impossibility of relating effectively to the whole of creation, we randomly draw boundaries around a more manageable unit for analysis and intervention (Rothery, 2008:96-98). In this way, systems can be understood as separate entities and within the context of the whole.

Family system theorists argue that one cannot understand a family looking at only one member or even a dyad or triad within the family. It is important to examine the entire system to understand why one member is having problems or how the family boundaries are always somewhat arbitrary, but not entirely so (Howe, 2012:36).

When intervening in the family, it will be important to look at how the family reaches agreements and negotiates differences, which will give a great deal of insight about the

nature of the family system (Howe, 2012:36). Rothery (2008:93) indicates that boundaries are qualitatively different, in that the type and amount of information they restrict varies as systems that exchange information relatively freely which are considered open, whereas systems that rigidly restrict the flow of information are relatively closed. Social systems like families are never completely resistant to influence from outside so they are always to some extent open and can only be relatively closed. Rothery (2008:97) further indicates that excessive openness leads to a loss of identity and other risks, while excessive closeness results in deprivation. A balance is what is desirable with a system like families being open enough to access the resources they need to thrive but closed enough that undesirable influence can be screened out and identity maintained (Rothery, 2008:97). Turner (2006:587) emphasises that the basic claim of any systems theory is that the phenomenon under investigation is made up of elements and parts that are organised and interdependent and this organised interdependence is what constitutes a system which operates as a relatively bounded entity in interaction with an environment.

When working from the traditional Afro centric perspective it will be important to consider that behaviour and functioning are only explained from an eco-systemic point of view (Petty, 2006:114). Family is governed by explicit and implicit rules, regulations and conventions governing its behaviour and interactions individually, personally as well as interpersonally and jointly (Mwamwenda, 1996:478). Even though the source of Mwamwenda (1996) is dated it is regarded as an important reference within the context of limited published resources on African ways of life. Haselau, Kasiram and Simpson (2015:174) add to the African worldview in explaining the worldview as that of communality or "*Ubuntu*", which means a person, is a person through persons. This is primary to the African concept of the human being which sees people individually and communally as complex, with physical, social, emotional, metaphysical and spiritual elements both in life and after life (Haselau et al., 2015:174). Humans are part of a physical, social, cultural and spiritual environment and can only be understood within these contexts (Petty, 2006:113). The African kinship system can be described as a classificatory system in terms of which relatives are ranked and classified amongst each other (Bekker, 2001:42). The importance of the family systems in African marriages is hereby highlighted.

Family system theory considers how complex interaction among family members affects behaviour, with its primary principle being to learn more about the family. It is not possible to only study the interactions among family members if we simply study each family member individually. Behaviour can only be understood within the context of the multiple systems in which it occurs (Hammer & Bauer, 2003:423). The strength of the system theory lies in its ability to explore the complex interconnectedness of different sub-systems (Davies, 2000:342). Conflicts in marriage can arise because the system broke down or failed to produce sufficient resources to allow the system to continue working as before (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:513). Traditionally, each African individual belongs to a network of relatives and his or her behaviour or status is determined by his or her relationship with other members of the group and it is important to determine prohibited degrees of relationships (Bekker, 2001:42). Ecological Systems theory attempts to describe people's embeddedness to their environments indicating that we are thoroughly dependent on our social and physical world; without the resources it provides, we would immediately perish (Rothery, 2008:90). This helps to determine prohibited degrees of relationship and to ascertain who receives *lobola* and the succession to a status position. Bekker (2001:42) emphasises that the marital relationship is not between the two people who are planning to get married but between the family groups.

Pierson and Thomas (2010:513) indicate that during therapy the couple should always be viewed as a product of wider forces and when solving or managing marital conflicts it is important to consider the kind of system each person in the marriage is coming from. This should be done by exploring how conflicts were managed in the systems they came from Individuals' attitudes and behaviours are influenced by other individuals in their work and family environment providing for a more comprehensive understanding of work-family dynamics (Hammer & Bauer, 2003:420). The source of the problem may be within an individual or his environment or in the interaction of the two; in such cases counselling is carried out in the context of the family (Mwamwenda, 1996:478). The use of family systems counselling indicates that the behavioural problems of children are not examined in isolation from the rest of the family, but rather by observing the patterns of interactions among family members, as behaviour of one family member cannot be completely understood without considering the behaviour of their family members, and that family roles affect these interactions (Hammer &

Bauer, 2003:423). People in a marriage come from self-regulating systems and they function according to rules and regulations from their pre-marital family systems. Mwamwenda (1996:478) further indicates that it is believed that individuals are influenced by the social system of which they are a part and change in the family structure contributes to change in each of the members.

Families, like other systems are divided into subsystems such as parents, siblings, and kin who join to perform various family functions and the larger the family unit the more secure the person could feel (Sono, 1994:63). Sono (1994:63) further indicates that the African's social, economic, psychological and physical well-being depended on family cohesion which was enriched in religious rituals; which helped to solve everyday problems. Hepworth et al. (2006:246) also indicate that a member of the family system influences and is influenced by every other member, creating a system that has unique properties and that is governed by both implicit and explicit rules that specify roles, power structure, forms of communication, and ways of problem solving, decision making, and negotiating roles, power structure, and communication patterns. These are the dynamic processes of the system and the interrelated and interdependent constituent parts. In Africa, the nuclear family was a component of a larger family, as Sono (1994:63) indicates that the extended family is more of a socio-economic group of people who are related to one another by both blood and marriage. The family facilitated the forgiving of vital coalitions between two households as it gave people the same social history and collective reputation, thus strengthening family cohesion (Sono, 1994:63). Mwamwenda (1996:478) reiterates that the wholeness of the family system is considered greater than the sum of the family's parts, the members, and everyone is understood only in the context of the whole family as a change in one part of a family member will affect every other member.

2.2.2 The central concepts from Ecological Systems Theory

In Ecological Systems theory, one's experience is the unique creative result of interaction between him (the person) and the circumstances life has handed him (his environment). Most people who consult a social worker do so because they have needs that are not being adequately met (Rothery, 2008:99). According to Rothery (2008:99), the person has something they do not have that is necessary if they are to live well; determining

what the peoples' needs are and what change could make their lives more successful and gratifying is the basic purpose of the ecological perspective. It helps social workers to help people to answer fundamental questions like 'what do you need?', 'what do you want?', and 'what will make the necessary difference in your life?' People and their challenges are understood holistically considering they have bodies (biology), minds (psychology) and a social context and the biological fact of illness interacts with ecosystem events (Rothery, 2008:99). An individual cannot be understood outside of his or her environment that shapes individual functioning (Goodman, Crouter, Lanza, Cox & Vernon-Fegans, 2011:590).

From an ecological perspective, life is organised into ecosystems, which consist of all forms of life that live in relation to one another and a physical environment (Johnson, 2000:98). Ecosystem's focus is on the mutual contribution and response of each to an unending transactional process on which both are altogether dependent (Rothery, 2008:91). A social system is a structurally differentiated system of social roles and expectations that is maintained by four functional imperatives (adaptation, goal-attainment, integration and latency) as it operates in its environment (Turner, 2006:588). The environment is clearly influential in shaping health, happiness, and opportunities. However, human beings also have power, and are not passively becoming whatever the environment demands; humans shape the environment as the environment shapes them (Rothery, 2008:99). Papero (2009:447) reiterates that a family is a system of interdependent people, and individual behaviour cannot be understood adequately without including the relationship system in which individual's lives and changing degrees of anxiety greatly affect the condition of that system. Individuals all have typical ways of interpreting their lives, which affect how they feel about what happens to them and the result of this is beliefs that shape their feelings and behaviours (Rothery, 2008:99). Sustainable beliefs are seen when people can be helped while feeling hopeful and optimistic, with their motivation to change being enhanced. Hope is the belief that problems can be managed or solved and that something meaningful can come from painful, challenging times (Rothery, 2008:100). The family system can be influenced by the action of an individual family member, particularly if that person occupied a prominent position in the system and when the system changes, the behaviour and the function of the family members change as well (Papero, 2009:447). The ecological system theory approach sees a person's social environment as a set of concentric circles through which

it is possible to picture how institutions, social attitudes and family dynamics promote or limit the opportunities and wellbeing of individuals (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:190).

Ecological Systems theory tend to differentiate aspects of the environment that have an immediate impact on our ability to cope from those that are less directly influential; aspects that are micro (relatively small) versus macro (larger and broader), or proximal (close) versus distant (further away) (Rothery, 2008:103). Individuals develop within the micro-system of home and family, the meso-system of school, neighbourhood, and other local institutions such as churches, clubs and associations and the eco-system through which more distant but powerful institutions as practices influence the individual's life (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:190). Rothery (2008:104) believes there are environmental influences considered immediate, however because they are commonly obvious contributors to people's problems and targets for change, other influences are no less important but tend to be less immediate, often less apparent and less modifiable to change in the short term.

2.2.3 Concerns about Ecological Systems Theory

One of the major strengths of using an Ecological System perspective to understand individuals' issues is that it incorporates an analysis of both formal and informal networks around the individual, including relationship with other individuals, groups, family, community and the environment (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:43-44). In this way, it is a perspective that can help gain an appreciation of the multiple factors that contribute to or inhibit wellbeing. The examination of boundaries between the client system and others enables a fluid interpretation in terms of what constitutes healthy relationships and boundary setting within differing cultural contexts (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:43-44). Norms are important to integrate social systems as they are specific to social functions and the types of social situations which sometimes can be challenging as culture evolves (Lemert, 2004:299).

Although the Ecological Systems theory is a framework capable of integrating (and extending) the traditional perspective, the social work profession's growing interest in this perspective has not been unanimously applauded (Rothery, 2008:91). Ecological system perspective is abstract or "metaphorical" in that it cannot reliably be

operationalised. The ecological system theory is also criticised due to the level of abstraction, the range of competing perspectives within systems theory and the mechanistic, nonhuman nature of much of its language and its lack of prescription of intervention strategies for the social workers (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:34). The profession of social work is an applied profession and it needs concepts that inform its efforts to improve practical problems-domain specific knowledge about such areas as addictions, child well-being, welfare, or mental health (Rothery, 2008:91). The degree to which an ecological systems approach does, or does not acknowledge the motions of power, oppression and marginalisation is the subject of an enduring debate as the questions of authority and self-determination are important especially where there is oppression and human rights abuses (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:34).

Rothery (2008:92) indicates that the Ecological System theory is open-ended which can be both positive and negative as the openness of an eco-systems perspective encourages a broad understanding of the issues that individuals bring to social workers, instead of a narrow focus on the private lives and troubles of the people seen as isolated individuals. Systems theory has been much criticised, because it involves an organic similarity which is inappropriate; entails a conservative bias towards the study of social order rather than social conflict and does not provide a satisfactory theory of social change since it merely describes the process of differentiation (Marshall, 1998:660). The early interpretations of systems and an ecological perspective have been criticised for being dominated by a narrow focus on the psycho-social constraints, which was indicated due to its focus on the notions of relationship, 'goodness of fit' and successful adaptation of the individual within the environment (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:44). With the Ecological Systems theory view, the disadvantaged groups are motivated to hold system-justifying stereotypes and ideologies and to accept the status quo (Van Lange, Kruglanski & Higgins, 2012:315). The focus in the eco-system is more on the social context within which those troubles occur and to which they are inevitably bound, while the negative aspect is that too broad a scope can be paralyzing, in principle, there is no end to the avenues that can be explored if the goal is a holistic understanding of someone's life (Rothery, 2008:92).

An eco-system perspective need to be exclusively present oriented but tends in practice to have such an emphasis which can appear as a limitation to practitioners for whom

the past roots and future solutions of problems are critical (Rothery, 2008:92). A further concern is that the Ecological Systems theory emphasises adaptation; as such it can easily become a model through which practitioners encourage clients to accommodate to oppressive circumstances as social realities such as oppression and injustice are part of the environment that must be considered in an ecological analysis.

Social work's traditional concern for social justice becomes a necessary complement to the Ecological System theory. The approach can be misused if it is employed in the absence of articulated social values (Rothery, 2008:92). Critical Ecological System Theory is important to make sure that social justice is integrated into ecological thinking and especially within the context of this research study (Rothery, 2008:92). Societies provide members with the essentials they need to flourish, such as food, comfort, safety, opportunities to grow, freedom, respect and dignity. Those who sit in the position of privileges fail to acknowledge the importance of broad kinship networks and overlook the integral relationship indigenous populations have with the land and other natural habitats such as waterways (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:44). Members of the community also need social recognition which emphasises the need for validation from the people around us, as we are all happiest when we are welcome in our communities and are recognized as competent and credible and having something of value to offer. The denial of such recognition through racism, sexism, or other forms of discrimination is what is usually implied by terms such as disempowerment, marginalisation, or oppression (Rothery, 2008:92). Ecological System theory believes that everyone needs access to meaningful social roles and this is in effect an argument for adequate social recognition which allows us to keep social work's anti-oppressive agenda high on the list of professional priorities (Rothery, 2008:93). The understanding in an ecological system of functioning, which integrates environmental perspectives, is particularly relevant for work with populations where the relationship with the natural environment is powerfully linked to questions of personal identity, spiritual strength and ongoing survival and as such it has been criticised as being hard to test empirically and overly inclusive (O'Donoghue & Maidment, 2005:44). Despite the concerns discussed above, it does however provide a framework from which different systems and their interplay and mutual influences can be assessed.

2.3 SYSTEMS AND THE AFRICAN FAMILY CONTEXT

2.3.1 Family systems

African families refer to the entire network of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents as a family, as African thinking and acting is influenced by communal life (Mkhize, 2006:187). As such there can be serious family and community pressure if a family member does not adhere to the norms and standards as set out by the family or community. Even though most modern families turn to adopt the nuclear family set, their families are still influenced by the family network of uncles, aunts and parents. They are responsible for each other and the boundaries between the nuclear families are more permeable (Petty, 2006:20). Khathide (2011:46) states that in African communities, marriages do not only involve two people. Families are nested Microsystems that are shaped by different external systems (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:953). Khathide (2011:46) further indicates that African marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlaps so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another.

Culture is a strong factor in the maintenance of various groups of people, with certain practices, ceremonies, rituals, values and norms, religions and language (Khathide, 2011:46). Most indigenous African societies practice the principles of '*Ubuntu*' where the societies believe in taking collective responsibility and children are viewed as children of the community rather than belonging to their parents only (Malunga, 2006:3). Malunga (2006:3) further alludes that when one is married to someone from another clan, one did not marry just the individual but the whole clan and when this happens every member of each clan becomes a relative of every member of the other clan. These also imply mutual responsibilities such as weddings, funerals, births, problems and celebrations of one clan and are belonging to the other as well (Malunga, 2006:3). Religion is important in Africa as it forms part of economic production, courtship, bearing children and kinship ties; with the common beliefs that welded people together thus enhancing social control. Spiritual hierarchy reflected the family structure and was the symbolic expression of the desirable social order (Sono, 1994:63). These remain evident indirectly entangled with his or her cultural beliefs and sense of belonging to an ethnic group (Petty, 2006:19). Marriage in Africa is considered as normal, natural and

fully accepted as there are no bachelors for life as it is the case in some western societies (Khathide, 2011:46). Possel and Rudwicks (2014:284) indicate that marriage is widely desired among African people and it has been termed an event of major importance in the lives of young women.

The African kinship system can be described as a classification system in terms of which relatives are ranked and classified amongst each other (Bekker, 2001:42). Each system has its own kinship terminology and prescribed behaviour patterns with social organisation. Traditionally each African individual belongs to a network of relatives and his or her behaviour or status is determined by his relationship with other members of the group. This is important for determining prohibited degrees of relationship to ascertain who is to receive *lobola* and to determine succession to status positions. It also identifies people who should substitute a spouse in a marital relationship (Bekker, 2001:42). The marital relationship is between family groups rather than individuals; it follows that the relationship is not terminated by the death of one of the individual spouses. In certain instances, a spouse who passed away may be substituted by a relative to fulfil the expectations of the marriage, especially the procreative functions. Marriage in the African culture is served to unite families, not just individuals (Kotzé, 2013:19). Department of Social Development Green Paper on Families (2011) indicates that family tasks include physical maintenance, socialisation and education, control of social and sexual behaviour, maintenance of family morale and motivation to perform roles inside and outside the family, the acquisition of new family members by the formation of sexual partnership, the acquisition of new family members through procreation or adoption and the launching of young members from the family when matured.

The expected behaviour of the *umakoti* (a bride) in the homestead of in-laws is an example of how relations arise from a marriage and a bride is expected to display a specific form of 'respect' called *'inhlonipho'* toward her in-laws (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:206). The degree of respect required, differs from one community to the next. In some very traditional communities, elders can be quite rigid when it comes to *'inhlonipho'* (respect) (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:206). People are born in a social-cultural context and through language and socialisation; they learn to understand the norms and values of their family, community and culture (Haselau, Kasiram & Simpson, 2015:173).

Haselau et al. (2015:173) further indicate that we tend to internalise the dominant norms and values of our culture, believing that they reflect our truth, however because society is interactive and reflexive, the marginalised culture will also influence the dominant culture, a notion that is important to consider when examining opportunities for changing the status quo, especially regarding marriage counselling. The African families practiced the ecosystem approach to preserve itself, by making sure that they look after each other using the principles like that of *Ubuntu*. This has resulted in religious rituals, values and norms that regulated how families interact in procreation, marriage and childrearing.

2.3.2 African marriage as a system

African marriages are most of the time customary where both family groups participate in the choices of marriage partners (Bekker, 2001:41). The families are involved in the preceding negotiations, the agreements, quantity and transfer of marriage goods and the marriage ceremonies (Bekker, 2001:41). *Lobola* is negotiated by uncles on behalf of the couple as the prospective bride and groom cannot participate in such negotiations (Kotzé, 2013:18). The identity function of *lobola* was vested in the handing over of *lobola*, completing the marriage negotiations as marriage symbolized a transaction into adulthood, with an established social and sexual identity and cultural relationships (Kotzé, 2013:19). The tendering of *lobola* (marriage goods) by the man's family to the family of the bride plays a prominent legal and ceremonial role (Bekker, 2001:41). In African marriages, *lobola* creates the relationship and bond between the families of the bride and the groom (Possel & Rudwik, 2013:291). *Lobola* is a traditional custom of the payment of a gift for the right to marry a woman; an act which traditionally brought the two families together (Kotzé, 2013:18). The paying of *lobola* as well as getting married is understood as a transaction of reciprocal rights, duties and prescribed relationship between the two families of relatives which continues past the death of the individual marriage partners (Possel & Rudwick, 2014:292). The custom of *lobola* is an important way to establish and strengthen alliances between families and clans, as a gift of cattle, as living creature is a powerful symbol of a social and spiritual link between African families (Kotzé, 2013:19). Kotzé (2013:19) further indicates that the average value of *lobola* between 1985 and 1998 was around R2000.00, which in 1998 was about 13 times the average monthly earning of African men.

Marriage in African communities entails more than just building a relationship between spouses; it also involves the establishment and cement of relations between two groups as indicated by Nkosi and Daniels (2007:203-204). Marriage is associated with strengthening of the individual's birth network as marriages were and continue to be arranged by relatives and friends in many African settings (Luke & Munshi, 2006:266). The families are fully involved in the events leading up to and including when the consummation of the marriage is made observable, visible and clear to all in a concrete way (Bekker, 2001:42). Marriage strengthens existing network ties and creates new ones, thereby expanding the services and support that the individual receives from the community, while at the same time increasing social obligations (Luke & Munshin, 2006:266).

Previously, a customary union was defined as an association of a man and woman in a conjugal relationship according to black law and custom where neither the man or woman is party to subsisting marriage under Section 35 of the Black Administration Act 38 of 1927 (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:203). Customary marriages like civil law marriages are explained as a life-long union between one male and one female to the exclusion of all others, while it lasts. It is interesting to note that Africans remain attached to the dual system of marriage where in many cases civil law marriages is very often preceded by a customary law marriage (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:202). Sono (1994:71) mentions that customary marriage came to be associated with semi-literate and non-literate Africans and even after registration, the marriage was still considered to be mediocre to the church and civil marriages which were associated with modernity.

The combination of ancestral belief and cultural obligation requiring individuals to show respect towards family and community contributes to the persistence of more young people preferring to be married than cohabiting which can be viewed as acting against the culture of the family or community (Possel & Rudwick, 2014:291). When families were unable to resolve their disputes on their own, they turned to the elders in the community for counsel and guidance (Petty, 2006:114). In African marriages, those who provided counselling and support are uncles, aunts, grandparents, elders in the community, traditional healers, church elders and ministers, who are called on in times of family distress (Petty, 2006:114). Even these highly-esteemed members were mostly connected to the family in some way and they were highly respected for the wisdom that

they had accumulated in their own lives.

2.3.3 Components of relationships within the system of marriage

To understand people of a culture, it is necessary to understand their history, as well as the context in which they live as we tend to internalise the dominant norms and values of our culture, easily believing that they reflect the truth in respect of our identities (Haselau et al., 2015:170). Considering the components of the relationships with the system of marriage within the African context it is important to consider how a marriage partner is selected and the practice of *lobola* including the influence of family of origin. It will also be important to consider the gender roles in marriage, sexuality and parenthood. This should give an understanding to the culture and history of African people with the system of marriage.

2.3.3.1 Choosing a partner in the African family context

Women often have less control over the dating, mate selection, or courtship process than men (Howe, 2012:153). Parents controlled the activities of their children, especially their daughters and exerted considerable influence over whom their children married as kin priorities and elder preferences were the norm, rather than the exception to the rule (Howe, 2012:155). With regards to South Africa families, we talk not only of the nuclear family, but also extended families as well as caregivers or guardians (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:1). The family in South Africa refers to those activities that enable a family to effectively play its role in society, such as nurturing, socialising, parenting, and the delineation of both sex and gender roles (Department of Social Development, 2011). In considering procreation, marriages are arranged between kin groups within different lineage and should the bride be infertile she will freely be replaced by their kin since what is acquired is the right to a woman's fertility (Russell, 2002:5).

Howe (2012:155) further states that women were often considered to be the property of the family and were viewed as an economic asset as their mates were often chosen based on what would benefit families, villages, and even the whole region. In most African tribes, the aunts influenced young girls on issues such as their bodies, sex, sexual hygiene, and the behaviour expected of a wife and mother (Petty, 2006:114).

They advised young girls who were dating and helped them to assess the suitability of their boyfriends and they counselled and guided young women towards successful marriages, being very active during the premarital stage, informing them about their expected roles as wives, mothers and homemakers (Petty, 2006:114). Uncles did the same with young men who were preparing to marry, and they were also called upon to give advice when a young man experienced problem in his marriage.

Traditional healers continue to be consulted to deal with many problems that manifest themselves in the form of bad luck, illness or constant hardship that might also include unending conflicts in the marriage (Petty, 2006:115). Russell (2002:4) mentions that the deceased (the ancestors, the shades) continues to be powerful active members of their lineage as they must be informed of and introduced to new family members; if neglected they will cause trouble, as children who are not formally introduced to their appropriate ancestors will have no supernatural protections and will be vulnerable to all kind of misfortunes.

Petty (2006:15) states that traditional healers communicate with the spirits of the ancestors and they advise the family on how to safeguard themselves from the evil spirits and witchcraft, including making sure that the family they are marrying into is the right family. When misfortune or illness strikes the family, the traditional healer will be consulted to seek to find the causes and solutions (Petty, 2006:15). Some of the problems may include problems in the marriage or the inability to have children in the marriage. When there are problems in marriages, the counselling takes the form of giving advice and suggesting solutions, without giving the individuals involved the opportunity to become active in finding solutions to their problems. Petty (2006:15) argues that when the outcome of counselling is unfavourable, the person seeking guidance is blamed in place of the counsellor or traditional healer. Because it is believed that the ancestors inspire healers and the ancestors can never be wrong, the advice given by the healer must be accurate and appropriate. Therefore, the failure to relief must be attributed to the relief seekers for failing to implement the advice given to them, or following the instructions properly (Petty, 2006:115). It is thus clear that African practices are unique and must be considered within marriages and families, as is also the case with the practice of *Lobola*.

2.3.3.2   The practice of *Lobola*

Department of Social Development (2011) indicates that marriage in South Africa is honoured by the country's constitution and is also safeguarded by legislation, such as the Recognition of Customary Marriage Act of 1998 (Act No. 120 of 1998) and the Civil Union Act of 2006 (Act No. 17 of 2006), which are the laws for the legal standing of marriage and civil partnership between person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender. The Marriage Act, 1961 (Act No 25 of 1961), which was the only law which provided for recognition of marriage as defined by the South African legal system before democracy (Budlender, Chobokoane & Simelane, 2004:3). This Act was racially and culturally biased in that it did not recognise relationships formalised according to indigenous African rites (customary marriages) as well as relationships formalised in accordance with Hindu and Muslim law. Budlender et al. (2004:3) indicate that the relationships formalised according to indigenous African rites were legally recognised but were not recognised as marriages and did not have the legal consequences of a marriage. They further state that couples entering these marriages would only get legal recognition of their union if they subsequently formalised their union in one of the recognised ways.

The Recognition of Customary Marriage Act 120 of 1998 defines the custom of *lobola* as property in cash or in kind, whether known as *lobolo, bogadi, bohali, xuma, lumalo*, whether known as *amabheka*, or by any other name, which a prospective husband or the head of his family undertakes to give to the head of the prospective wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage (Ngema, 2013:405). *Lobola* is a custom in which the husband (or his family on his behalf) delivers or promises to deliver to the father (or guardian) of the wife, stock or other property such as livestock or money, in consideration of which legal custody of the children born of the marriage is assigned to their father (or his family) to the exclusion of any member of the mother's family (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). *Lobola* is a tradition with a long and rich history; however, today people interpret the term in many ways, and take a variety of positions on these customs (Kotzé, 2013:18). Kotzé (2013:18) further indicates that urbanisation and the modern commercialisation of the "payment of *lobola*" in a cultural diverse South Africa has diminished the original rich meaning of the tradition and it is now sometimes referred to as a transaction, as "buying wife".

Khathide (2007:35) indicates that *lobola* is not dowry but 'bride-price', 'bride-gift' or 'bride worth' as traditionally, cattle were transferred from the groom's family to that of the bride upon marriage, but now bride wealth is usually paid in cash. Despite the changes, people remain deeply attached to the institution of *lobola* (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). *Lobola* served as a material economic function through the exchange of livestock, established relationship between families, functioned as a form of social control and provided a social identity (Kotzé, 2013:19). Dowry is a gift of money, g o o d s or both offered by the bride or bride's family towards the establishment for her household; whereas the bride price is a marriage payment made by a prospective husband or more often, by his family to the family of the prospective bride (Khathide, 2007:35-36). The social control function of *lobola* was to offer security in the marital relationship, embedded in the family and community; however, the function of social security may also imply a form of control, as it gave the older generation a position of surveillance over younger men and woman (Kotzé, 2013:19). The manner of enforcing *lobola* agreements in customary law varies among diverse cultural groups or tribes in South Africa. Some communities have fixed amounts of *lobola*, while in some there is no fixed amount of *lobola* cattle to be delivered as the marriage depends on the delivery of a reasonable number of cattle (Ngema, 2013:407). Ngema (2013:407) further indicates that *lobola* can be fixed either by agreement between the parties or by the accepted custom in that tribe; in tribes that have fixed amounts of *lobola*, the delivery of *lobola* must take place before the celebration of the marriage.

Bride price demonstrates that the groom can look after his wife and that he feels the wife is worth something and it helps to stabilize the marriage and prevents the wife from running away from her husband (Sono, 1994:17). Raphalalani and Musehane (2013:19) indicate that *lobola* is an age-old Tshivenda custom that brings the families together, and it is a gesture of gratitude on the part of the groom's family for looking after and bringing up the young bride. Khathide (2007:36) alludes to this by saying that *lobola* is a token of gratitude on the part of the bridegroom's people to those of the bride for their care over her and allowing her to become his wife. *Lobola* is a demonstration of how much the girl is valued by both sides, as it denotes respectability, worthiness and appreciation (Khathide, 2007:36). The material function of *lobola* required the exchange of consumption resources (example: livestock, mainly cattle) and rights over productive

resource: land, cattle, labour, which secured production and reproduction (Kotzé, 2013:19). Among various Xhosa communities, the amount of *lobola* payable is not limited to a specific amount and constitutes a bond of goodwill between the families of the bride and the bridegroom for the entire life of the bride and even after her death (Ngema, 2013:407).

It can also be viewed as a stabilising factor, a significant gift and an acknowledgement of a priceless debt which the bridegroom's family group owes to the bride's family group; it helps to legitimize the children and conferring marriage status of a woman and it can be understood as a guarantee of good faith on the part of both families (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). Khathide (2007:36) further indicates that the gift to the family elevates the value attached to the bride both as a person and as a wife, as to her parents the marriage gifts 'replace' her or it can be taken as economic compensation reminding the family that she will leave or has left and, yet she is not dead. In their study Chireshe and Chireshe (2010) found that on the positive side most their participants responded in the affirmative to a question on whether *lobola* shows that the man loves and values his wife and it also links families (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:214). People who adhere to the custom of *lobola* view it as a significant custom that connects them with their ancestral spirits; failure to pay *lobola* might therefore bring bad luck and the bridegroom may encounter difficulties if he resists the payment of *lobola* (Ngema, 2013:407).

Men approach their in-laws through a mediator, to pay the required bride wealth that gives him legitimacy to children. The heads of the two families or their representatives in the presence of a messenger negotiates *lobola* and it involves some payments by the husband or his family (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). Today's *lobola* transactions can be finalized between two men, with no other extended family present to witness, mediate, and oversee the process (Kotzé, 2013:19-20). After paying an acceptable part of the stipulated *lobola*, the marital union is validated (Sono, 1994:70). During the negotiation of marriage, men are the ones who charge and receive the *lobola* and often use it as they wish (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). As such, *lobola* payment and the process therefore give man all rights whilst the woman is stripped of all freedom and rights. Once *lobola* is paid, the two households involved in the transactions frequently visit each other and give each other gifts to strengthen the union (Sono, 1994:70). Throughout Africa, a marriage could not take place without some form of a gift (payment) of animals, beer,

food or other material goods to the parents and family of the bride.

Considering different viewpoints, Chireshe and Chireshe (2010:212) say during the *lobola* negotiations women are reduced to the level of acquired property especially in cases where high bride price was paid (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). *Lobola* is an instrument of patriarchy that perpetuates the subordination of woman and as dehumanising women and relegates them to the status of commodities. *Lobola* has conflicting influences on the lives of women, especially regarding domestic violence, as in a study man reported that it was more acceptable to beat a woman for whom they have paid *lobola*, while others indicated that they were more likely to beat a woman for whom they have not paid *lobola* because they could get away with it (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:213).

The South African Law Commission recommended that *lobola* should not be deemed essential for the validity of customary marriage; if the two parties wish to give *lobola*, they should be free to do so, but payments or non-payments will have no effect on the spouse's relationship or on their rights to any children born of the marriage (Ngema, 2013:406). *Lobola* is viewed as a valuable part of African culture that should be allowed to thrive and it is persistent even among urbanized and educated people (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:215). In their research, Possel and Rudwick (2014:293) found that among the urban Zulu men and women there is virtual consensus among most of the participants that *lobola* is of paramount significance in the setting up of a joint household between a man and a woman. *Lobola* is supported because it is a traditional practice, as it has been practiced since time immemorial and has a legal status. Chireshe and Chireshe (2010:215) further indicate that *lobola* is viewed as the tradition, part of culture and cultural heritage, but because some of the parents have distorted the meaning of *lobola*, as it has led many young people to cohabit.

2.3.3.3 The influence of family of origin

Hammond-Tooke (2004:74) explains that the systems of kinship terminology all derive from the need to simplify into a few broad categories the potentially large variety of relatives that an individual interacts with during his or her lifetime. The main principles of which such classification is made are descent, generation, age and gender, with the

primary distinction been typically made between the father's people and the mother's people, between kin of one's own generation (sibling and cousins) and those of one's parents (uncles and aunts), between grandparents and grandchildren, between male and female kin, and often between elder and younger (Hammond-Tooke, 2004:74). The classification is thus inclusive of all family systems on both sides.

Marriage institution is the cornerstone of kinship networks in the Black African family, widening their scope, while at the same time increasing the individual's obligations to the kinship (Luke & Munshi, 2006:264). The main goal of Black African marriages is to unite whole families and communities; it is often expected that families of both the bride and bridegroom would be involved in the decision pertaining to the selection of the potential marriageable partner as the similarities in background would create a congenial environment for the success of the relationship (Takyi & Broughton, 2006:120). Family life cover quality of relationships between various members for example between parents and children or between spouses and siblings (RSA, Department of Social Development Green Paper on Families, 2011). Takyi and Broughton (2006:120) further show that as many Africans moved from the rural neighbourhoods to growing cities, new developments emerged in which the traditional family's role in partner selection may have been eroded by distance, the realities of the urban environment and education. Takyi and Broughton (2006:120) mention that in contrast to what prevails in the rural communities, city residents and educated people tend to emphasise western notions of romantic love, to the detriment of traditional normative practices. Families that are characterised by disunity, ineffective communication, poor interpersonal relationships, poor parenting skills and irresponsible behaviour, face imminent danger of disintegration RSA, Department of Social Development's Green Paper on Families (2011).

Luke and Munshi (2006:264) believe that marriage in much of sub-Saharan Africa is exogamous, in the sense that a man is not allowed to marry anyone from his own clan or any clan that has been designated as being related to his own clan. This is confirmed by Kotzé (2013:22) where she indicated that marrying from diverse cultural groups can complicate the situation of the couple during *lobola* negotiations as the different stances held by the various parties on maintaining of traditional customs would have implications for extended families, the future of the couple and any children they might have, as well as legal and cultural consequences. An example can be given on

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approaches that foreground gender equality that can potentially oppose the right to practice traditional culture, depending on how *lobola* is viewed, as a strong commitment to individual rights may potentially compete with practice of community and collectivism (Kotzé, 2013:22).

2.3.3.4 Gender roles in marriage

The African family in South Africa is patriarchal as men are considered the heads of their households and women and children are expected to comply with men's authority (Ngubane, 2010:21). Many man believe that they are the custodians of African culture and regard women as inferior and believe that women should obey men (Ngubane, 2010:22). In the African kinship system, the man was born into a support network organised around his father's family and then subsequently acquired new networks, outside his clan, as and when he married (Luke & Munshi, 2006:266).

While women are considered equal to men and have gained many rights in the new South Africa there is still discrimination, not only in the law but in daily interactions among women and men (Ngubane, 2010:21). During sex role socialisation, individuals adopt personal attitudes that shape their labour force participation, with traditional family roles and gender ideology depressing women's earnings by encouraging women to enter gender appropriate, female dominated occupations that are lower paying, to seek part-time jobs that are compatible with meeting domestic responsibilities or to stay out of the labour market completely (Christie-Mizell, 2006:48). Christie-Mizell (2006:48) further indicates that despite decreasing inequality and more opportunities for women in the workplace, maintenance of the home and the care and rearing of children remains primarily the responsibility of women.

The lag in changes to workplace practices in which the ideal worker is a male who is employed full-time that his (female) partner is either employed or is a secondary wage earner and that she bears primary responsibility for the care giving (elder care and child care) and housework, leads to continued constraints on successfully balancing work and family (Haddock, Zimmeman, Lyness & Ziemba, 2006:209). This results in sex-role differentiation and sex-segregation in the division of labour in the household and in the employment outside the home; with women continuing to earn less money

than men, even when important explanatory factors such as job tenure, education and occupational status are held constant (Christie-Mizell, 2006:48).

Mwamwenda (1996:480) indicated that about a half century ago, most African wives remained at home as housewives but today the number of wives working in the formal and private sectors has increased therefore in many cases two incomes are earned and enjoyed by husband and wife. In the early apartheid years, mothers were shaped by the political context focused specifically on home making and caring practices (Moore, 2013:153). While this boost the social and economic well-being of a married couple, in some cases it can lead to tensions and conflict as some African wives feel that their income is theirs to spend as they wish (Mwamwenda, 1996:480).

In view of historical shortage of labour in Africa, women were valued for both their productive and reproductive capabilities giving rise to bride-wealth payments in balance with transfer flowing from the man to the woman's family at the time of marriage (Luke & Munshi, 2006:264). The central feature of a mother's work was struggling for survival, whether in urban or rural areas; mothers in rural areas were separated from their spouses, and they took sole responsibility for caring and relied on remittance from their migrant husbands (Moore, 2013:153). Although women, particularly in marginalised economic and racial groups have long been in the paid labour force, in previous decades the number of dual-earner couples has increased dramatically (Haddock et al., 2006:209). Haddock et al. (2006:209) further explain that the significant demographic shifts have resulted from economic change that now requires most families to have two incomes for economic viability and form an increase in women's desire to have both an active and fulfilling family life as well as a professional career.

Many women become mothers and find themselves highly dependent on men for money, housing and survival, as well as being accused of undermining African family life. With the challenge of low educational levels, many of the woman in Africa are left few options for work other than domestic service, which as a source of income often separated women from their children and such work strengthened women's and mother's domestic roles and reinforced ideas of maternal responsibilities (Moore, 2013:153). African culture is generally male-dominated with women accorded a lower status than men (Ngubane, 2010:26). Men are socialised to believe that women are

inferior and should be under their control, with women socialised to ever-respect men and act submissively towards them. African culture continues to promote patriarchy in many ways and this perpetuates the subordination of women. This often perpetuated the abuse against women and is still extremely common and encouraged by the tradition of male dominance (Ngubane, 2010:22).

In taking into consideration the socialisation of men, we can also acknowledge that men have begun to do slightly more household and childcare tasks than they did in the past as women have taken on breadwinning responsibilities. Haddock et al. (2006:210) however emphasise that an equitable redistribution of responsibility for family work has yet to take place and workplace practices contribute to this inequity for many families.

2.3.3.5   Sexuality

Sexuality plays an integral part in human functioning from birth until death and relationship problems and sexual problems or dysfunctions are often interlinked (Department of Social Development (2007:58). According to the Department of Social Development (2007:59), sexual problems or dysfunction are often symptoms of other problems within the relationship, whether it is a lack of emotional intimacy or unresolved conflict. Sono (1994:72) indicates that due to the industrialisation happening amongst African people, virginity and other values which controlled African sexual life ceased to be celebrated collectively. In the African society, the sex act was both carnal and sacred and it was enjoyed as the consummation of marriage as well as a celebration of procreation without which family groups could not be renewed (Sono, 1994:72).

Khathide (2007:34) allots that in many African communities, virginity was held in high esteem and the girl friends of the bride were supposed to witness the first intercourse of the bride and bridegroom to ensure that she was a virgin. This was done because female friends of the bride were supposed to carry back home some of the blood on sheets or a skin or from the soil to show the family (Khathide, 2007:34). Virginity at the wedding is greatly respected in many African societies because the blood virginity is the symbol that life has been preserved, that the spring of life has not already been flowing wasteful and that the girl and her relatives have preserved the sanctity of human reproduction.

Virginity symbolises purity, not only of the body but also of moral life, and the virgin bride is the greatest glory and crown to her parents, husband and relatives. This practice is not unique to South African ethnic and cultural groups. Khathide (2007:35) mentions that among the Banyakole in Uganda, the girl's chastity is preserved with greatest care and if she loses her virginity, her parents may disown her or, if she marries, her parents will ask for less or no dowry.

There has been a revival of the culture of virginity tests in South Africa, especially among some of the Zulu traditional communities and those involved in virginity tests or proponents thereof are convinced that renewing some of the good cultural customs like tests could go a long way in curbing the spread of HIV/AIDS (Khathide, 2007:35). African moral puberty sexual lessons were permitted in some communities and the lessons did not involve penetration. A betrothed couple could interact sexually in similitude (without penetration). Among the Luo and amaZulu tribes it was considered a shame of a bridegroom to be ignorant and incapable of performing his duty on the wedding night. Girls were taught by their grandmothers and mothers how to protect themselves from penetration (Khathide, 2007:35). They were under obligation to protect their hymen to avoid shame and disgrace. Procreation is consequently highly valued within marriage, as Khathide (2011:46) states that in African communities, marriage and procreation are a unity; without procreation, marriage is incomplete as both husband and wife are reproduced in their children thus perpetuating the chain of humanity.

Culturally, male youth has been led to believe that it is a sign of manhood to be able to control relationships and females are brought to believe that males are superior in all spheres of life and should be masters of sexual relationships (Ngubane, 2010:26). Ngubane (2010:27) further indicates that men are given license to be sexually adventurous and aggressive, without taking responsibility for their actions whereas women's respectability is derived from the traditional roles of wife, homemaker and mother. Childbearing and satisfying her husband sexually and otherwise are the key expectations for a wife even if she is aware that her husband is unfaithful, as refusing the husband sex can result in rejection and violence (Ngubane, 2010:27). In South Africa, the negotiation of motherhood has been shaped by specific social conditions including but not exclusively, slavery, rural life housing and labour policies under apartheid political turbulence and urbanisation (Moore, 2013:152).

The Department of Social Development Green Paper on Families (2011) indicates that polygamous families are also quite prevalent in certain parts of South Africa. Polygamous marriages (multiple wives) are permitted where the husband has the means to pay the *lobola* for each and maintain them properly and women are expected to leave their families to live with their husband's family (Ngubane, 2010:21). Ngubane (2010:27) continues to indicate that women's inferior status offered them little or no power to protect themselves by insisting on condom use or refusing sex as many women also lack economic power and feel they cannot risk losing their partner; thus, their source of financial support by denying them sex or deciding to leave an abusive relationship.

2.3.3.6 Parenthood

Parenthood affects the couple as a system and other systems connected to the new family. Mwamwenda (1996:480) indicates that the birth of a first child may impose strain on a couple's relationship as after the baby's arrival the couple may have less time for each other, as the wife is bound to pay more attention to the baby than to the husband. The husband may feel entitled to some of the attention given to the baby, something that may result in less sexual activities between the couple which can lead to frustration (Mwamwenda, 1996:480). Possel and Rudwick (2014:284) indicate that the links between marriage and reproduction has been dislodged as despite low marriage rates, most African women want to have children and at least in some sections of Zulu society, the goal of motherhood outweighs that of marriage.

With regards to the very low marriage and cohabitation rates among mothers, and rising rates of non-marital childbirth, the phenomenon of the absent father has become a concern among South African researchers, with research identifying that the common absence of fathers in many households is not always because men are denying paternity or behaving irresponsibly, but that their absence may be due to financial reasons (Possel & Rudwick, 2014:284). A man is socio-culturally not permitted to co-parent or cohabit with the mother of his child unless he has initiated the *ilobolo* (bride wealth) negotiations and concrete marriage plans are in place (Possel & Rudwick, 2014:284). This again emphasises the practice of *lobola* as discussed previously.

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The father of the child can claim rights to his children through the significantly lower *'inhlawulo'* ('damage') payment, and this practice may have helped to accommodate the high rate of non-marital childbirth within the Zulu culture. The payment of *inhlawulo* does not grant the father the right to stay with the mother of his child. Ngema (2013:410) confirms that in customary law, the payment of *lobola* regulates parental rights. If the husband has paid lobola, he and his family group have complete parental privileges to the children he had by the wife during the duration of the marriage. Parenthood is thus influenced by customs and traditional practices. However, in modern society with equal responsibilities of marriage partners, shared parenting happens, and parents often focus on the children and less on their own rights and privileges. Although, having children asks for adjustment.

2.4   MEDIATION IN AFRICAN MARRIAGES

The cultural heritage of *Ubuntu*, passed on from generation to generation, has been a source of guidance for African communities and families in time of peace, uncertainties, birth, life and death in that it has enabled people to live in harmony with their physical, social and spiritual environment (Malunga, 2006:3). The South African Governmental White Paper on Welfare describes Ubuntu as the principle of caring for each other's well-being and a spirit of mutual supporting of everyone's humanity which is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual's humanity (Haselau et al., 2015:175). It further explains that *Ubuntu* means people are people through other people, also acknowledging both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal wellbeing. Malanga (2006:3) further states that the cultural heritage of *Ubuntu* has provided the foundation of leadership, problem solving, decision making and hope for the future. People of Anglo descent (such as white English-speaking South Africans) are more likely to define family as the nuclear family (mother, father and children), and place less emphasis on the extended family (Petty, 2006:20). Under the customary law married woman had access to traditional dispute resolution forums which could utilise to raise grievances about their marital relationships, but such disputes resolutions were those recognised by customary law and chief's courts (Button, 2014:4). Button (2014:4) further indicates that in this kind of courts the customs dictated that the women be represented by a male relative or guardian when raising grievance with the husband. This kind of practice could have

had the potential of leading to lack of objectivity in the part of man in resolving conflict fairly.

Dominant Western cultural practices, influences such as globalisation, women's empowerment and the ideology of human rights have impacted traditional African beliefs and practices about relationships, further eroding the bedrock of African culture as a source of power and health (Haselau, et al., 2015:172). Haselau et al. (2015:172) further indicate that because of all the historical and political influences in South Africa there may be marked differences in the values, beliefs and behaviours between generations within one family, between the youth and the elders and between those living in urban and rural areas. Petty (2006:115) indicates that Western therapists use weekly sessions of conversation, drama, art, sand tray therapy and hypnosis whereas the traditional healer in the African context relies on rituals such as throwing bones or performing ecstatic trances but both approaches depend on the trust and belief of those they are helping. Whatever culture we belong to has influenced us to ascribe certain meanings to life events, and to treat others as relatively meaningless (Haselau et al. 2015:170). They both evoke some type of confession and catharsis which relieve the client's guilt and anxiety, or restore the broken harmony with ancestors (Petty, 2006:115). Charema (2004:52) adds that both aim to resolve the problem, and both emphasise confidentiality. In the Western approach to counselling, the clients must be active in finding solutions for their problems, and in traditional Afrocentric helping, the helpers provide the solutions and the recipients passively accept them (Charema, 2004). The African worldview values community and interpersonal relationships in the group, whereas the western view is based on the individual within a group (Haselau et al. 2015:174). Petty (2006:116) purports that in Western counselling approaches, the helper is usually a stranger, by comparison in an Afrocentric situation; the helpers are usually well acquainted with the couples, as they are normally relatives or well- known people living in the same community who have related to the family or extended family over time.

In accordance with the *Ubuntu* principles of conflict management, the values of trust, fairness, and reconciliation were emphasised, as it was closely linked with the importance of relationships (Malunga, 2006:6). The concept of Ubuntu is premised on the reciprocal belief that an individual's humanity is expressed through the personal relationships with others in a community and in turn other people in the community

recognise the individual's humanity (Haselau et al., 2015:175). Malunga (2006:6) further indicates that the goal of all conflict mediation is reconciliation and relationship building as within the African culture of *Ubuntu* conflicts will be preferred to be resolved within the family or household level and proceeded to a higher level through appeal if some parties are not satisfied with the outcome. The notion of *Ubuntu* within the African culture emphasises the importance of peace making through principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between people, as it provides a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness (Malunga, 2006:6). People in South Africa are born into diverse cultures and contexts, where everyone has a unique experience of reality (Haselau et al., 2015:173). The authors (Haselau et al. 2015:173) further indicate that as the understanding, description and constructions of people's worlds change and adapt, so do some patterns of behaviour and social actions are sustained whilst others are excluded. Thus, certain actions, attitudes and behaviours are permissible whilst others are forbidden; based on influences that we consider important our constructions of the world are therefore influenced by power relations.

2.5   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding discussion, the Ecological Systems theory as a foundation for human functioning, the central concepts from this theory and some of the concerns of this theory were discussed. The latter includes the traditional concern for social justice which becomes a necessary complement to the eco-system model as the approach can be misused if it is employed in the absence of articulated social values. The chapter further viewed the systems in the African family context focusing on the family systems which in the African context refers to more than the nuclear family, but also the relatives and extended family members. African marriage is a system which mainly is the customary marriage and the components of relationships within the system of marriage which amongst others include the practice of *lobola*, choosing a partner and gender roles.

The chapter briefly discussed mediation in African marriages which talks about the cultural heritage of *Ubuntu* that has provided the foundation of leadership, problem solving, decision making and other African rituals that encourage confession. It is not possible to understand the African family without recognising that the whole is greater

than the sum of the parts, as each person's role in the family is crucial for maintaining a balance in functioning between all the members. The unity of the family system is considered bigger than the sum of the family parts, the members and every individual is understood only in the context of the whole family as a change in one part of family member will influence every other member. Culture and religion continue to play an important part in the African family system in that it is seen in the marriage processes like *lobola* negotiations. Mediation in the African family revolves around the family and that influences mediation during conflicts.

CHAPTER 3

COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN MARRIAGE AND INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Successful marriages are the result of more than just compatibility and commitment, but effective communication and conflict management skills are fundamental. Conflict is an unavoidable component of human relationships that even those who are frightened of it and try to avoid it at all costs are still not safe from it. Most couples have conflict over the same issues for example, finances, children, leisure, personalities, in-laws, gender-roles, religion, politics and sex. Topics regarding marital conflict differ with the most significant appearing to be problems with communication, finances, division of chores, and showing affection; and these topics represent important dimensions of marriage. The occurrence of conflict and the issues that cause the most hostility do not remain the same over the years. The question of how couples manage conflict becomes important to their well-being as individuals as well as to the well-being of their marriages and their children.

This chapter will discuss communication and conflict in marriages, the different communication styles that couples use in managing any conflict in their marriages, gender differences in communications which are because of gender stereotypes, and cultural influences whereby some cultures do not promote open communication. We will further elaborate on the distinctive styles that can be used to manage conflict and handling of conflict in marriages because how a married couple handles and negotiates in conflict becomes important in the success of their marriage. The researcher will also look at conflict and family functioning where the family feels emotionally bonded and responds cooperatively to any challenges faced by the family. Finally, this chapter will discuss how to negotiate conflict by understanding the demands made by a partner.

3.2   COMUNICATION AND CONFLICT IN MARRIAGE

3.2.1 Communication patterns

Communication can be explained as an act of conveying verbal and nonverbal

information to another person (Kunz, 2011:45). Decades of research have demonstrated the explicit importance that conflict communication has in discussions of interpersonal strength and quality (Canary & Canary, 2013:24). The authors (Canary & Canary, 2013:24) further indicate that scholars often argued that interpersonal conflict presents the primary or only predictor of marital quality but recently researchers have connected conflict processes with other relational processes like supportive messages. Most marriages are simply efficient where partners carry out the duties of provider, nurturer, parent, sex partner, or cooker which is incomplete and unsatisfying (Van Pelt, 2000:92). Van Pelt (2000:92) further explains that functional marriages can be changed into highly efficient marriages by establishing a personal communication system, as communication is what inspires the caring, giving, sharing and affirming that present in intimate relationships.

In marriages in which the couple represented a highly traditional marriage with a patriarchal structure and highly structured sex role expectations, it was found that even in the traditional structured and patriarchal marriages both husband and wife were more satisfied with their marriage when integrating, obliging and compromising, as opposed to when competing and avoiding were used to address marital conflict (Canary & Canary, 2013:47). Communication involves the use of words, signs and gestures that can sometimes be misinterpreted and generate conflict (Kunz, 2011:44). In communication, we use verbal communication and when we read or then interpret visuals such as typographical signs, illustration and images; we use visual communication (Kunz, 2011:45). Kunz (2011:45) further indicates that when we interpret each other's body language, gestures and facial expressions we use nonverbal communication. It is further eluded that in each time when communicating, one uses a mix of verbal and non-verbal communication, sometimes the non-verbal and verbal elements reinforce each other, but express very different feelings at other times.

3.2.2 Family communication

In considering Kunz's (2011:45) findings on communication, it was discovered that family communication is influenced by the interaction of individual perceptions, emotions and the results of their reasoning or cognition. During interaction, family members receive information through senses and then they react to the information and then interpret the

information (Kunz, 2011:45).

It is further stated that interpretation can either be done rationally or it may be influenced by the person's emotions. During a family argument, a person may be overly angry and need to take time away from the interaction before being able to rationally interpret what the family member is saying (Kunz, 2011:45). Another fundamental component of family communication is the context in which the communication takes place as Kunz (2011:46) indicates that the context includes not only the physical space in which communication takes place, but also the cultural background that affects the interaction. Canary and Canary (2013:38) support that when couples' communication and relationship satisfaction just prior to marriage was assessed during the first two years of marriage, it was found that married partners did not vary that much in their conflict tactics over time as partners tended to use the same conflict tactics over the two years they were observed.

This can happen especially with younger couples as Canary and Canary (2013:23) indicate that couples' conflict changes as they age. Satisfied partners in marriage engage in less negativity as they do not use negative behaviours like direct fighting tactics of threats and coercion (Canary & Canary, 2013:23). Birditt, Brown, Orbuch and McIlvane (2010:203) found that the use of destructive tactics and exchange involving withdrawal led to divorce, whereas constructive tactics reduced the likelihood of divorce over the sixteen years they were observed. The beginning of support in marriage includes communication practices on the part of husband that encompasses open talk about work-family difficulties, expressions of care and concern, legitimisation of their wives' concern, and collaboration and assistance with child care including household tasks (Edwards, 2008:65). The introduction of technology like cell-phones and social network has prejudiced communication within the families (Aponte & Pessagno, 2009:581). The usage of technology by family members and friends to communicate with one another to withstand relationships has impacted communication even in the marriage (Aponte & Pessango, 2009:158).

Sometimes verbal and nonverbal communication may contradict each other, and this kind of discrepancy often occurs in family interactions and can cause problems or conflict. When faced with contradictions in communication, research has shown that

people tend to rely on nonverbal causes to interpret another person's behaviour (Kunz, 2011:46). Interpersonal communication refers to the verbal and nonverbal messages that two or more people exchange (Manohar [sa]). In the process of interpersonal communication, a sender conveys a message through a communication channel which is either in speech, gesture or writing. The receiver then interprets that message. According to Kunz (2011:46), one of the biggest challenges of family life is to adapt and correctly interpret distinctive styles of interpersonal communication.

3.2.3 Communication styles

In the context of the workplace, Manohar [sa] mentions some of the interpersonal styles of communication which are mostly applied to define interpersonal communication as:

- Controlling communication style: the sender does not allow the receiver to express his or her ideas
- Egalitarian communication style: the sender encourages feedback from the receiver
- Dynamic communication style: the sender uses motivational phrases to encourage the receiver
- Relinquishing communication style: the receiver is invited to participate in the communication as much as the sender
- Withdrawal communication style: either participant shows no interest in the exchange.

In relationships where a partner is controlling it can be difficult as he or she might adopt a controlling style of interpersonal communication in which he or she establish strict rules that the other person is not allowed to discuss (Kunz, 2011:47). Petty (2006:13) states that in relation to the indications of Kunz (2011:46), personal expectations are the individual's decisions, both deliberate and unconscious about how she or he should behave as a loving partner. Every person enters a relationship with a set of unspoken expectations, based largely on past experiences. Petty (2006:13) further indicates that expectations may be further determined by gender and ethnic differences and couples enter a union with assumptions of how their partner will behave which are based on these differences.

3.2.4 Gender differences in communication

Males and females differ regarding communication styles. Van Pelt (2000:93) indicates that the rapport between girls is built by private talks and the involvement in each other's secrets while boys on the other hand engage in recreation in groups, often outdoors, which result in a reduced amount of talks but more activities in a group. The situation with men might be different as they might have never heard many secrets and might assume there must be something wrong with the relationship; resulting in them being defensive to heart-to-heart talks. Kunz (2011:47) emphasises factors such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation (or the sex one is attracted to), and demographics that have an enormous influence on the pattern of communication within a family.

It is reported that in conflictual situations, males and females react in diverse ways (Petty, 2006:15). Petty (2006:15) states that in his study, Gottman found that females tend to self-soothe or calm themselves during arguments, and males becomes more aroused and hold on to their distressing thoughts. Men who report witnessing violence between their parents have a substantially higher risk of being in a violent relationship as adults (Skuja & Halford, 2004:623). In a study by Christensen and Heavy in 1990, it was found that when couples find themselves in negative relationships, men are more likely to withdraw, and women tend to become more demanding and complaining (Petty, 2006:15). Kunz (2011:48) indicates researchers agree the differences in communication styles between genders rely more on the gender's interpersonal orientation.

Women interacting with exposed men who have negative conflict communication also show more negative communication than other women, regardless of whether the women themselves have been exposed to family of origin parental violence (Skuja & Halford, 2004:623). In situations where people are provoked, men are more likely than women to use physical and verbal aggression (Petty, 2006:15). Men commit more violent crimes than women and are responsible for more assaults, and in situations where people are angered, or frustrated men resort to using verbal aggression more freely than women (Petty, 2006:15). Violent men's negative communication is urged to often reflect attempts to control the relationship (Skuja & Halford, 2004:624). The higher the frequencies of conflicts in marriages is related to less happy partners and that the number of marital 'good times' identified by those partners was negatively correlated

with the number of marital conflicts (Canary & Canary, 2013:48).

The issue of how a couple communicates in a conflict can have an impact in the management of the conflict. Women do much more work starting and maintaining quality interactions because of the nature of their conversational style and they have conversational patterns in which they ask more questions than men, use a questioning tone in their statements requesting confirmation from the listener, and tend to use tag questioning that occur at the ends of sentences and encourage the listener to respond (Petty, 2006:16). Men tend to talk to provide information and to solve problems, also providing facts, focusing on things rather than people (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1995:160). They are more prone to interrupt conversations and are more competitive. It appears that, for men, conversation is like a sports game where they hope to dominate the argument and expect to win (Petty, 2006:16). Petty (2006:16) further indicates that men's conversations are characterised by fewer words and are far less revealing about their intimate thoughts and feelings and their conversation emphasises information and detail. Women are more skilled at interpreting nonverbal behaviour as they are more attentive, use more nonverbal communications to demonstrate that they are listening, use gesticulations to emphasise what they say (Petty, 2006:16). Kunz (2011:48) is also of the opinion that women are more likely to ask for information and talk to connect with others, as such they are more prone to smile or establish eye and physical contact.

3.2.5 Cultural influences

Individuals who come from the same social system will not mean that they are all the same; as people are unique, even those who grow up in the same family do differ from one another (Louw & Du Plooy-Cilliers, 2016:31). Some cultures do not value open communication which is not always that positive (Kunz, 2011:47). This has a way of affecting the way communication and personal interaction occurs in society, especially in cultures that regard family as the foundation of the society. Louw and du Plooy-Cilliers (2016:31) indicate that culture is one of the aspects that have a major influence on our communication style. Culture is not genetically determined as it is a relatively specialised lifestyle of a group of people, their values, belief, and ways of behaving that is passed from one generation to the next by means of communication not genes Kunz (2011:31). There is a link between family of origin and adult relationship aggression, as

it was found that parental modelling lead men to learn aggressive conflict management styles (Skuja & Halford, 2004:624). Communication styles are shaped by cultural shapes and intercultural ignorance slows people's ability to develop meaningful relationships with people from other cultures (Louw & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2016:31). Skuja and Halford (2004:624) further state that family of origin models are believed to be strong influences in adult conflict management. When working with couples, counsellors need to consider gender differences without falling into the trap of stereotyping people as this can be valuable when trying to track the interactional patterns and conflicts of couples (Petty, 2006:14). Cultural values influence marital conflict processes to the degree that marital conflict would look very different in Asian marriages than they will do in Europe or American marriages (Canary & Canary, 2013:47). The way we speak or our choices to remain silent is influenced by our culture (Louw & du Plooy-Cilliers, 2016:31). Our nonverbal behaviour; what we demonstrate and what not, and how we do it, the eye contact we do or do not engage in, the tone and sound of our voices as well as many other aspects of communication has also influenced our culture. The value and importance of culture during conflict in marriage cannot be ignored if we are to understand how conflict is managed within the family, especially where there are certain norms and values that are passed from one generation to the other within the family context.

3.3   CHALLENGES AFFECTING MARRIAGES

Marriage faces different kinds of challenges which can lead to conflict. The way a couple handle finances, roles in the marriage, workplace stress and lack of communication can cause or escalate conflict in the marriage. The following section will consider some of the challenges faced by married couples.

3.3.1 Finances

One of the key issues about couples' fights is more about finances, as conflict about finances is more intense and significant than non-finance conflicts (Archuleta, 2013:391-392). A survey by the National Marriage Project at the University of Virginia has shown that where finances and romances intersect, often it proves to be a make-it-or-break-it point for couples (Boone, 2011:62). It has been found that couples in search of marital

counselling presented financial stress, while couples seeking financial counselling reported having marital problems (Archuleta, 2013:392). The satisfaction of a couple's relationship is significant to families for many reasons, including the improvement of the couple's emotional health, physical health, financial stability and marital stability (Hubler, Burr, Gardner, Larzelere & Busby, 2016:373-374). Couples who stated greater economic distress reported more blaming in their marriage and those who underwent financial distress presented substantial increase in their likelihood for entertaining thoughts of divorce over a five years period (Archuleta, 2013:393). Differences between couples which are founded on finances can create substantial alterations in marital satisfaction and the levels of warmth or hostility exhibited in partner interactions (Hubler et al., 2016:374).

Financial stress is significantly associated with lower marital quality, while more responsible financial behaviours appear to be positively associated with relationship quality (Archuleta, 2013:393). Financial disagreements predicted divorce more strongly than other potential problem areas such as household chores and spending time with each another (Hubler et al., 2016:374). In her study, Archuleta (2013:407) found that where there is increased household income, increased shared goals and values, increased financial role satisfaction, and increased age and years of marriage were important predicting factors of financial satisfaction. Even though finances can be a challenge in any marriage, those who are able to redouble their marital commitment because of a recession are much more likely to be in a happy marriage (Boone, 2011:63). Family income should not be the only gauge of financial stress, as this may not capture the perceived stressors felt by family members, as individual's perception of one's own wealth becomes a contributing factor to overall life satisfaction as well as marital satisfaction (Hubler et al., 2016:374).

3.3.2 Work stress

Work stress has a negative impact on the family (Carnes, 2017:154), while stress is a problem that employed mothers may experience when they try to manage their work and family lives but appraise their situation as particularly taxing or exceeding their resources (Edwards, 2008:61). Carnes (2017:155) indicates that when married couples feel that they cannot have the time and resources to deal with their assigned responsibilities or

activities they experience what is called role overload. Work overload can produce a variety of occupational stressors which predict lower quality parent-child interactions, including long hours at work, nonstandard work schedule, elevated level of workplace support (Goodman et al., 2011:588). The shift of energy and resources from the family domain to work domain have a detrimental impact on relationships both at work and at home (Carnes, 2017:156). Due to women's societal given and generally accepted role as the primary caretakers of children, employed mothers are often more involved in work-family conflict than their employed husbands (Edwards, 2008:61).

A well-documented issue facing employed mothers is a sense of inequity in the distribution of household tasks between employed mothers and their husbands, as a traditional division of household and child care labour is also related to women's stress levels and work-family conflict (Edwards, 2005:61). Carnes (2017:158) alludes that due to the stereotypes of social gender roles which eventually limit the social activities of each gender, woman often take on greater responsibilities in the home setting while men tend to focus on workplace activities. Increase in work hours and job instability, including the rise in women's employment, particularly among mothers have augmented the level of stress affecting many employees (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007:1022). The problems of employed mothers' adaptations have an impact on a mother's marital satisfaction as this may be partially related to the findings by some researchers that marital satisfaction is significantly related to the ways in which marital partners negotiate their work and family responsibilities and that mothers of young children report lower marital satisfaction than women without children (Edwards, 2008:62). Work stress impacts both men and women differently due to an individual social role and social norms that apply to a specified gender, as well as the potential gender differences in social behaviour (Carnes, 2017:158). Stress is a form of emotion and partners in close relationships tend to express and communicate their emotional states both verbally and nonverbally; patterns of emotional transmission in couples may explain how the emotions of one partner influence the emotional and behavioural reactions of the other (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2007:1022). The experiences of occupational stress may negatively impact the quality of a marital relationship through negative effect of work stress on each of the partners in marriage (Goodman et al., 2011:590).

3.4   STYLES OF CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

Husband and wife disagreement can occur based on anything among others which might include in-law problems, alcohol addiction, career versus marriage, jealousy, infidelity, religious values, money, childrearing, work addiction and sex (Mwamwenda, 1996:479). Greeff and De Bruyne (2000:324) indicate that styles of conflict management that are desirable within one culture may be unacceptable in another as cultures hold opposing views in their handling of conflict. South Africa consists of population groups with different cultures though most are somehow related on their cultural practices (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:324). They further argue that conflict management style can be related to the gender and will vary from culture to culture as it is often influenced by cultural background. Couples can either engage negatively or positively, some of the negative engaging displayed may include criticism, hostility, verbal attacks and insults during conflict resolution (Pape, 2001:20). Positive behaviours according to Pape (2001:20) include revealing one's feelings and perspectives on the problem in a cooperative manner, and searching for areas of agreement, using compromising and negotiation to resolve conflict. Once people latch onto negative explanations for conflict that reflect characteristics of the partner, then increased and personal isolation is said to occur, which will be driven more by how such negative attributions helps a person defend him/herself (Canary & Canary, 2013:46). Conflicts that are resolved unsatisfactorily impact negatively on the romantic relationship as negative conflict management styles as part of the association between relationship satisfaction and negative conflict management style may be due to problems not being resolved satisfactorily (Cramer, 2002:426). Divorce is largely a function of how negative conflict tactics lead to perceptions, experiences and attributions that in turn lead to increased distance, recasting of the marriage and divorce (Canary & Canary, 2013:46).

Styles used in managing conflict in marriage may vary according to the character of the conflict as previous achievement with the style in similar states of affairs, or the appropriateness of the style for the specific situation may lead to repetition of the style to solve similar problems (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:322). Amid conflict, a couple can either be assertive (endeavour to satisfy one's own concerns) or cooperative (attempt to gratify the concern of the other). Van Pelt (2000:92-93) indicates that temperament has a more profound influence on one's communication style, as it is a

combination of inborn traits that influence one's behaviour.

Greeff and De Bruyne (2000:322) list five styles of conflict management as follows:

i) **Avoidance:** Avoidance can include among others speaking abstractly about an issue, denying that a problem exists and making jokes. Greeff and De Bruyne (2000:323) explain that avoidance as behaviour is unassertive and uncooperative as it is associated with withdrawal including failure to take a position in a conflict situation. Avoidance of conflict is significantly positively correlated with negative handling of conflict, which indicates that it is associated with negative aspects of conflict resolution rather than an attitude of loyalty (Cramer, 2002:430). When couples use avoidance during conflict it is most of the time positively linked with negative features of conflict which are spouse attacks and escalation (Cramer, 2002:430). Avoidance of conflict results in reappearance of conflict issues as well as emotional disconnection in relationship, as couples who avoid conflict have more conflict than conflict engagers. Research has found that couples that avoid conflict have more conflict than conflict engagers and they are higher risk for marital dissolution (Pape, 2001:20).

ii) **Yielding:** Yielding is retreating from a conflict in which spouses may lower their aspirations and settle for less than they would have liked. Greeff and De Bruyne, (2000:322) identify yielding as finding the middle ground, which is viewed as in-between in both assertiveness and cooperativeness. In marriages where the wife makes use of compromising, the couple reports more satisfaction than when the wife uses avoidance, accommodation or competition. They further indicate that where couples compromise there is less distress as compromising behaviour is more closely linked to collaborating and accommodating than avoiding and competing.

iii) **Competition or contending:** Competition or contending is trying to impose one's preferred solution on the other party. It is behaviour that is regarded to be both assertive and uncooperative as it is allied with forcing behaviour and win-lose arguing (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:323). They further state that couples, who make use of competitive conflict management style, reported the lowest marital satisfaction, as making use of this style leads to feelings of resentment,

powerlessness and increased conflict. Greeff and De Bruyne (2000:322) indicate that people who use competitive conflict management styles are not worried about the needs of others or their relationship, as winning is paramount for them, and it gives them a sense of superiority.

iv) **Problem solving or cooperative:** Problem solving, or cooperative communication style is described as an alternative that satisfies the aspirations of both sides. According to Greeff and De Bruyne (2000:322) it can be called collaboration behaviour as it is assertive and cooperative, and it is identified with confronting disagreements and solving problems to find solutions. In their study, Greeff and De Bruyne (2000:329) found that the collaborative conflict management style yielded the uppermost level of marital happiness for both male and females. The authors allude that the collaborative style brings about a satisfactory marriage and afford a foundation for achieving common and fulfilling agreements. The use of problem solving produces mutual commitment to solutions reached during negotiation and provides a relationship climate of trust and openness (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:329).

v) **Accommodation:** Accommodation is the behaviour that is unassertive and cooperative as it is viewed as an attempt to pacify the other person and look for harmony (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:323). In marriages where the husband uses an accommodation style, his marital satisfaction is very low while female satisfaction is higher than when the husband is avoiding and approximately the same as when the husband is compromising (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:323). They further allude that males reported the least possible marital fulfilment when their wives are making use of an accommodating conflict management style.

Husband and wife who have the same opinion on how conflicts in marriage should be managed are more content especially those who have the same opinion that conflict should not be avoided (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000:322). Furthermore, when a wife is engaging, and a husband withdrawn, that kind of marriage becomes hostile, with man and woman differingion styles of managing conflict. During conflict, there are behaviours that can be displayed which can either be destructive or constructive (Pape, 2001:20).

Behaviours that are destructive can include:

- insulting one another;
- threatening one spouse,
- bringing the spouse's family into the engagement;
- having to have the last word and,
- bringing up things that happened in the past.

Constructive behaviours may include:

- calmly discussing the problem;
- finding out what the spouse is feeling;
- saying pleasant things; attempting to compromise;
- suggesting new ways of perceiving the situation and
- listening to the spouse's point of view.

In their study, Buunk, Schaas and Prevoo (2001:823) found that between men and women, men try to avoid an emotional discussion and prefer to soothe over differences as they appeared to view themselves as more willing to compromise, but women viewed themselves as expressing the negative emotions, more than their partner. Women attempt to resolve problems through an open exchange of feelings (Buunk et al., 2001:823).

3.5   HANDLING OF CONFLICT IN MARRIAGES

Conflict is inevitably part of a relationship (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131), while the ability to manage conflict has been found to be one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of satisfaction in romantic relationships (Cramer, 2002:425). Webster-Straton and Hammond (1999:18) have stated that conflict management is one of the most important determinants of the well-being of the relationship and marital satisfaction. Destructive conflict management is characterised by escalating spirals of manipulation, threat, coercion, avoidance spiral, retaliation, inflexibility and rigidity, competitive patterns of dominance, insubordination, demeaning, with degrading verbal and nonverbal communication (Webster-Straton & Hammond, 1999:18). Family conflict can lead to positive outcomes if managed effectively, as a family that manages to resolve a

conflict displays more motivation to face and solve problems (Kunz, 2011:54). An understanding of how conflict is managed in Black African marriages provides an understanding into the environment in which children grow up and through which socialisation occurs, thus bringing an understanding into influences and effects of social breakdowns on families and communities and ultimately on South Africa (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:1).

Conflicts in marriage may influence the vitality of a marriage and vary from couple to couple, though the intensity of the pain runs deep for all (Chapman, 2008:16). In as much as partners might not appreciate conflict in their marriage they can be able to cope with conflict by avoiding situations that might worsen conflicts (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131). The ability of parents to manage conflict well in their marriage can have positive results on the children as quoted in a study by UNICEF (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:2) showed that the closer children remain to the biological family, the more likely they are to be well cared for, and the greater the chances are that they will go to school consistently, regardless of their poverty levels.

3.6   CONFLICT AND FAMILY FUNCTIONING

Family functioning is the extent to which family members are emotionally bonded; effectively communicate emotions and information (Freistadt & Strohschein,2012:954). It also includes how they respond cooperatively and flexibly to problems as it contributes to how couples handle conflicts in their marriage (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:954). Marital conflict can influence children's adjustment directly by equipping children with faulty working models of functional behavioural and emotional expression for dealing with social problems (Gerard, Krishnakumar & Buehler, 2006:955). Marital conflict challenge children's ability to regulate emotional states; disrupting their emotional security and shaping their cognition and coping responses (Gerard et al., 2006:955).

The way a family regulates itself matters to children's welfare, as evidence suggests that low-levels of family functioning are associated with lower educational attainment, and a wide range of child physical and mental health problems including obesity, substance abuse, social phobias, indirect aggression and depression including antisocial behaviour (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:955). Marital conflict can also influence children's

adjustment ultimately by disturbing parenting behaviours that uphold children's psychosocial competency (Gerard et al., 2006:952).

Gerard et al. (2006:953) further indicate that given the silence that can be between parent and child due to marital conflict, scholars believe that children's psychosocial development can be compromised when marital conflict leads to punitive discipline, disengagement by parents and negative interaction between parents and children. Antagonism and aggravation brought about by marital conflict can result in parents' dependence on power-assertive techniques to manage children's behaviour and such techniques are linked consistently to externalising and internalising problems in children (Gerard et al., 2006:954). The consequence of this can be harsh discipline that partially accounts for the relation between marital conflict and children's maladjustment.

3.7   INFLUENCE OF FAMILY SYSTEMS IN FAMILY CONFLICT

Couples faced with circumstances that bring about conflicts between them build up strategies and practices that can be of assistance to them to deal with those conflicts when they resurface (Kunz, 2011:54). When an individual decides to choose a long-term partner, he or she is certainly choosing a set of unsolvable problems that he or she will have to come to grips with for the next ten, twenty or fifty years (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131). Gottman and Silver (2007:131) further indicate that every marriage of people from different family backgrounds is bound to have conflicts or problems, as the people coming together are not from the same family of origin. It will be important to note that even among those from similar family or parental backgrounds there are conflicts and differences.

Gottman and Silver (2007:133) state that in most cases when couples have conflict it is a result of love that is not reciprocated, and endless arguments symbolise some profound differences that will need to be addressed. Conflict in marriages occurs in a person or family and situation context as internal and external factors can impinge upon, disrupt family functioning, and influence family dynamics and as such when families experience a disruption, family dynamics are often directed toward restoring equilibrium (Gottman & Silver, 2007:133).

When couples do not find ways to manage conflict effectively, it can lead to marriage breakdown, especially where the couple reached a block over the problem or the cause of the conflict. This may make the other partner in a marriage feel increasingly hurt, frustrated and rejected by the spouse (Gottman & Silver, 2007:132; Kunz, 2011:54). It is important that in a relationship couples understand the solvable and unsolvable conflicts and work hard to make sure that solvable problems are dealt with before attempting to deal with the unsolvable problems (Gottman & Silver, 2007:134).

When couples have disagreements that symbolises deeper conflicts between them, where they argue about issues like trust, security and selfishness it will be important that they understand the deeper meaning that the conflict has for each of them. Webster-Stratton and Hammond (1999:118) indicate that when couples have low confidence in their ability to solve problems and they lack the skills of managing conflict or effective collaboration, this can lead to increasing negative effect and unresolved issues. It is only when they understand such meaning that they will be able to manage it effectively (Gottman & Silver, 2007:134). When couples do not work to find a compromise on the issues, it is more likely that they will become increasingly resentful and entrenched in their positions. This could evolve into a gridlocked, perpetual problem (Gottman & Silver, 2007:134).

Canary and Canary (2013:48-49) indicate that in their research on conflict, Bermudez and Stinson came up with five couple types:

i) **United Couples:** (validating couples) they report feelings of togetherness and sharing being best friends or companions. They think positively about marital issues and have a feeling of marital satisfaction. Such couples rarely argue or disagree, as they like the way they communicate.

ii) **Harmonious Couples:** (conflict-avoiding couples) they report acceptance of things in marriage they cannot change. They lack desire to talk about or analyse problems, especially when they disagree. They are likely to share negative feelings or to be disrespectful.

iii) **Conservative Couples:** they do everything in their power to avoid conflict. They value religious values and beliefs also being traditional in their approach to life. They rely on traditional gender roles, beliefs, and traditional gender roles scripts to solve problems in times of disagreements.

iv) **Autonomous Couples**: (Separate Couples), they value being separate individuals, often doing things separately. They appreciate having separate and different friends.

v) **Passionate Couples:** (Volatile Couples), they are reporting to honestly confronting disagreements and are comfortable with strong expressions of negative feelings. They understand values through arguments and defending their own views since they enjoy discussing diverse perspectives and experiencing romance and jealousy in the marriage.

The family system over time creates mechanisms that help it to survive conflicts that can destroy the relationship. Conflict in marriage is unavoidable as two people come together from diverse backgrounds being influenced by the systems they come from. Those backgrounds thus influence how they will view and deal with conflict in their marriage.

3.8   NEGOTIATING CONFLICT

The way conflict affects marriage depends on how partners manage conflict as well as provide an overall positive environment for each other (Canary & Canary, 2013:26). Maintenance and conflict behaviours interact to affect relationships and imposing one's will seldom produce results and knowing how to negotiate effectively will help one cultivate strong working relationship, even in difficult relationships (Lapin, 2009:32). Lack of resolutions in conflict between spouses may be the most important determinant of result dissatisfaction and relationship dissatisfaction (Cramer, 2001:431). When there is conflict one might find that you must negotiate with a difficult person, and in that time, it is important that one should not use authority to make demands, but it will be important to uncover the partner's true or personal needs, and then present them as one's own (Lapin, 2009:32).

Adopting such attitude can easily lead to real co-operation and clarifications in areas where couples find that there are conflicts. People respond to direct threats to their relationships by protecting their relationship which can mean that a less personal and subtler exposure to risk can produce the opposite response (MacKinnon & Boon, 2012:265). In dealing with conflict in the home it will be important that each person

in the relationship work hard to find out why the initial presenting demand or what the partner wants is important to them, considering also what needs of theirs will be met if that need was to be met (Lapin, 2009:32). Avoidance with regards to discussing issues in a relationship and discussing those issues in an unconstructive approach may be a consequence of not being able to resolve them (Cramer, 2001:431). When faced with a problem or demand one should not counter with one's own position or demand.

Effective solutions to any conflict can only be reached when true needs have been addressed (Lapin, 2009:33). During conflict negotiations, Lapin (2009:33) indicates that it will be important to understand why the demand is important to the partner, in what way will the demand help the partner, what are the concerns that the partner is having, what are the needs that will be met if one was to meet the demand and lastly what needs will not be met if that need was not met? It is only when you have uncovered and understood the other person's true needs that you are ready to share your needs and in doing that it is important that you share your true needs as opposed to your positions as the other side might perceive your position as a demand (Lapin, 2009:33). It is important amid conflict to define a problem instead of imposing a solution as it will open a door to problem-solving.

Canary and Canary (2013:29) indicate that there are four different general approaches for managing conflict and one of them is negotiation tactic. During the negotiation tactic one partner accepts responsibility by using the "I" or "we" are responsible for the problem and through acknowledging and approving of the partner's action, statements or explanations. Using self-disclosure can be a helpful technique for uncovering your partner's personal needs. Self-disclosure can be explained as exposing vulnerability of your own to the other party to make it comfortable and safe for them to talk about their needs and concerns (Lapin, 2009:34). In a relationship, one's personal concerns can be more important than the obvious ones and those concerns you find your partner finding it difficult to talk about are the ones which are more difficult to address. It is important that during communication one listens carefully for clues that may help uncover the concerns (Lapin, 2009:35). Canary and Canary (2013:29) agree with Lapin by indicating that during negotiation one will need to ask for his/her partner's ideas and feelings including criticism with an open mind to suggest a course of action, and/or accepting the other person's course of action through support and acceptance of responsibility.

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When a couple has reached a stage of conflict and they are working on resolving that conflict it will be important to involve each other in designing the solution to the conflict as this will give them ownership of the agreement, making them more committed and more likely to comply with it (Lapin, 2009:39). During those negotiations, it will be important for the couple to compromise by attempting to split the differences on an area of disagreement (Canary & Canary, 2013:29). It is also important for couples to understand that they cannot negotiate conflict until they have a clear definition of the problem they wish to solve and that will require them to communicate all their needs that must be satisfied for both parties to agree. This means that before attempting to find solutions, it will be important to take time to explore the other party's needs, and then communicate one's own needs (Lapin, 2009:39). Choi and Mark (2008:384) indicate that depressive symptoms lead to more marital conflicts, which in turn led to more depressive symptoms over time. This will help objectify the problem and separate it from personalities. According to Canary and Canary (2013:32), there is a link between depression and how one manages conflict, as explained below:

> Conflict in any committed romantic relationship can potentially lead to devastating impact and a salient factor when discussing such impacts concerns the role of depression. Depression can affect how people manage conflict and how people manage conflict can affect their depression. In general, depressed people tend to have poor social skills, and rely more on confronting and negative tactics, they engage in demand, showing withdrawing patterns and rely on cooperative and direct communication during conflict. Experiences of depression led to both partners' use of angry and depressing messages and the conflict tactics that were used in reaction to depression includes verbal hostility, defensiveness, withdrawal, insults and nonverbal display of anger and sadness.

Heene, Buysse and Van Oost (2007:509) indicate that women reported lower levels of marital adjustment compared with men, as well as gender differences in view of depressive symptoms. They further indicated that the couples with depressed women fared worse on marital satisfaction, conflict communication, attributions and attachments compared with couples with depressed men and nonclinical couples.

3.9   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has discussed communication and conflict in marriages, the different

communication styles that couples use in managing any conflict in their marriages, gender differences in communications which are because of gender stereotypes, cultural influences whereby some cultures do not promote open communication. The chapter further elaborates on the distinctive styles that can be used to manage conflict and handling of conflict in marriages because how a married couple handles and negotiates in conflict becomes important in the success of their marriage. Conflict and family functioning where the family feels emotionally bonded and responds cooperatively to any challenges faced by the family were discussed and emphasised. In the end, the chapter discussed how to negotiate conflict by understanding the demands that have been placed by your partner.

Communication is the important necessity in addressing conflicts in marriage and understanding different communication styles is important in addressing any form of conflict in marriage. Gender and cultural differences play a significant role in understanding conflict and the communication during conflict, based on the influence of families of origin, cultural differences and personalities, different couples can make use of different styles of conflict management that will determine how they will handle the conflict in their marriage.

CHAPTER 4
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Conflict management in Black African marriages in an urban context is a theme that has not received much attention as emphasised in Chapter One. With this research study, the researcher aimed to explore the nature of conflict management in this specific context. In this chapter, the researcher discusses the research methodology followed by the research results. The goal of the research study was to explore conflict management in Black African marriages in an urban context. In this chapter, the researcher seeks to provide an overview of the research methodology used to draw the empirical findings and conclusions. The researcher provides an impression of the ethical aspects involved and applied in carrying out the empirical study, as discussed in Chapter One. Analysed data is presented in themes and sub-themes to answer the research question that guided the research study.

4.2   RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The following section outlines how this research study was conducted and how the data was analysed. Following the research methodology for qualitative research ensured that this study was conducted with ethical considerations and that reliable and valid results could be achieved.

4.2.1 Study population and sampling

The non-probability sampling method was used to seek out couples who could participate in the research study. Purposive sampling was used because it is based entirely on the judgement of the researcher, in that a sample is composed of elements that contain the most characteristics, representative, or typical attributes of the population (Strydom & Delport, 2011:392). Purposive sampling which is also called judgmental sampling is a type of non-probability sampling in which units to be observed are selected based on the researcher's judgement about which ones will be the most useful or representative (Babbie, 2011:179). Purposive sampling is used

in exploratory research and uses the judgement of an expert in selecting cases (Neuman, 2011:267-268). An availability sample was used in selecting the target groups which according to Bless, Higson-Smith and Kagee. (2006:105) is selected from people who are easily contactable, near the researcher and are willing to be recruited as participants. Eighteen of the couples, who met the criteria, were selected in this way. For the focus groups, twenty married men and twenty married women were chosen according to the criteria as discussed below:

The criteria for the purposive sample were:
- participants were first time married couples;
- participants were legally married;
- participants were married more than three years;
- participants had at least one child;
- participants were from the Tshwane Metropolitan Nellmapius-Mamelodi area; and
- participants participated voluntarily.

Participants were recruited from churches, couples' clubs and gatherings of married people such as workshops for married couples in the identified area. The researcher used the contacts that he has acquired in many years of working in the communities to select the research participants. An appointment was made with the research participants in an area where there was no interference and the research participants were informed about the study and its benefit to the community. The approach enabled the researcher to have access to the couples.

Focus group interviews were conducted with four focus groups consisting of ten married men and ten married women each. A focus group discussion is a method of collecting data in which an interviewer asks questions to an interviewee or interviewees (Strydom, 2011b:178). It was important for the researcher to establish a relationship of trust with the research participants as the interviews were interpersonal. Greeff (2011:361) describes focus group interviews as a type of group interview in which the researcher directs the discussion with a small group of individuals to examine, in detail, how group members think and feel about a topic. The researcher used focus groups of men only and women only, using a semi- structured interview schedule with each group giving

their beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of how conflict is managed in Black African marriages. The researcher made use of four focus groups; two with ten married men each and two with ten married women each. Each group was interviewed separately. Focus groups helped to provide a planned discussion on how conflict is managed in Black African marriages from the perception or view of men and women separately. The discussion was designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment (Greeff, 2011:361). The views and perceptions collected from the focus groups were used for drawing inferences about the larger population, which was the eighteen Black African married couples (Greeff, 2011:361). The researcher generated group discussions by keeping the individual group members focused on the topic under discussion using open-ended questions while acting as a facilitator during the interactions within the group. The following are some of the reasons Kumar (2012: 185) mentions for using focus group interviews:

- Obtain general background information about a topic of interest;
- Generate research hypotheses that can be submitted to further research and testing using more quantitative approaches;
- Stimulate new ideas and creative concepts;
- Generate impressions of products, programmes, services, institutions or other objects of interest; and
- Learn how participants express their feelings about the topic of interest, which may in turn, facilitate the design of questionnaires, survey instruments or other research tools that might be employed in more quantitative research.

Focus group interviews assisted in promoting self-disclosure among research participants and to bring to understanding as to how people think and feel (Kumar, 2012:7).

4.2.2 Pilot study

A pilot study is an informal study in which a few respondents possessing the same characteristics as those of the main investigation were involved in the study, to ascertain certain trends (Strydom & Delport, 2011:394). The pilot study's purpose was to determine whether the relevant data can be obtained from the respondents (Strydom & Delport, 2011:331). During the pilot study, the researcher had an opportunity to test the

research procedure, made the necessary modifications and improved the quality of the actual interview (Strydom, 2011b:241).

The researcher consulted books, dissertations, theses, journals and documents containing the latest information on the topic of conflict management in Black African marriages. The information gathered served as a broad orientation and as knowledge enrichment before the commencement of the investigation (Strydom, 2011a:238). The researcher consulted experts in the research field, especially in the broad field of social work.

During the testing of the data collection instrument, the prepared questions were reviewed through consultation, thus the researcher consulted with the participants to confirm the appropriateness of the questions (Greeff, 2011:342). To ensure that the questions are worded concisely, the researcher consulted with experts in qualitative research. Two potential participants and one pilot focus group with members who were not participants in the actual study, were asked for their understanding of the questions formulated for the interview, to allow the researcher the opportunity to refine and reword the questions for added clarity. Collican (2004:158) indicates that interviews can be made more effective with thoughtful preparation and by practicing with colleagues as dummy interviewees until stumbling points and awkwardness have been reduced.

4.2.3 Data collection

Face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted with the sample of eighteen couples and four focus groups consisting of ten married men and ten married women each. An in-depth interview is a conversation with the purpose of understanding the experiences of the people and the meaning they attach to these experiences (Greeff, 2011:348). The research produced descriptive data in the participants' own written or spoken words and thus involved identifying the participants' beliefs and values that underlie the phenomenon. Furthermore, Greeff (2011:351) indicates that to gain a detailed picture of a participant's belief about, or perceptions or accounts of a topic, the researcher must use semi-structured interviews. Data collection was carried out using the two methods which were: semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus groups discussions (Maree, 2007:80). Purposive sampling was also used to select participants who were

able to share valuable information on the topic. The method gave the researcher and participants much more flexibility and there was opportunity to follow up interesting avenues (Greeff, 2011:351). In the interviews, the researcher could probe for even more in-depth information.

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed as a guide for conducting the in-depth interviews for a level of consistency to be maintained between the interviews (Greeff, 2011:351-352). The interview schedule which was utilised can be found in the appendix 5. The interview schedule was, however, used as a flexible guide thereby allowing the researcher to explore the individual opinions and explanations of research participants (Greeff, 2011:348). Themes were identified beforehand and tested within the pilot study once the researcher confirmed through the pilot study that participants understood all the themes. Greeff (2011:323) indicates that the researcher should learn the schedule in advance to be able to concentrate on what the participant is saying and to monitor the coverage of the scheduled topic during the interview. The participants had a choice regarding the questions they preferred to answer, and they were allowed a strong role in determining how the interview proceeds as not every question needed to be answered (Greeff, 2011:353). The researcher took field notes and used a digital recorder to capture the data for analysis. Field notes were taken about what the researcher heard, saw, experienced and thought during the interview. A digital recorder was used to allow a much fuller record than note taken during the interview. The digital recorder was only used where the participants granted permission. The researcher made notes during and after the interview taking into consideration the non-verbal communication not captured by the digital recording.

4.2.4 Data analysis

The analysing of data did not start after the collection of data but started at the collection of data during the interviews, taking field notes and observing the research participants (Gibbs, 2007:3). According to Gibbs (2007:3), not only is simultaneous analysis and data collection possible, but it can be good practice. Babbie (2011:398) indicates that the data obtained during the in-depth interviews is analysed according to the qualitative strategy looking for patterns and trends that appear among the interviews. Data collection and data analysis are an ongoing, cyclical and iterative (non-linear) process

(Maree, 2007:81). The aim of data analysis is the discovery of patterns among the data, patterns that point to a theoretical understanding of social life (Babbie, 2011:398). In analysing qualitative data, the researcher adopted Creswell's model of data analysis which according to Schurink, Fouchè and De Vos (2011:403) contains a series of steps, of which the following were used.

4.2.3.1 Planning for recording data

The recording of data was done in a systematic manner that was appropriate to the setting, the participants, or both (Schurink et al., 2011:404). A digital recorder was used by the researcher to record the interviews. With the use of an interview summary form the researcher recorded the details of the research participants, such as their biographical information, time, place, duration of the interview, and other valuable information that could be relevant and helpful during the interview.

4.2.3.2 Data collection and preliminary analysis

Due to the nature of data analysis in qualitative research which requires a twofold approach, the data from this study was primarily analysed away from the site. Schurink et al. (2011:405) indicate that in the twofold data analysis of qualitative inquiry, the first phase deals with data analysis at the research site during the data collection, while the second phase involved data analysis away from the site after the period of data collection.

4.2.3.3 Managing data

Transcription of interviews is the change of medium and that introduces issues of accuracy, fidelity and interpretation (Gibbs, 2007:11). Gibbs (2007:11) further indicates that transcription helps the researcher to read carefully what was recorded digitally and provides the researcher an easily readable version that could be copied as many times as necessary. Thus, the digitally recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed according to categories and themes that emerged. The researcher read the transcripts in their entirety, often several times to be immersed in the details, trying to get a sense of the interview before breaking it into parts (Schurink et al., 2011:409).

As categories of meaning emerged, the researcher searched for those that have convergence and external divergence and the rest of the data were organised under the main themes (Schurink et al., 2011:410-412).

In managing the data, which according to Schurink et al. (2011:408) is the first step in data analysis away from the site, the researcher took notes while listening to the recorded interviews in private. The data was then transcribed in the form of written transcripts. The recordings which had the recorded data from research participants were labelled with the date, and locations of the interviews. Backup copies of the recorded data were compiled. The data collected from the research study has been kept safely in a locked place for safety purpose to ensure that the research participants' confidentiality is always protected.

4.2.3.4 Reading and writing memos

For the key concepts from the transcripts to be identified, the researcher organised the data to be familiar with the data by reading the transcripts. Reading the transcripts, the researcher could write memos, while looking for similarities and differences. This in turn assisted the researcher to identify the key concepts from the data collected.

4.2.3.5 Generating categories, themes and patterns

When searching for themes, the researcher looked for topics that recurred again and again, while looking at local expressions that were either unfamiliar or were used in an unfamiliar way (Bryman, 2012:580). Bryman (2012:580) further indicates that repetition can be one of the most common criteria for establishing that a pattern within the data warrants being considered a theme, if it is relevant to the investigation's research questions or research focus. In the process of going through the responses by the research participants to understand the meaning the researcher could generate the main themes and sub-themes from the transcripts. The researcher examined all the transcripts of the interviews and their responses were classified according to their identified themes and sub-themes.

4.2.3.6   Coding data

Coding is a process of organizing the raw data into conceptual categories and creating themes or concepts (Neuman, 2011:510). It includes finding and recording one or more passages of text or other data items such as the parts of pictures that, in some sense, exemplify the same theoretical or descriptive idea (Gibbs, 2007:38). Babbie (2011:397) refers to coding as a process of classifying or categorising individual pieces of data coupled with a retrieval system, which allows one to retrieve materials one may later be interested in. The coding process involved making comparisons and asking questions. Open coding is a process which is performed during the first pass through the recently collected data where the themes are located and assigned initial codes in the first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories (Neuman, 2011:511). Using the open coding by reading the text, phrase by phrase, this served to alert the researcher about the theoretical issues lying behind the text and gave sensitivity to the deeper theoretical level in them (Gibbs, 2007:50).

Open coding, which pertains to the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data, was used in this study. During open coding, concepts and themes buried deep inside the data were brought to the surface (Neuman, 2015:345). During the open coding the data was broken down into discrete parts, closely examined, and compared for similarities and differences, as questions were asked about the phenomena as reflected in the data.

The use of assorted colours to highlight the themes from the collected data was helpful because the key process in the analysing of qualitative social research data involves coding, classifying or categorising individual pieces of data (Babbie, 2007:384). The researcher assigned codes to the information collected, to present the information in a tabular or figure form during the process of interpretation.

4.2.3.7   Testing emergent understandings

The researcher could test the emergent understanding of the emerging patterns and incorporate them into larger constructs and seek to ascertain the usefulness and centrality of data to the unfolding story, through the evaluation of the data. Schurink et

al. (2011:415) indicate that researchers need to search through the data for possible negative instances of the emerging patterns and then, if necessary, incorporate them into large constructs.

4.2.3.8   Searching for alternative explanations

To search for alternative explanations to the data collected the researcher critically challenged the obvious apparent patterns. The researcher further sought for other plausible explanations for the data and the linkages between them.

4.2.3.9   Writing of report

In discussing the emerged themes and sub-themes the researcher could unite the research report using quotations to verify the evidence obtained and went back to the literature to contextualise the data.

4.2.5 Trustworthiness

Validity is the ability of a research instrument to demonstrate that it is finding out what it was designed to, and reliability refers consistency to in its findings when used repeatedly (Kumar, 2011:184). Reliability means dependability or consistency while validity means truthful (Neuman, 2015:145). Reliability is a matter of whether a technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, yields the same result each time, while validity refers to the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration (Babbie, 2011:129-131). The trustworthiness and authenticity of the study will be determined by four indicators that will be (Kumar, 2011:185):

- Credibility - where the findings of the research were distributed to the research participants for confirmation, congruence, validation and approval. The higher the outcome of the study, the higher the validity of the study.
- Transferability – the researcher made sure that the process of research is thoroughly and extensively described for others to follow and replicate.
- Dependability – the researcher made sure that an extensive and detailed record of the process is kept for others to replicate for them to ascertain the level of

dependability.

- Conformability – the research was conducted in such a manner that if another researcher was to follow the same process in an identical manner it will provide the same results.

The qualitative research should always aim to be trustworthy to make sure that the inquiry can persuade the audience that the findings of that inquiry are worth paying attention to or worth taking account (Babbie & Mouton, 2011:276). Trustworthiness considers the believability based on coherence, insight, and instrument utility (Creswell, 2014:206). To meet the criterion of trustworthiness in implementing the qualitative research design, the researcher used conformability as defined by Babbie and Mouton (2011:276). Field notes and audit trail notes were made from the raw data which were recorded on audiotapes to enable the researcher to use them throughout the study, and the instruments used were piloted prior to the main investigation. The researcher used the same set of questions to interview married couples and to conduct the focus group interviews for the four groups of married men and woman separately. The research questions for the focus groups did not have the section with biographical information. The answers to the questions were compared to ascertain reliability. Measurement unreliability can also be generated by research workers like interviewers and coders, to check reliability; it is customary practice to have supervisors to monitor the work or verify the information (Babbie, 2011:131). The researcher further discussed the research procedures and findings with colleagues who were outside the context of the study to form a peer debriefing and to enhance the credibility of the research study. To ascertain the reliability of the research, the research project was done under the supervision of Professor CE Prinsloo from the University of Pretoria.

4.3 ETHICAL ASPECTS

The section will consider research ethics concerning the responsibility of the researcher to be honest and respectful to all individuals affected by the research study (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009:98). The researcher will discuss ethical issues applicable when working with human subjects and that he adhered to during the process of the research study.

4.3.1 Harm to participants

Participants were thoroughly informed beforehand about the potential impact of the investigation and were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research at any time (Strydom, 2011a:115). A core ethical principle is that researchers should never create unnecessary stress in participants, meaning they should not go beyond the minimal amount required to create desired effect, or stress without direct, legitimate research purpose (Neuman, 2011:146). Babbie (2011:480) indicates that social research projects may force participants to face aspects of them that they do not normally consider which can cause continuing personal agony to them.

The researcher should not expose research participants to unnecessary physical or psychological harm (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:107). The researcher took all the necessary precautions to protect research participants from harm which included but not limited to obtaining written informed consent before the research, monitoring their conditions closely and arranging for emergency intervention or termination of the study if a dangerous situation arises also debriefing the research participants immediately after the research session (Neuman, 2015:72). As the nature of the study involved creating psychological discomfort as the research participants had to talk about their painful experiences in their marriages, the research participants were warned before time and those who needed counselling or debriefing were referred immediately after their participation (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:107). Participants who had unresolved conflicts or have had painful experiences during conflict would have been referred to the Family and Marriage Association of South Africa (FAMSA) where they could be assisted. When the study involves human beings, the general rule of thumb is that the risk involved in participating in a study should not be appreciably greater than the normal risk of day-to-day living (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:107). The research participants based their voluntary participation in the research on a full understanding of possible risks involved and as such they all signed a statement indicating that they were aware of the risks and that they chose to participate anyway (Babbie, 2011:480).

4.3.2 Debriefing

Interviewing subjects to learn about their experience of participation in the project,

especially if there is a possibility that participating has damaged them will be helpful to understand their feelings about the research and to undo any damage resulting from the research (Babbie, 2011:486-487). Debriefing helps to alleviate any uncomfortable reactions which are either anticipated or unanticipated to certain questions, tasks or activities (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:107). Social research practice concerns the revealing of information that could embarrass subjects or endanger their home life, as applicable to this study on conflict in marriages (Babbie, 2011:479). Leedy and Ormrod (2015:107) indicate that debriefing alerts the researcher to necessary follow-up interactions for any participants experiencing extreme reaction. It also provides a time during which participants can learn more about the nature and goals of the study, how its results may fit in with what is already known about the topic, and about the nature of research more generally (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:107). The researcher looked at the possible dangers and guarded against them since the research participants could be harmed psychologically during this research study (Babbie, 2011:479). Debriefing sessions after the interviews was the process by which the participants got the opportunity to work through their experiences and its aftermath (Strydom, 2011a:122). At the end of the interviews there were sessions with the research participants to debrief them and to learn what the research participants thought, including how their definitions of the situation affected their behaviour (Neuman, 2011:303). This is one way in which the researcher assisted subjects in minimising possible harm, which might have been done despite all precautions against such harm. The researcher debriefed participants directly after every interview.

4.3.3 Informed consent

Informed consent implied that all possible or adequate information on the goal of the investigation, the procedures which would be followed during the investigation, the possible advantages, disadvantages and dangers to which participants might be exposed, as well as the credibility of the researcher, was rendered to potential subjects (Strydom, 2011a:117). The fundamental ethical principle to never coerce anyone into participating in a research project was adhered to as all research participants had to participate voluntary (Neuman, 2011:149). Neuman (2011:149) further indicates that it is not enough to obtain permission; people need to know what they are being asked to participate in, and only then can they make an informed decision about participation.

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Informed consent is intended to safeguard participants from mental or physical harm that might befall them because of their participation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011:64). Research participants became aware of their rights and what they were getting involved in when they read and signed a statement giving informed consent; a written agreement to participate given by the people after they have learned some basic details about the research procedure (Neuman, 2011:149). The research participants were accurately informed about the nature of the research and the researcher obtained their written consent to participate (Babbie, 2011:485). Leedy and Ormrod (2015:145) indicate that informed consent should emphasise the importance of both accurately informing the research participants as to the nature of the research and obtaining his or her verbal or written consent to participate.

The informed consent was important as the researcher used it to establish rapport with and gain the trust of the couples (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015:145). The informed consent further helped the researcher to spell out the expectations on the part of the researcher and participants, such as how long the study would take, and whether the participant would receive compensation. In this study, the participants did not receive any compensation. The research participants were aware that they were at liberty to withdraw from the investigation at any time. Since the subjects in the study were adults, they signed a written informed consent form to participate in the study.

4.3.4 Violation of privacy/ anonymity/ confidentiality

Conflict in intimate relationships is a sensitive issue. Participants had to know that all information would be treated in confidentiality. The right to privacy is the individual's right to decide when, where, to whom, and to what extent his or her attitudes, beliefs, and behaviour will be revealed (Strydom, 2011a:119). Social researchers transgress the privacy of the research participants to study social behaviours; as such they must take precautions to protect participants' privacy (Neuman, 2011:152). It was important to safeguard to protect the research participants' identities and those of the research locations, with confidentiality assured as the primary safeguard against unwanted exposure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008:193). The researcher safeguarded the privacy and identity of participants by not mentioning their names in the research report. If needed, the researcher would violate privacy only to the minimum degree necessary and only

for legitimate research purpose, while protecting the information on research participants from public disclosure (Neuman, 2011:152). The right to self-determination implied that individuals had the right and competence to evaluate available information and make their own decisions (Strydom, 2011a:119). The researcher used a digital recorder to record research information. The researcher asked permission to use the digital recorder to protect the privacy of the participants.

The researcher also signed the letter of informed consent to assure the participants that the information provided would be treated with confidentiality and would only be used to the benefit of the research. No biographical details and identifying information were used. Ethical research protects privacy by not disclosing participants' identity after information is gathered, something that takes the form of anonymity and confidentiality (Neuman, 2011:152). The clearest concern in guarding research participants' interest and well-being is the protection of their identity (Babbie, 2011:482). Anonymity was not possible because of the personal contact with participants. A research project guarantees confidentiality when the researcher can identify a given person's response but promises not to do so publicly (Babbie,2011:482). However, the researcher ensured that all information was treated confidentially, and no identifying information was revealed.

4.3.5 Actions and competence of the researcher

The norms and values of a profession such as social work is mutually reinforcing and contribute to the unique role of social scientists as they express ideals of proper conduct (Neuman, 2011:13). The researcher was ethically obliged to ensure competence, honesty and being adequately skilled to undertake the proposed investigation (Strydom, 2011a:123). In conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher required specific skills where he needed to be adept in communication and interviewing techniques. The researcher is a qualified social worker who has passed theoretical and practical examinations in social work intervention with individuals within the Department of Social Work and Criminology at the University of Pretoria. These modules include the theory and practice application of interviewing. The research study was conducted under the close supervision of an experienced researcher, Prof C.E. Prinsloo, in the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria.

4.3.6 Release of findings

Social researchers have an ethical obligation to the community of researchers as well as the subjects and that obligation includes reporting results fully and accurately (Babbie, 2011:487). The findings of the study must be introduced to the reading public in written form, and should be as clear as possible, containing all the information necessary for the readers to understand what is written (Strydom, 2011a:126). The research was approved by the Faculty of Humanities Research and Ethics Committee to ensure that it would be conducted according to the expected guidelines and procedures. As the watchdog or gatekeeper of the University and as far as research is concerned, the committee would be watchful on research conducted on vulnerable groups in the society (Strydom, 2011a:127). The researcher made sure other people's work is not incorporated without proper acknowledgement. Strydom (2011a:126) indicates that committing plagiarism is a serious misconduct and must be avoided at all cost. The release of the findings is disseminated in such a manner that utilisation by others is encouraged, since that, after all, is the goal of any research project (Strydom, 2011a:126). The results of the findings are released through the University of Pretoria to make sure that the findings can be utilised by others in the profession. Research data will be stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology for a period of 15 years.

4.4   RESEARCH RESULTS

Based on the semi-structured interviews and the focus groups done with the participants the researcher will discuss the biographical information and empirical research in this section.

4.4.1 Biographical profile of participants

The biographical information provided was only taken from the couples interviewed for the research study. Members of the focus group were invited as per the criteria, but their biographical information was not collected.

4.4.1.1   Gender

The research was based on heterosexual married couples and as such both males and females were interviewed for the study.

Figure 1: Gender representation of the participants (N=32)
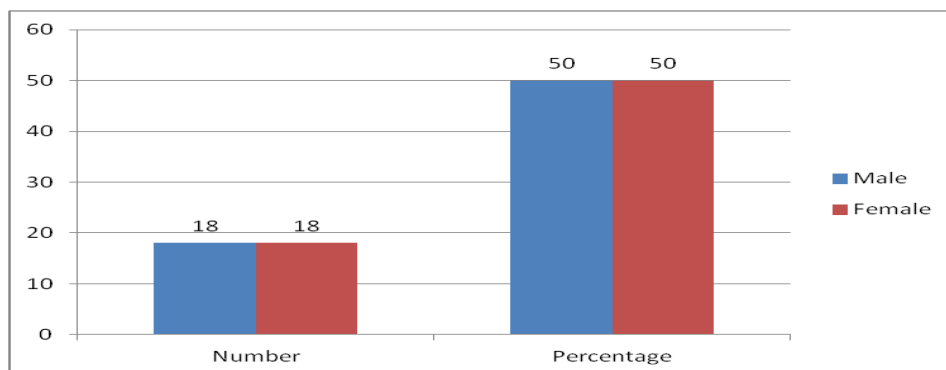
There were 18 heterosexual couples interviewed individually as a couple for the study and four focus groups which were divided into two groups comprised of only men and only women. Four focus groups comprising of ten participants each were held. Each group comprised of participants of the same gender to allow participants to share their experiences without feeling intimidated by the opposite partners. Participants in the research took part out of their own will and participated voluntarily.

4.4.1.2   Duration of marriage

The sample included heterosexual married couples married more than three years.

Figure 2: Duration of marriage (N=18 couples)
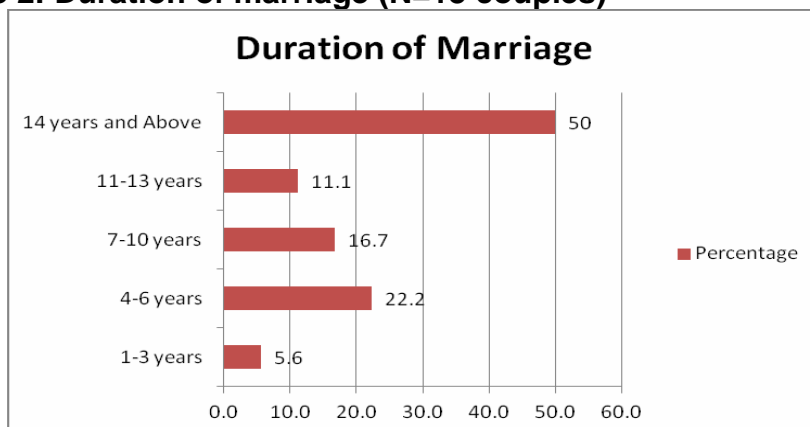
Half of the interviewed couples had been married for fourteen years or above, followed by those who have been married for four to six years. The smallest number of married couples was married for three years. Participants were selected in such a way that the researcher could get a balanced view from participants regarding varied experiences in the duration of the marriage.

4.4.1.3   Marriage type

The research focused on research participants who were first time married couples and who are legally married in terms of the South African law. In the same cases, the researcher had to interpret from the participants' home language into English to bring out the meaning of what the research participants were saying.

Table 1: Types of Marriage

Marriage Type	Number
Customary/ Traditional	17
Civil/ Legal (As recognised by the Civil Union Act 120 of 2006.	18
White Wedding (Western white dress wedding)	5

The findings indicate that the participants for the research study had different marriage types. Marriage in South Africa is honoured by the country's constitution and is also safeguarded by legislation, such as the Recognition of Customary Marriages Act, 1998 (No. 120 of 1998) which recognises marriages by African customary law; the Marriage Act, 1961 (No. 25 of 1961) which recognises the monogamous opposite-sex marriages, and the Civil Union Act, 2006 (No. 17 of 2006), which recognises same sex marriages. These laws are for the legal standing of marriage and civil partnership between persons, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender. The Marriage Act (No. 25 of 1961) previously was the only law which provided for recognition of marriage as defined by the South African legal system before democracy (Budlender et al., 2004:3). This Act was racially and culturally biased in that it did not recognise relationships formalised according to indigenous African rites (customary marriages) as well as relationships formalised in accordance with Hindu and Muslim law. Budlender et al. (2004:3) indicate relationships formalised according to indigenous African rites were legally recognised but were not recognised as marriages and did not have the legal consequences of a marriage. Couples entering these marriages would only get legal recognition of their

union if they subsequently formalised their union in a recognised way.

The Recognition of Customary Marriages Act 120 of 1998 defines the custom of *lobola* as property in cash or in kind, whether known as *lobolo, bogadi, bohali, xuma, lumalo,* whether known as *mabheka,* or by any other name, which a prospective husband or the head of his family undertakes to give to the head of the prospective wife's family in consideration of a customary marriage (Ngema, 2013:405). As indicated in the table above, the interviewed couples either started staying together after performing traditional marriage rituals without going to the magisterial offices to legally register their marriages or to have an official marriage. As the table on the duration of the marriage suggests, most of these couples had been married for more than 15 years. This could explain the evolution of their marriages through various stages. However, the findings indicate that only a few of the research participants had a white wedding (what is a traditional western white dress wedding celebration, done after the process of *lobola*). It should be noted that there is no time limit for couples to have a white wedding. Some couples had a white wedding after 10 or 20 years of marriage as suggested by some research participants during the focus groups interviews.

4.4.1.4   Home language

Language was not a barrier in the study as the researcher was able to speak and understand most of the languages spoken by the research participants.

Table 2: Home language of participants

Home Language	Female	Male
Sepedi	9	9
Tsonga	2	2
Tswana	3	3
Zulu	2	3
Afrikaans	0	1
Swati	1	0
Venda	1	0
Total	**18**	**18**

The table above indicates that most of the couples interviewed were Sepedi speaking couples. The home language was divided into two as in some cases the researcher

found that the husband and the wife were not speaking the same language, but most of the partners married spouses that speak their language. According to Statistics South Africa Census 2011, the most commonly used language in and around Mamelodi and Nellmapius is Sepedi which is spoken by 43% of the population in Mamelodi and by 35.5% of the population in Nellmapius.

4.4.1.5 Ethnic groups

All the research participants in both individual couples' interviews and the focus groups were Black African married couples.

4.4.1.6 Children in marriage

The research participants in the study were married heterosexual couples who were supposed to have at least one child and the following was reported:

Table 3: Number of Children in the Marriage

COUPLE	GENDER			AGES		
	FEMALE	MALE	TOTAL	0 >7	8 > 15	16 > above
COUPLE 1	0	2	2	1	1	0
COUPLE 2	2	1	3	0	2	1
COUPLE 3	1	2	3	1	1	1
COUPLE 4	2	1	3	0	2	1
COUPLE 5	1	1	2	0	2	0
COUPLE 6	1	1	2	1	1	0
COUPLE 7	0	2	2	1	1	0
COUPLE 9	2	1	3	1	1	1
COUPLE 10	0	1	1	0	1	0
COUPLE 11	1	2	3	1	1	1
COUPLE 12	1	2	3	0	0	3
COUPLE 13	4	0	4	1	0	3
COUPLE 14	1	1	2	0	1	1
COUPLE 15	0	2	2	1	1	0
COUPLE 16	1	2	3	0	2	1
COUPLE 17	2	2	4	0	0	4
COUPLE 18	1	0	1	0	1	
TOTAL	20	23	43	8	18	17

In total, the interviewed couples had 43 children between all of them and the number of female children was less to that of male children. Most of the couples had three children with the highest having four children. Majority of children were aged between eight and fifteen years, followed by those aged sixteen and above. Most couples were married for more than fourteen years, and this can be proved by the less number of the children aged between zero to seven years.

4.4.1.7 Highest qualifications

The education level of research participants differed between males and females. Numbers were captured according to the minimum qualification for each gender.

Table 4: Highest qualifications of participants (N=36)

	Male		Female	
Educational Qualifications	No.	%	No.	%
Primary School	4	22.22	2	11.11
Secondary School	8	44.44	4	22.22
Post-Matric Certificate	1	5.56	3	16.67
Diploma	1	5.56	2	11.11
Degree	3	16.67	7	38.89
Post-Graduate degree	1	5.56	0	0
N=	**18**	**100%**	**18**	**100%**

From the participants' biographical data, most of the male participants indicated that they have acquired a secondary school qualification. As indicated in the number of woman with a secondary education, those who had secondary education managed to go further with their education to obtain a degree or diploma. Only a few of the married men had a degree while several of the married women had a degree.

4.4.1.8 Employment status

Research participants came from different employment statuses, and the views and participation were not based on their educational level.

Table 5: Employment status

Employment status	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
Employed	17	94.4	13	72.2
Unemployed	0	0.0	4	22.2
Pensioner	1	5.6	0	0.0
Student	0	0.0	1	5.6
N=	**18**	**100%**	**18**	**100%**

From the married men interviewed, 94.4% (17) were employed with only 72.2% (13) of the woman being employed. Four (4) women interviewed were not employed. One male participant was a pensioner while one female participant was a student.

4.4.2 Empirical research results

Based on the literature review and information by the key informants, themes of discussion for both the focus groups and the couple interviews were established by the researcher before the research could be implemented. This resulted in some the information been prearranged under themes in the researcher's field notes while the secondary themes became clear during data analysis. As introduction to the discussion of the empirical research data, the researcher provides a table with the identified themes and sub-themes.

Table 6: Themes and sub-themes

TOPIC	MAIN THEME	SUB-THEME
Aspects that cause conflict in marriage	**Theme 1:** Difficulties with communication **Theme 2:** Finances **Theme 3:** Family **Theme 4:** Expectations	• Culture • Work place stress • Roles • Trust and sex • Children (Parenthood)

General handling of conflicts in marriage	Theme 1: Quiet Theme 2: Non-verbal communication Theme 3: Invite family or friends and involving a third party and not family Theme 4: Communication	• Confrontation • Support each other • Compromise • Prayer • Using substances
External intervention into marital conflicts	Theme 1: Family Theme 2: Pastors Theme 3: Friends	
Effective ways of handling conflict	Theme 1: Communication Theme 2: Leaving things as they are by choosing to be quiet (avoiding conflict) Theme 3: Staying humble and thinking Theme 4: Talking to authorities such as pastors or others	

4.4.2.1 Topic 1: Aspects that cause conflict in Black African marriages

Participants in both the couple interviews and the focus group interviews indicated communication as the major cause of conflict in the Black African marriages. It was followed by money or finances, family, expectations, work stress, gender roles and culture differences taking the least position. The responses provided by the research participants clearly show that failure of the family to meet the expectations in things like communication, finances, gender roles and culture can lead to conflict in marriage. This is supported by Rothery (2008:90) that all people or groups of people are systems which share a reciprocal influence on one another, and system theory recognizes that everything in a system is constantly influencing everything else. The couples and group members interviewed in this study were Black Africans, and when working with them it will important to understand functioning are only explained from an eco-system point of view (Petty, 2006:114). In taking into consideration what causes conflict with the Black African married couples, it is important to consider the statement by Pearson and Thomas (2010:513) that conflicts in marriage can arise because the system broke down or failed to produce sufficient resources to allow the system to continue working as before.

In discussing the causes of conflict with the research participants the following were identified as causes of conflicts in the Black African marriages (In quoting the research

participants the letter "W" represents "Woman", "M" presents "Man" and "R" refers to "Researcher" while "Partc 1" represents the "Participant" in the group):

4.4.2.1 (a)   Theme 1: Difficulties in communication

Communication came out as one of the main causes of conflict in both the focus groups and the couple interviews. Communication occupies a significant role in models of relationship deterioration, as intimate bonds are believed to remain strong to the extent that partners respond with sensitivity to one another (Lavner, Karney & Bradbury, 2016:681). Communication can be explained as an act of conveying verbal and nonverbal information to another person (Kunz, 2011:45). As indicated by Benokraitis (2011:426-427), communication problems derail many marriages as some researchers can predict whether a newlywed couple will still be married after four to six years by observing not what they say but how they say it. One of the biggest challenges of family life is to adapt and correctly interpret distinctive styles of communication. This emphasises the necessity for conducting a study of this nature.

In considering what Kunz (2011:45) has indicated on communication, it was found that family communication is influenced by the interaction of individual perceptions, emotions and the results of their reasoning or cognition. In their study, Lavner et al. (2016:692) found that poor communication does in some cases lead to changes in marital satisfaction, but assuming poor communication consistently leads couples to be less satisfied was not supported in their study. During interaction, family members and spouses receive information through senses and then they react to the information and interpret the information (Kunz, 2011:45). If these channels of communication are flawed in some way, it will affect the relationship.

The following verbatim quotes illustrate the difficulties that couples experience due to communication problems in their marriage:

W (Wife): "*You find that there are things that I don't communicate to him about, where I will tell him at the last minutes that I will like to go to town... for example I will say it in passing that not properly telling him about my plans to go to town. I won't sit with him and tell him that on this particular date I will like to go to town in do this and*

that. Then when I am supposed to go to town, he will be surprised asking what is happening in town. I will say but I told you that I am going to town... but I know I have said like I don't mean it... and at the end of the day it will cause fights between us."

W: *"Nna to me the thing that really triggered bad emotions to me is lack of communication, especially when I could find that something has been done without my knowledge, it is whereby I really get very angry, because I am an open person, I like communication. It just like lack of communication and maybe betrayal can really make me very angry..."*

Failure to communicate properly as indicated by the research participants has the potential to lead to conflict within the marriage relationship which can affect the functioning of the marital relationship system. Lack of communication in the marriage can negatively influence important decisions in the marital relationship which in turn lead to conflict. In marriages where there is lack of communication, it can lead to the deterioration of the relationship, while perceptions, emotions and results of reasoning or cognition can create conflict in the marriage.

The way marital partners communicate with each other, has an influence on the way the message is received and interpreted. It is not what they say, but how they say it. Communication involves the use of words, signs and gestures that can sometimes be misinterpreted and generate conflict (Kunz, 2011:44). In communication, we use verbal communication and when we read, and then interpret visuals such as typographical signs, illustration and images; we use visual communication (Kunz, 2011:45). This was indicated in the following:

H: *"There are things that happen in life that you don't like, which happens outside of the home, and when you get home you don't talk about them. When you don't talk about them, you not happy about things that happened outside your home but they affect you at home, but if you can talk about those issues and explain to your wife like telling her that today this and that did not go well and this did not make me happy, obviously your woman will understand the situation and won't demand a lot of things like why are you quiet and why your face looks like you are frowning?"*

Kunz (2011:45) further indicates that when we interpret each other's body language, gestures and facial expressions we use nonverbal communication. It is further eluded that in a time when communicating, one uses a mix of verbal and non-verbal communication, sometimes the non-verbal and verbal elements reinforce each other, but express very different feelings at other times. It is clear from the following response that the way in which a partner communicates, has an influence on the message.

Partc 5 (Participant*): "Like when he is giving you instruction saying you must do this and do that..."*

Communication in marriage is clearly a multi-faceted aspect. It is not only what is said, but how it is said. Not saying anything is clearly also detrimental to the relationship.

4.4.2.1(b)   Theme 2: Finances

Finances or money matters was evident as one of the main causes of conflict from the responses of research participants. Failure of the couples to handle and communicate about finances has been identified as the cause of conflict in the marriages. The economic situation, both nationally and internationally has also contributed to the challenges that couples face regarding finances. Many of today's couples face significant financial problems because of the current crisis in the economy (Conger, Conger & Martin, 2010: 685). The marriage institution is the cornerstone of kinship networks in the African family, widening their scope, while at the same time increasing the individual's obligations to the kinship (Luke & Munshi, 2006:264). While marriage is the cornerstone of the kinship network in the African family it does not come cheap as the custom of *lobola* is an important way to establish and strengthen alliances between families and clans, as a gift of cattle, as a living creature is a powerful symbol of the social and spiritual link between African families (Kotzé, 2013:19). Kotzé (2013:19) further indicates that the average value of *lobola* between 1985 and 1998 was around R2000.00, which in 1998 was about 13 times the average monthly earning of African men. The high costs of *lobola* could also have an influence on the marriage especially when the couples are starting their families. Economic conditions of a couple with a family may play a key role in the development and maintenance of healthy romantic relationships in young adulthood (Copp, Glordano, Manning & Longmore, 2016:744). Copp et al. (2016:744)

further indicate that economic problems may be an even more important source of stress for a couple than other difficulties in their marriage, as it was found that consistent with the family stress model, objective measures of economic conditions (employment status) influenced feelings of financial strain, which in turn led to hostile interaction between partners.

Marital distress is a consequence of poor communication as distress results from couples' aversive and ineffectual response to conflict (Lavner et al., 2016:681). Interpersonal difficulties are often closely related to demographic and macro-level factors for example many divorced black men report that financial strain created or aggravated existing communication problems (Benokraitis, 2011:427). Family scholars have demonstrated that economic conditions influence marital quality and relationship instability (Copp et al., 2016: 744). Benokraitis (2011:427) indicates that money is a common source of conflict in marital breakups; something which is supported by Copp et al. (2016:744) who indicated that family literature has shown a lengthy line of research underscoring the influence of economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment, economic hardship on marital quality and relationship stability.

Participants verbalised that money matters cause conflict in the following way. One couple responded as follows:

H (Husband): *Normally when there is a shortage... we don't meet the needs for the family and ... if... it's only finances"*

W: *"Yes, I agree... because you find that maybe I want to do something with a certain amount and find that we disagree, yes, it is going to cause a conflict between us. You find that nna looking at that thing I see that is going to help us, we are going to benefit as a family, and you find that he does not agree with me and then yesss... mhhh."*

Another couple mentioned:
W: *"In a house where you live as husband and wife there are times where you will differ and in most of the time the main factor will be around issues of money ...that I won't hide..."*

H: *"I will also say it is money as well because there a lot of things that money destroys. Like for instance as a man you are always an enemy when coming to money, when you enter through the gate you are enemy when coming to money...even when you are sleeping you become an enemy."*

W: *"according to me there are just minor things...they are not things that we ended up calling somebody to intervene...maybe parents or uncles...it is maybe a minor things where I will blame my husband maybe that he has misused the money, and then we had an agreement that we going to spend the money on doing this and that...and when coming to doing things that we had agreed that we will do you find that he has misused the money..."*

Partc 3: *"I was going to utter the same words indicating that in most cases conflict in the homes is caused by money, but the other thing is lack of communication...within the couples."*

Partc 2: *"In my house when we fight it will also be about the child ... my husband don't want to buy his son a bed... our son is receiving disability grant and I will tell him that he should give me money so that I can go buy our son a bed, we have built rooms they are complete...and my son also listen to what his father is saying as he will say rather than I use his money his father make use of his money to buy alcohol. I will say to him my son look you don't have a bed...for how long are you going to sleep on the sponge...and now I am no longer working cause when I was working I could at least manage to work out something and I still have debts that I am paying...but if you can give me the money so that I can buy you a bed for you to stop sleeping on the sponge...when you sleeping on the floor I struggle to pick you up to your wheelchair especially when there is not one around to help me...so give me money to buy the bed...right there we will start fighting as it will be a big fight with my son..."*

Partc 2: *"Yes indeed money causes conflict in the marriage...honestly speaking most of the conflicts in the marriage are brought about by money...you find that the man in the house will want to spend his money by himself...but when you as woman you have to spend your money you will find that your husband is always by your side to monitor what you are doing with your money until he sees that you have spent it all...but*

when it his money comes you will see that he has bought this and that but you won't know where the rest of the money went...and he does not to account on his money on what he has done with his money...when you ask him he will tell you that he has debts that he need to pay, this and that...I will say it fine, I also have debts and we go together when I go to pay those debts....so what about your debts why don't we go together to pay them...what kind of debts are those that you pay them off on the sides...then when you start asking about those debts there will be fights..."

On the macrosystem the economic situation in both the country and the world, including high food prices has had an impact on how couples make and use their money. This is something that the research participants clearly indicated as the main cause of conflict when coming to finances. Most the couples and the focus group members interviewed in the study are employed but they still stated money as one of the main things that cause conflict in their marriage. The lack, shortage and usage of finances within the couple's relationship continue to be the main contributor to the conflict with marriage as indicated by the research participants. This is in line with what Copp et al. (2016:744) indicated namely those economic problems may be an even more important source of stress for a couple than other difficulties in their marriage.

4.4.2.1(c)   Theme 3: Family

In-laws have been identified by the research participants as one of the aspects that can cause conflict in a marriage in both group and couple interviews. The participants in this case are referring to extended families like siblings and in-laws. African families refer to the entire network of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents as a family, as African thinking and acting is influenced by communal life (Mkhize, 2006:187). As such, there can be serious family and community pressure if a family member does not adhere to the norms and standards as set out by the family or community. Even though most modern families turn to adopt the nuclear family set, their families are still influenced by the family network of uncles, aunts and parents. They are responsible for each other and the boundaries between the nuclear families are more permeable (Petty, 2006:20). Khathide (2011:46) states that in African communities, marriages do not only involve two people. Hepworth et al. (2006:246) also indicate that a member of the family system influences and is influenced by every other member, creating a system that has unique

properties and that is governed by both implicit and explicit rules that specify roles, power structure, forms of communication, and ways of problem solving, decision making, and negotiating roles, power structure, and communication patterns. Families are nested Microsystems that are shaped by different external systems (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:953). Khathide (2011:46) further indicates that African marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlaps so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another.

Marriage in African communities entails more than just building a relationship as it involves the establishment and connecting o f the relatives between two groups (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:204). Marriage in the African culture is served to unite families, not just individuals (Kotzé, 2013:19). The expected behaviour of *umakoti* (a bride) in the homestead of in-laws is an example of how relations arise from a marriage and a bride is expected to display a particular form of 'respect' called '*inhlonipho'* toward her in-laws (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:206), something that according to Benokraitis (2011:277), can be in conflict with the Western culture which does not have clear delineated roles for in-laws such as showing differences to older women in the kin group or obeying a father in-law. After a couple marries, most conflict is usually between female in-laws as a woman plays a significant role in family relationships (Benokraitis, 2011:277). Benokraitis (2011:277) further indicates that when a new marriage is formed, and another woman enters the family circle, a mother may believe, correctly so, that she is less central in her son's life and may be ambivalent about giving up the close ties with him that she enjoyed in the past.

The following verbatim quotes illustrate some of the difficulties the married couples experience with the in-laws:

H: "*Yes... let us say example one of the family members will phone me saying they need ... 1, 2, 3... Instead of involving her in the beginning I will tell her later, sometimes is not intentional ... with family conflict sometimes you think it will be better if she does not know ... as you think of family conflict you want to save her ... thinking you are saving her emotions. You just keeping quite in order to avoid having another discussion*"

Partc 4: "*In most of the time when there is conflict in a marriage, you find that when*

there is a conflict the woman will take the matter to her family even before she can engage with you, which cause big commission right there. You will only notice when you visit her place that their faces are sad, and the environment is not that good. When you ask what is happening she will ask if you don't know, and she will tell you that you have done this or that and I have told my family. If she had started with you first it could have helped the matter."

W: *"I have my siblings at home, as a first born you will find that they will come to me seeking help and I was not working, I will go to my husband to seek help and sometimes I will not get help and that will cause conflict, because I don't have parents and they are looking up-to me. So, when I got into marriage that was the thing that was troubling a lot in our marriage."*

Partc 5: *"Ok ... I will like to add something that we were talking about which is the in-laws both from the woman or man' side. There are times where you find that my wife's parents don't like me, and you find that I love my wife that I even visit her parents, but you find that they don't treat me will...but you find that when my wife visits my parents' house she is treated well with respect but at her parents' house they don't respect me."*

When two people get married in the African context, it is not just the marriage between the two of them, but it involves an entire network of aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents as a family. Even though most couples interviewed are living in an urban area, having adopted the nuclear family set-up, they are still influenced by the family networks of uncles, aunts and parents. When a woman gets married, she automatically relegates her parental' status into that of her husband, with specific expectations from both her husband's family and her own new family. Failure for her as daughter in-law (*makoti*) to carry out some of those expectations can result in conflict between the couple and the extended family. Expectations from the family members like parents and siblings on the couple, as is clear from the excerpts given above, have the potential to cause conflict between them as they must focus on building their own new family and on the other hand provide for the extended family.

4.4.2.1.d)   Theme 4: Expectations

A social system is a structurally differentiated system of social roles and expectations that is maintained by four functional imperatives (adaptation, goal- attainment, integration and latency) as it operates in its environment (Turner, 2006:588). The expected behaviour of an *umakoti* (a bride) in the homestead of in- laws is an example of how relations arise from a marriage and a bride is expected to display a form of 'respect' called '*inhlonipho*' toward her in-laws (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:206). The degree of respect required, differs from one community to the next.

Kunz (2011:46) states that personal expectations are the individual's decision; both deliberate and unconscious about how she or he should behave as a loving partner. Every person enters a relationship with a set of unspoken expectations, based largely on past experiences (Petty, 2006:13), something that is also confirmed by Petty (2006:13) further indicates that expectations may be further determined by gender and ethnic differences and couples enter a union with assumptions of how their partner will behave which are based on these differences. This was confirmed by one of the people interviewed.

H: "(Laughing) ... let me put it .... Expectations! ... you find that maybe I have expectations and if does not come the way you expected you feel a bit offended."

This is in line with Petty (2006:14) who found that expectations that are not met in a relationship may lead to conflict in marriage as gender stereotyping often promotes unnecessary conflict within relationships and a rational understanding of researched gender differences is useful for helpers and couples to develop realistic expectations.

When an individual decides to choose a long-term partner, he or she is certainly choosing a set of unsolvable problems that he or she will have to come to grips with for the next ten, twenty or fifty years (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131). Most of the unresolved problems are from the family of origin which in turn have the potential to cause problems in the marriage, something that was indicated by one of the research participants in the following:

H: *"One will have to look back where we started, the thing that was causing conflict in our marriage I think it was our own background as before we got into marriage we both did not have the stable families, that the things...we did not have a good picture or maybe a model...a family model, apart from those that were at church, ... so when you entered the marriage you see to yourself and you thought that certain things will just happen the way you wanted them but they don't happen. My own background basically will cause..."*

The family background of the research participants and the expectation to have a better marriage as modelled by the marriages in the church resulted in unmet expectations which led to conflict in the marriage. Some of the remarks of the research participants were the following:

Partc 3: *"If you find that there is something troubling me and I cannot express it to my wife that will cause conflict. As you will know that when we entre marriage everyone come-in with their own expectations and when you enter the marriage and you don't get what you were expecting that experience in your marriage that is when you find that courses problems in the marriage."*

Partc 4: *"On the same note on expectations...let us say you have a way of challenging the challenges in the house...you find that you explain to your partner and she does not take it the way you are putting it but she takes it the other way which is not the way you are putting it. You may find that before there was something that you had differed on in the house..."*

Partc 5: *"Different expectations or unrealistic expectations which you cannot be able to perform..."*

The unmet expectations and failure to communicate has the potential to cause conflict in the marriage. Some of the expectations come from the families that the couple have grown from while some were adopted from the society and community like churches. Gender roles also create certain expectations which can cause conflict within the marriage.

4.4.2.1(e)   Sub-themes

The following sub-themes in discussing the aspects that causes conflict in Black African marriages as discussed by the research participants and literature were identified and is discussed below:

4.4.2.1 (e)(i) Sub-theme 1: Culture

In the macrosystem, culture is seen as a strong factor in the maintenance of various groups of people, with certain practises, ceremonies, rituals, values and norms, religions and language (Khathide, 2011:46). Most indigenous African societies practise the principles of 'Ubuntu' where the societies believe in taking collective responsibility and children are children of the community rather than belonging to their parents only (Malunga, 2006:3). Malunga (2006:3) further alludes that when one is married to someone from another clan, one did not marry just the individual but the whole clan and when this happens every member of each clan becomes a relative of every member of the other clan. These also implied mutual responsibilities such as weddings, funerals, births, problems and celebrations of one clan belonged to the other as well (Malunga, 2006:3).

These remain evident when people immigrate to countries with different cultures. An individual's sense of self is indirectly entangled with his or her cultural beliefs and sense of belonging to an ethnic group (Petty, 2006:19). Haselau et al. (2015:173) further indicate that we tend to internalise the dominant norms and values of our culture, believing that they reflect our truth, however, because society is interactive and reflexive, the marginalised culture will also influence the dominant culture, a notion that is important to consider when examining opportunities for changing the status quo, especially regarding marriage counselling. The combination of ancestral belief and cultural obligation requiring individuals to show respect towards family and community contributes in large measures to the persistence of more young people preferring to be married than cohabiting which can be viewed as acting against the culture of the family or community (Possel & Rudwick, 2014:291).

Luke and Munshi (2006:264) indicate that marriage in much of sub-Saharan Africa is

exogamous, in the sense that a man is not allowed to marry anyone from his own clan or any clan that has been designated as being related to his own clan. This is confirmed by Kotzé (2013:22) that marrying from different cultural groups can complicate the situation of the couple during *lobola* negotiations as the different stances held by the various parties on the maintaining of traditional customs would have implications for extended families, the future of the couple and any children they might have, as well as legal and cultural consequences. An example can be given on approaches that foreground gender equality can potentially oppose the right to practice traditional culture, depending on how *lobola* is viewed, as a strong commitment to individual rights may potentially compete with practice of community and collectivism (Kotzé, 2013:22).

Cultural values influence marital conflict processes to the degree that marital conflict would look very different in Asian marriages than they will do in Europe or American marriages (Canary & Canary, 2013:47). The value and importance of culture during conflict in marriage cannot be ignored if we are to understand how conflict is managed within the family especially where there are certain norms and values that are passed from one generation to the other within the family context.

H: "But I don't like this thing of talking about alcohol because I am a man...according to my culture a woman is not supposed to tell me about alcohol...but it is this western civilization thing that makes woman to talk to us the way they are doing and jump on top of our head...if there is something that makes me angry is when one speaks she will put in this word and that word...that is the thing that makes me...because she want to make this fifty-fifty in my house...I grew up with my father, he grew old and even passed on I have never heard such a thing."

4.4.2.1 (e) (ii)   Sub-theme 2: Workplace stress

The lag in changes to workplace practices in which the ideal worker is a male who is employed full-time that his (female) partner is either employed or is a secondary wage earner and that she bears primary responsibility for the care giving (elder care and child care) and housework, leads to continued constraints on successfully balancing work and family (Haddock et al., 2006:209). The work place practices of the couples shows the macrosystem influence on the couple's lifestyle at home. This results in sex-

role differentiation and sex-segregation in the division of labour in the household and in the employment outside the home; with women continuing to earn less money than men, even when important explanatory factors such as job tenure, education and occupational status are held constant (Christie-Mizell, 2006:48).

H: *"Other times it comes when she is stressed from work it affect the environment her at home... and then the stress from work..."*

H: *"There are things that happen in life that you don't like, which happens outside of the home, and when you get home you don't talk about them. When you don't talk about them, you not happy about things that happened outside your home but they affect you at home, but if you can talk about those issues and explain to your wife like telling her that today this and that did not go well and this did not make me happy, obviously your woman will understand the situation and won't demand a lot of things like why are you quiet and why your face looks like you are frowning?"*

4.4.2.1. (e)(iii)   Sub-theme 3: Roles

African culture continues to promote patriarchy in many ways and this perpetuates the subordination of women. This often maintained the abuse against women and is still extremely common and encouraged by the tradition of male dominance (Ngubane, 2010:22). Men have begun to do slightly more household and childcare tasks than they did in the past as women have taken on breadwinning responsibilities. Haddock et al. (2006:210), however, emphasise that an equitable redistribution of responsibility for family work has yet to take place and workplace practices contribute to this inequity for many families.

W: *"Roles... as a woman or as a wife in a marriage is a bit of conflicting because it has changed, personally according to me and in laws, from both either side... and just the fact that we are not the same people... what makes me smile doesn't make him smile, what annoys me is maybe what he likes...and you will realize it latter in a marriage defiantly... (Laughing)."*

4.4.2.1. (e) (iv)   Sub-theme 4: Trust and sex

Sexuality plays an integral part in human functioning from birth until death and relationship problems and sexual problems or dysfunctions are often interlinked (Manual for Marriage Preparation and Marriage Enrichment, 2007:58). According to the Department of Social Development's Manual for Marriage Preparation and Marriage Enrichment (2007:59), sexual problems or dysfunction are often symptoms of other problems within the relationship, whether it is a lack of emotional intimacy or unresolved conflict. This is something that was confirmed during a focus group interview when one group member indicated as follows:

Part 3: *"Yes but on my site trying to bring another thing is when you are both tired from…work and you find that your man wants to be intimate with you and you tell him that you are tired...and you find that such kind of thing in marriage bring conflicts...even if he won't tell you but you are able to see that the person is not in the same mood that he will be in...he will give you things you want and you will be happy at home and even the money you need in the house he will give you, but when it comes to the sex that is where you will fight as both of you are tired from work...but until you both take a decision that we will be intimate as from Friday...that is when you realize that there is joy in the house...you agreed that we won't intimate during the week but we will start from Friday cause you will know that the next day you will rest...and it will be nice..."*

Procreation is consequently highly valued within marriage, as Khathide (2011:46) states that in African communities, marriage and procreation are a unity; without procreation, marriage is incomplete as both husband and wife are reproduced in their children thus perpetuating the chain of humanity. Among the Luo and amaZulu tribes it was considered a shame of a bridegroom to be ignorant and incapable of performing his duty on the wedding night (Khathide, 2011:35).

Culturally, male youth has been led to believe that it is a sign of manhood to be able to control relationships and females are brought to believe that males are superior in all spheres of life and should be masters of sexual relationships (Ngubane, 2010:26). Ngubane (2010:27) further indicates that men are given licence to be sexually

adventurous and aggressive, without taking responsibility for their actions whereas women's respectability is derived from the traditional roles of wife, homemaker and mother. Childbearing and satisfying her husband sexually and otherwise are the key expectations for a wife even if she is aware that her husband is unfaithful, as refusing the husband sex can result in rejection and violence (Ngubane, 2010: 27). In South Africa, the negotiation of motherhood has been shaped by specific social conditions including but not exclusively, slavery, rural life housing and labour policies under apartheid political turbulence and urbanisation (Moore, 2013:152).

Ngubane (2010:27) continues to indicate that women's inferior status offered them little or no power to protect themselves by insisting on condom use or refusing sex as many women also lack economic power and feel they cannot risk losing their partner; thus, their source of financial support by denying them sex or deciding to leave an abusive relationship.

W: "According to me, when a couple doesn't trust each other..."

(Researcher) R: "Oohhooo Lack of trust...when two people don't trust each other anymore that would cause conflict..."

Part 2: "You see the thing cause fights in the marriage is when people don't trust each other..."

Part 2: "If you can trust each other they won't be fights in the marriage...you when a man wakes up early in the morning to go to work and his wife think he going to pass at another woman's house...you never have trust...you as a man on the other side when your wife goes to work to will busy calling several times thinking he is with another man...if you love each continue to love each other... you just have to trust each other believing that he is at work and she is at work..."

4.4.2.1. (e)(v)   Sub-theme 5: Children and parenthood

On the mesosystem level parenthood affects the couple as a system and other systems connected to the new family. Mwamwenda (1996:480) indicates that the birth of a

first child may impose strain on a couple's relationship as after the baby's arrival the couple may have less time for each other, for example the wife is bound to pay more attention to the baby than to the husband. The husband may feel entitled to some of the attention given to the baby, something that may result in less sexual activities between the couple which can lead to frustration (Mwamwenda, 1996:480). Posel and Rudwick (2014:284) indicate that the links between marriage and reproduction has been dislodged as despite low marriage rates, most African women want to have children and at least in some sections of Zulu society, the goal of motherhood outweighs that of marriage.

The following responses point to disciplining children and both parents being involved in and responsible for discipline.

Partc 2: *"I will like to say that sometimes in the house, woman turn to favour one child over the other...even when the favoured child is doing something wrong and you try to correct him, they will utter words like you don't like the child and you favour the other...that itself." You will find that even amongst the children when they are fighting, and you try to discipline them, she will be saying that you like the other one and the other you don't like. That results in the children no longer working together and it results in the children not been well disciplined. If when you discipline the children you find that your wife is also supporting you, it will make it easy if the mother also supports you, as you will find that even the children behave properly."*

Partc 1: *"Children can be naughty...like in my case...you see there a decoder remote...so my 12 years son when I left him with the children he took the remote and changed whatever he changed, as he has a habit of fixing things around the house, so when I came back he said he is going to see his aunt and I agreed that he should go... while he was gone I looked for the remote and couldn't find it and no one in the house knew where the remote was...so when he came back I asked him where did he put the remote he said he did not know where the remote was...but I knew that he knows what he did with the remote as he always fixes things around the house. I thought that he might have opened it and when he couldn't put it back together he threw it away ... as we searched throughout the house and couldn't find it. His father had gone to the funeral so when he came back he asked where the phone was ... so the children told*

the father that their brother was holding the remote ... the father then indicated that it was my responsibility as the mother to make sure that the children don't touch things they are not supposed to touch in the house."

4.4.2.1. (e)(vi)   Sub-theme 6: Personalities

Higher frequencies of conflicts in marriages are related to less happy partners and the number of marital 'good times' identified by those partners is negatively correlated with the number of marital conflicts (Canary & Canary 2013:48).

W: "Well I think as expected it is two different personalities ... I think that is the first source of problem" .... "Yes... am more introverted and my husband is extroverted, he is out there.... I am more indoor person, my husband is more adventurous, is a reader, like my own space, am that type of a person. He is more of people's person, out there doing this doing that... so obviously, personalities are the first area of conflict, and obviously it boils over to things like time management it still comes from personalities, things like perfections still partially comes from personalities"

4.4.2.2   Topic 2: General handling of conflict in Black African marriages

The way conflict affects marriage depends on how partners manage conflict as well as provide an overall positive environment for each other (Canary & Canary, 2013:26). Maintenance and conflict behaviours interact to affect relationships and imposing one's will seldom produces results. Knowing how to negotiate effectively will help one cultivate strong working relationship, even in difficult relationships (Lapin, 2009:32).

Couples faced with circumstances that bring about conflicts between them build up strategies and practices that can be of assistance to them to deal with those conflicts when they resurface (Kunz, 2011:54). Most of the couples and group members interviewed pointed out that they use the non-verbal communication method of quietness to handle conflict in their marriage. Other couple participants and group members indicated that they will invite family or friends to intervene and sometimes they will involve the third party. Further methods that the couples and members of the groups use to handle conflicts in the marriage include, communication, confrontation, compromise,

and support for each other and prayer.

When intervening in the family, it will be important to look at how the family reaches agreements and negotiates differences, which will tell a great deal about the nature of the family system (Howe, 2012:36). Family system theory considers how complex interaction among family members affects behaviour, with its primary principle being to learn more about the family. It is not possible to only study the interactions among family members if we simply study each family member individually. Behaviour can only be understood within the context of the multiple systems in which it occurs (Hammer & Bauer, 2003:423), thus taking mesosystem influences into account.

Pierson and Thomas (2010:513) indicate that during therapy, the couple should always be a product of wider forces and when solving or managing marital conflicts it is important to consider the kind of system each person in the marriage is coming from. This should be done by exploring how conflicts were managed in the systems they came from. Individuals' attitudes and behaviours are influenced by other individuals in their work and family environment providing for a more comprehensive understanding of work-family dynamics (Hammer & Bauer, 2003:420). Hepworth et al. (2006:246) also indicate that a member of the family system influences and is influenced by every other member, creating a system that has unique properties and that is governed by both implicit and explicit rules that specify roles, power structure, forms of communication, and ways of problem solving, decision making, and negotiating roles, power structure, and communication patterns. In the mesosystem, one's experience is the unique creative result of an interaction between him (the person) and the circumstances life has handed him (his environment).

Individuals all have habitual ways of interpreting their lives, which affects how they feel about what happens to them and the results are beliefs that shape their feelings and behaviours (Rothery, 2008:99). Sustaining beliefs are seen when people can be helped to feel hopeful and optimistic and their motivation to change is enhanced as hope is the belief that problems can be managed or solved and that something meaningful can come from painful, challenging times (Rothery, 2008:100).

The themes are discussed as follows:

4.4.2.2. (a)   Theme 1: Communication

One of the biggest myths about interpersonal relationships is that it is okay to say what is on one's mind and let it all out, but in some cases couples should probably communicate less, not more, because too much talking can lead to relentless nagging, criticism, and repeating the same issue over and over (Benokraitis, 2011:284-285). This was confirmed by one of the research participants who indicated:

Partc 4: "Communication...we talk...we sit down and show each other where we have gone wrong...but we wait until we have calmed down..."

The research response correlates with Benokraitis (2011:284-285), who found that communication should not be done when one is emotional as too much talking can result in miscommunication. Communication involves the use of words, signs and gestures that can sometimes be misinterpreted and generate conflict (Kunz, 2011:44).

During a family argument, a person may be overly angry and need to take time away from the interaction before being able to rationally interpret what the family member is saying (Kunz, 2011:45). It is further stated that interpretation can either be done rationally or it may be influenced by the person's emotions. How a couple communicates in a conflict can have an impact in the management of the conflict as Lavner et al. (2016:681) indicate that distressed couples display more negative communication behaviours and fewer positive communication behaviours during conflict resolution tasks than relatively satisfied couples. Women do much more work starting and maintaining quality interactions because of the nature of their conversational style and they have conversational patterns in which they ask more questions than men, use a questioning tone in their statements requesting confirmation from the listener, and tend to use tag questioning that occur at the ends of sentences and encourage the listener to respond (Petty, 2006:16). One female research participant indicated that she likes to speak out about what is disturbing her there and then, as pointed out below:

W: "Nna (me) truly speaking when coming to handling of conflict when something is not handling me well.... I speak out, I bust open... as I cannot wait for something to be

solved in the future, I want it solved now.... as I will like to speak about it there and then, feeling that I could speak about it the whole day ... because there more I speak about it the more I feel it is getting into the person ... but in most cases I will be the one, even though not making noise, who will call my husband so that we could sit and talk about an issue that I feel is troubling me; where I will indicate to him that my husband I am not happy with 1,2,3,4,5,6... which I don't like. This particular thing that I feel we are doing is not good. But in most of the things which I feel that they are disturbing me, I burst out."

This confirms what Petty (2006:16) pointed out namely that women do much more to start and maintain quality interaction. Kunz (2011:48) is also of the opinion that women are more likely to ask for information and talk to connect with others and as such, they are more prone to smile or establish eye and physical contact. Women are more skilled at interpreting nonverbal behaviour as they are more attentive, use more nonverbal communications to demonstrate that they are listening, and use signs to emphasise what they say. (Petty, 2006:16). In using communication, you might find that the partner in marriage is difficult to deal with, but the research participants have showed that it will still be important to communicate. The following verbatim quotes illustrate the point as mentioned by the participants:

Part 3: *"As the other gentleman has put it when there is a conflict we have to deal with it because when we are quite it does not mean that the conflict is over, but we have to talk about it. Even though the women speak too much, you have to give her time to speak and after she has spoken request her to give you opportunity to speak then talk, because if you don't give each other chance you will never hear the end of it. Give her the chance if the shouts let her shouts but give her the chance until she is satisfied, because if she shouts and shouts without you giving her the chance to express herself as failure to do so will lead to other things."*

When there is conflict one might find that you must negotiate with a difficult person, and in that time, it is important that one should not use authority to make demands, but it will be important to uncover the partner's true or personal needs, and then present them as one's own (Lapin, 2009:32). It is only in uncovering and understanding the other person's true needs that a person is ready to share own needs and in doing that it is

important that person shares his or her true needs as opposed to one's positions as the other side might perceive that position as a demand (Lapin, 2009:33). During those negotiations, it will be important for the couple to compromise by attempting to split the differences on an area of disagreement (Canary & Canary, 2013:29). It is important for couples to understand that they cannot negotiate conflict until they have a clear definition of the problem they wish to solve and that will require them to communicate all their needs that must be satisfied for both parties to agree. This means that before attempting to find solutions, it will be important to take time to explore the other party's needs, and then communicate one's own needs (Lapin, 2009:39).

One research participant responded as follows:

Partc 1: *"It all about communication... you communicate with her…"*

Partc 4: *"It is all about communication...there is no other way..."*

Partc 4: *"Communication...we talk...we sit down and show each other where we have gone wrong...but we wait until we have calmed down..."*

Communication is an essential element in handling conflict in the marriage. It is important that discussing conflict should not be done when one is emotional to avoid miscommunication. Communication does not only involve verbal communication but involves signs and gestures that sometimes can be misinterpreted with potential to generate more conflict in the marriage. Women are perceived to be verbal in the marriage and insist on communication when there is conflict in the marriage.

4.4.2.2 (b)   Theme 2: Non-verbal communication – Quietness

Nonverbal communication and quietness were identified as the methods that a married couple will use to deal with conflict in their marriage. This can also be viewed as the avoidance style of conflict management, where couples avoid escalating the level of conflict by choosing to be quiet when there is a conflict.

Sometimes verbal and nonverbal communication may contradict each other, and this kind of discrepancy often occurs in family interactions and can cause problems or

conflict. When faced with contradictions in communication, research has shown that people tend to rely on nonverbal actions to interpret another's behaviour (Kunz, 2011:46). Interpersonal communication refers to the verbal and nonverbal messages that two or more people exchange (Manohar [sa]). In the process of interpersonal communication, a sender conveys a message through a communication channel which is either in speech, gesture or writing. The receiver then interprets that message. According to Kunz (2011:46), one of the biggest challenges of family life is to adapt and correctly interpret different styles of interpersonal communication.

Partc 1: *"so in most of the time if there is something that is troubling us.... I usually keep quiet for some time and she will be asking if there is something that is bothering you....at that time there won't be any fighting, as I will be cool, and she will also be cool, then I will explain to her. Sometimes she will be talking at that time...why should you be quite about such a thing when there be such problems in the house ... but for the sake of peace I also don't answer her back or say anything..."*

In a study by Christensen and Heavy in 1990, it was found that when couples find themselves in negative relationships, men are more likely to withdraw, and women tend to become more demanding and complaining (Petty, 2006:15). Kunz (2011:48) indicates that researchers agree that the differences in communication styles between genders rely more on the gender's interpersonal orientation. Once people latch onto negative explanations for conflict that reflect characteristics of the partner, then increased and personal isolation is said to occur, which will be driven more by how such negative attributions help a person defend him/herself (Canary & Canary, 2013:46).

In dealing with conflict in their marriage most of the couples have indicated that they prefer to use quietness to deal with conflict in their marriage. This is in line with the avoiding style of conflict management which is associated with both low concern for self and others as is usually accompanied by withdrawal, as an individual using this style fails to satisfy both his and her concerns as well as the concerns of the other party (Copley, 2008:10). It is often used when the potential ramifications of confronting the other party seem to outweigh the benefits of resolving the conflict. Benokraitis (2011:284) confirms it by indicating that when the disputant withdraws, he or she refuses to continue the argument, either by clamming up or by leaving the room. This is

confirmed by the research participant who indicated the following:

W: *"When it is like that, that is the time when each goes to sleep, and tomorrow is work as normal."*

Partc 3: *"As they have already indicated ...to avoid lot of things you remain quite...if ever the things are troubling her she will end-up coming back to you...to apologizing for whatever wrong she has done... in the same time she might try to accuse you indicating that you are wrong..."*

Among the four coping techniques Benokraitis (2011:284) mentions, withdrawal is the least effective because there is no resolution of the conflict. Some of the views expressed by the research participants included the following:

Partc 2: *"You see this thing is like this ... you fight and be angry with each... you just remain quiet and go to work...when you come back from work happy and you continue to talk with her...she will be laughing again...then you leave all the other things you were disagreeing about cause if you might try to solve them you will only create more problems for yourself...and you don't want problems..."*

Partc 1: *"A man is like a sheep...she dies from inside without uttering a word."*

W: *"Because I feel that maybe I will just outburst, or maybe say something that will hurt him... and then most of the times he will just humble himself and keeping anger even in me sometimes makes me to bottle up things and I will just leave things like that without even communicating. But what humbles me most is that each and every time if he has done something wrong he will always come in and will say sorry. In the midst of the pain he will say sorry and he will want us to communicate about it, when am angry and when I don't want to greet, every morning he will say good morning, how are you my love... and even his routine of doing some other things that makes me to love him he will just continue even in the midst of storms. Even when it is bad, he normally used to make tea for me in the morning that is why I love him so much.... then he will just greet and do exactly what he supposed to be doing for me... he will just go warm the car when I am supposed to go... and he will do it by himself and everything... when I come*

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back he will just sit and ask me how was your day.... it just humbles me. But on my side sometimes I won't even say anything; I will just come to him and say 'Hi'... but I have learned something from him even as a child of God, because this thing when it works like that I couldn't even pray, in a good way because I couldn't manage to communicate in a good way because I could not manage to communicate with him. I realise that things are not getting well especially in the house when we are supposed to communicate about some other things when I am quite."

W: "I was taking it like that, but then it will just prolong this bitterness in me and he taught me that if can even if can just call is much better than just keeping quiet and it made me to just love him, because I will lash on him and he will withstand that thing up until it is done."

H: "In most of the time I prefer to keep quiet ... I am actually having a problem of bottling things up... it is like am banking things where I sometimes say let the slide pass...until where I reach a point where I see that now things are getting worse, that is when I will tell her...but in most cases I don't see something and react as I will consider that she is a human being and she bound to make mistakes...I see that this time is getting out of hand...that is when I will tell..."

It is clear from what the research participants have indicated that most of the couples interviewed have identified quietness as a method that is working for them in handling conflict in their marriage. The method of quietness in dealing with the conflict in the marriage is used by couples especially where couples avoid escalating the level of conflict.

4.4.2.2 (c)   Theme 3: Invite family or friends or involving a third party who is not family

All people or groups of people in systems share a reciprocal influence on one another; systems theory recognises that everything in a system is constantly influencing everything else (Rothery, 2008:90). The positive influence of the family during conflict is important in the sustaining the marriage, as they create an atmosphere in which two people in conflict can decide to talk out of respect for family members. Ecological

theories tend to differentiate aspects of our environment that have an immediate impact on our ability to cope from those that are less directly influential, aspects that are micro (relatively small) versus macro (larger and broader), or proximal (close) versus distal (further away) (Rothery, 2008:103). Individuals develop within the micro-system of home and family, the meso-system of school, neighbourhood, and other local institutions such as churches, clubs and associations and the exo-system through which more distant but powerful institutions as practices bear on the individual's life (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:190). Rothery (2008:104) believes there are environmental influences considered immediate, however, because they are commonly obvious contributors to people's problems and targets for change, other influences are no less important but tend to be less immediate, often less apparent and less modifiable to change in the short term.

Marriage in African communities entails more than just building a relationship as it involves the establishment and connecting of the relatives between two groups (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:204). Marriage in the African culture is served to unite families, not just individuals (Kotzé, 2013:19). The chronosystem is seen dominant Western cultural practices, influences such as globalisation, women's empowerment and the ideology of human rights which have impacted traditional African beliefs and practices about relationships, further eroding the foundation of African culture as a source of power and health (Haselau et al., 2015:172). Haselau et al. (2015:172) further indicate that because of all the historical and political influences in South Africa there may be marked differences in the values, beliefs and behaviours between generations within one family, between the youth and the elders and between those living in urban and rural areas. This sentiment was shared by one of the research participants who said:

W: "You know I like the fact that ...Black African Marriages in an Urban Context... we find ourselves in a very confused space, we are Africans we still wanna follow tradition, but still want to live in an urban area. When we grew up we saw the uncles and aunts coming in to solve problems, but it is just practically impossible hey... so actually at this moment is a moment of that time of what do you do... do you call out a friend, do you put it on facebook ... to cry out loud, do you sms... it's more of technology part this lately, hence it's just a lot of unresolved issues because there is never an end to it. Yes, you will go to the Pastor, but you can't go to the Pastor every day, sometimes you will just leave it, hope it solves itself and it builds up ... I think it contribute to a lot of unhappy

couples and lots of divorce ... I can say I don't see any methodology, yes there is ICAS, there is FAMSA, when you really angry, where do you find FAMSA by the time, when you are in between you don't know what to do, where do you FAMSA at the time? Previously you could find a neighbour, who is an uncle or the elders, now I don't even know the names of my neighbours. Which are elderly which could play a big role like they used to do in African Marriages, but now they can't as they don't even know me.

In such cases, family ties can be a valuable resource and provider of various types of social capital to married couples and their families, especially in the early years of marriage as the family ties can positively affect the marital relationship by buffering the negative effects of conflict on marital outcomes (Orbuch et al., 2013:256). Orbuch et al. (2013:256) further indicate that families of origin serve as models that couples can use to shape their own marriages over time, since these ties also provide members with a sense of belonging and enables members to share and exchange practical and economic resources. The sentiment shared by Orbuch (2013:256) is confirmed by some of the research participants who pointed out the following:

Partc 2: *"We stayed at our mother in law's place for a long time...so when there was a fight between us I could run to my mother in law's room as we were staying with her...and you will find that he is able to cool-up and as he has cooled-up that is when you find that is the time that you will go back to your room...but sometimes you find that you will sleep in the room...you will wake up in the morning when he is sober that is when you will go back to your room...that is when you can solve it...because if you could say you are going to confront him you will have more problems....there can even be blood bath in there..."*

H: *"When it is like that...because you have a family, you will call them and sit down to solve the matter of course if it is only the two of you, it might not be easy to solve it as each one will be angry...how will you solve it...?"*

Family which involves parents from both sides of married couples are part of the micro-system which is a valuable resource and provider of several types of social capital to married couples especially when there is conflict within the marriage. On the other hand, close family friends and pastors who are part of the meso-system have also

been identified to be playing an important part in helping married couples manage their conflict in the marriage, as one research participant pointed out that:

Partc 1: *"I believe in what I have seen working for me... I invite the best friends of my partner to my house and we talk about something and I know that they are his friends and he is open with them and this are the people I know they love our marriage and they won't appreciate seeing our marriage going down the drain. We sit down with the best friends and relatives with my relatives that are good we sit down to talk...at that time because the situation is tense,...he is a man I can't beat him but when the family comes the matter will brought to the table, likely we have families that are born again...where he is wrong they will climb on him and where I am wrong they will also climb on me to correct me...that is the method that I saw working for me..."*

H: *"Like conflict comes in sizes in families, there are other times where you see really that this you cannot handle alone, so involving the third party might work. I don't prefer going to my family or her family to come help us solve the problems because that might trigger negative attitude from my family towards her or her family towards me, so I prefer to consult a neutral person whom I can confine my problems preferable our Pastor is the one who is really the third member of the family, whom I always run to when I have problems."*

While emphasising the importance of communication between couples, the research participants have also stated the importance of other stakeholders in the meso-system in helping to handle the conflict within the marriage. Close friends have been identified as part of the people within the couple's system to help in handling conflicts in the marriage. The involvement of parents in assisting to handle the conflict in the marriage should not only be from one side of the couples but should involve both families, as Nkosi and Daniels (2007:204) indicated that marriage in African communities entails more than just building a relationship; it involves the establishment and connecting of the relatives between two groups (Nkosi & Daniels,2007:204).

Partc 4: *"By sitting down the two of you and communicate before you call the intervention of outside people before you even call your parents. You will call your parents' family and your family that is where the parents will talk to you and reprimand*

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the two of you asking how did you come to the situation where end-up fighting like this. Then you are given the opportunity to relate the whole story how you have arrived where you are in the relationship, and if you as the wife you are wrong, they parents will reprimand you, showing you as their child where you did wrong.....if the man is wrong they will talk to both of you advising you how to handle such matters in the future......advising you to talk your issues over.....but there should always be communication between the two of you first before you can invite other people from outside to intervene in your relationship."

The family has been attributed to play a role of giving advice which can be useful in handling conflict in the marriage as indicated by the research participant below:

Partc 5: *"Our fights are not necessarily that serious, but it in most of the time petty things...like you find that some of those petty things don't handle me well...but my mother in-law has taught me that if I have a problem I should call her; I should call my family...you find that sometimes she comes to visit us and while she is around she will talk to us...my main problem is that he drinks alcohol and will be coming home late at night...but sometimes when he has made me angry I will cook and prepare a nice meal at home...that is when he will call me during the day while he is at work and because he is far from me we will talk...he be asking that the differences must be set aside so that we could grow our children."*

The African married couples interviewed in this study are working from a systematic approach which involve the family and friends who provide support and advice when there is conflict in the marriage. The people in the micro-system and macro-system of the couple's marriage are important contributors towards the well-being of the marriage. They are viewed as valuable resources and providers of several types of social capital to married couples and their families.

Some researchers have suggested that successful conflict management involves using specific styles to resolve conflict situations; for example, that the integrative problem-solving style is most appropriate for managing all conflicts (Copley, 2011:10). For conflict to be managed most effectively, one style can be more appropriate than the other, based on the situation, as effectiveness of individuals is perceived based on which conflict

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management styles they choose to incorporate. In dealing with conflict in the home it will be important that each person in the relationship work hard to find out why the initial presenting demand or what the partner wants is important to them, considering also what needs of theirs will be met if that need was to be met (Lapin, 2009:32). Couples over the years of being together facing different circumstances or challenges that bring about conflict in their marriage can find strategies or methods that are able to help them handle conflicts in their marriage. The non-verbal communication style of quietness which is associated with the avoidance style of conflict management has been identified by most of the research participants as the most used method to handle conflict in Black African marriages. The importance of communication within the marriage system to handle conflict effectively cannot be more emphasised as indicated by both literature in this study and research participants. Lastly, the functioning of an African family system involves more than just a couple system in a marriage but also the extended family, friends and pastors on both the micro-system level and the macro system level also continue to provide the valuable resources and social capital to married couples in handling conflict in their marriage.

4.4.2.3 Topic 3: External avenues to seek help from when there is conflict in Black African marriages

Social systems like families are never completely resistant to influence from outside so they are always to some extent open and can only be relatively closed. Rothery (2008:97) further indicates that excessive openness leads to a loss of identity and other risks, while excessive closeness results in deprivation. A balance is what is desirable with systems like families being open enough to access the resources they need to thrive but closed enough that undesirable influence can be screened out and identity maintained (Rothery, 2008:97). Papero (2009:447) reiterates that a family is a system of interdependent people, and individual behaviour cannot be understood adequately without including the relationship system in which an individual's lives and changing degrees of anxiety greatly affect the condition of that system.

The family system can be influenced by the action of an individual family member, particularly if that person occupied a prominent position in the system and when the system changes, the behaviour and the function of the family members change as well

(Papero, 2009:447). The ecological system theory sees a person's social environment as a set of concentric circles through which it is possible to picture how institutions, social attitudes and family dynamics promote or curtail the opportunities and wellbeing of individuals (Pierson & Thomas, 2010:190). Rothery (2008:104) believes there are environmental influences considered immediate, however, because they are commonly obvious contributors to people's problems and targets for change, other influences are no less important but tend to be less immediate, often less apparent and less modifiable to change in the short term.

One of the major strengths of using an ecological system perspective to understand individuals' issues is that it incorporates an analysis of both formal and informal networks around the individual, including relationships with other individuals, groups, family, community and the environment ('ODonoghue & Maidment, 2005:43-44). In this way, it is a perspective that can help gain an appreciation of the multiple factors that contribute to or inhibit wellbeing. In accordance with the *Ubuntu* principles of conflict management, the values of trust, fairness, and reconciliation are emphasised, as it is closely linked with the importance of relationships (Malunga, 2006:6). The concept of *Ubuntu* is premised on the reciprocal belief that an individual's humanity is expressed through the personal relationships with others in a community and in turn other people in the community recognise the individual's humanity (Haselau et al., 2015:175). Haselau et al. (2015:175) constitute that the South African Governmental White Paper on Welfare describes *Ubuntu* as the principle of caring for each other's well-being and a spirit of mutual support everyone's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through recognition of the individual's humanity. It further explains that *Ubuntu* means that people are people through other people, also acknowledging both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal wellbeing.

Most couples and group members indicated that they preferred to use family, pastors and friends as external intervention methods into marital conflicts. A few couples interviewed had indicated that they will make use of the social workers as well as psychologists during conflict in their marriage.

4.4.2.3. (a) Theme 1: *Lobola* negotiators

From the couples interviewed in this research only one couple indicated that they did not involve *lobola* negotiators when they conducted their customary marriage as indicated in Table 1: Type of Marriage. Possel and Rudwick (2014:293) found that among the urban Zulu men and women there is virtual consensus among most of the participants that *lobola* is of paramount significance in the setting up of a joint household between a man and a woman. *Lobola* is supported because is a traditional practice, as it has been practiced since time immemorial and has a legal status. Chireshe and Chireshe (2010:215) further indicate that *lobola* is viewed as the tradition, part of culture and cultural heritage, but some of the parents have distorted the meaning of *lobola*, as it has led many young people to cohabit. When asked about the involvement of *lobola* negotiators during conflict in the marriage, most of the couples interviewed indicated that after their marriage those who negotiated *lobola* are no longer involved in their marriage, especially when there is conflict. If *lobola* negotiators were to be involved during a conflict in the marriage, it will only be as a last resort. Some of the views expressed included:

H: "After marriage they are no longer involved..."

H: "Like I have indicated that I don't like involving my parents or one of my relatives in my problems. Those they must be involved but let it be the last resort, so that they can understand what is going on in our marriage."

While some have seen the entire process of *lobola* negotiation as just a project towards getting married, it is important to note that even though the marriage of two people can be legalised without the payment of *lobola* in terms of the Marriage Act 25 of 1961 most of the couples interviewed indicated that *lobola* was paid for their marriage to be legitimized according to their tradition as indicated in Table 1: Type of Marriage above. This can be confirmed by what Kotzé (2013:19) indicated when saying the identity function of *lobola* was vested in the handing over of *lobola*, completing the marriage negotiations as marriage symbolized a transaction into adulthood, with an established social and sexual identity and cultural relationships. This is confirmed by Chireshe and Chireshe (2010:212), who pointed out that despite the changes people remain deeply

attached to the institution of *lobola* (Chireshe & Chireshe, 2010:212). People who adhere to the custom of *lobola* view it as a significant custom that connects them with their ancestral spirits; failure to pay *lobola* might therefore bring bad luck and the bridegroom may encounter difficulties if he resists the payment of *lobola* (Ngema, 2013:407). Some of the research participants pointed out the following:

H: "Lobola negotiators are no longer there...their job is done...just there and then their job is done..."

H: "It's a project and it get finished… if we were to negotiate for six months, one month we negotiate, and we go to finalise everything in December. They will be in the picture the first month... then we forget about them... then when we must go back, we will consult them indicating that we have not finished what we have started...after that we don't involve them.

In African marriages, *lobola* creates the relationship and bond between the families of the bride and the groom (Possel & Rudwick, 2013:291). The paying *lobola* and getting married is understood as a transaction of reciprocal rights, duties and prescribed relationship between the two families of relatives which continues past the death of the individual marriage partners (Possel & Rudwick, 2013:292). Takyi and Broughton (2006:120) mention that in contrast to what prevails in the rural communities; city residents and educated people tend to emphasise western notions of romantic love, to the detriment of traditional normative practices. Based on what is pointed out by the authors above it seems that most of the couples interviewed in this study who are residing in the City of Tshwane, are emphasising the western notion of family when coming to deal with conflict in their marriage. It will be interesting if the same research on the involvement of *lobola* negotiators could be done in cities that are closer to rural areas. Therefore, based on the above findings, the role of the *lobola* negotiators in the marriage will end just after the *lobola* negotiations are completed. *Lobola* negotiators are no longer involved in the marriage or during conflict unless as a last resort. This can be confirmed by Haselau et al. (2015:172) who indicated that because of all the historical and political influences in South Africa there may be marked differences in the values, beliefs and behaviours between generations within one family, between the youth and the elders and between those living in urban and rural areas.

4.4.2.3. (b) Theme 2: Pastors

In the African community system, the concept of communality or "*Ubuntu*" which means a person is a person through other persons is highly regarded. This is primary to the African concept of the human being which sees people individually and communally as complex, with physical, social, emotional, metaphysical and spiritual elements both in life and after life (Haselau et al., 2015:174). Humans are part of a physical, social, cultural and spiritual environment and can only be understood within these contexts (Petty, 2006:113). The African kinship system can be described as a classificatory system in terms of which relatives are ranked and classified amongst each other (Bekker, 2001:42). Sono (1994:63) further indicates that the African's social, economic, psychological and physical well-being depended on family cohesion which was enriched in religious rituals; which helped to solve everyday problems. Families are nested Microsystems that are shaped by different external systems (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:953). Khathide (2011:46) further indicates that African marriage is a complex affair with economic, social and religious aspects which often overlaps so firmly that they cannot be separated from one another. When misfortune or illness strikes the family, the traditional healer will be consulted to seek to find the causes and solutions (Petty, 2006:15). Some of the problems may include problems in the marriage or the inability to have children in the marriage. With regards to the participants of the study, some considered their Pastors as the people they will prefer in helping addressing challenges in their marriages

H: "Unfortunately for us, only the Pastor..."

Pastors are holding a prominent position in the family like that of an elder which as mentioned by the participants. The role of the Pastor is more than just a mediator but the ability of the Pastor to intervene spiritually is also acknowledged as important.

H: "If it is really tough...if I don't see someone older than me or somebody else or Pastors, those are the people who can help us, who will make us sit down and rebuke us and thing will go back to normal to be alright..."

W: "Yeees... I will also prefer most of the time I will prefer that Pastor, because I will also love that he helps me spiritually, not only speaking as sometimes you will find that it is not right as a Christian, so a Pastor as he will be quoting, he will make you understand according to the Bible, so I prefer him."

The role of spirituality is one that cannot be easily ignored within the African community when coming to address important things like marriage. The concept of human being is complex, and it involves the element of spirituality, which for many of the research participants that role was assigned to the Pastors.

4.4.2.3. (c)   Theme 3: Consulting family/ parents

Family is an important part of the marriage between couples and in the African context it is more than just a nuclear family. When families were unable to resolve their disputes on their own, they turned to the elders in the community for counsel and guidance (Petty, 2006:114). In African marriages, those who provided counselling and support are uncles, aunts, grandparents, elders in the community, traditional healers, church elders and ministers, who are called on in times of family distress (Petty, 2006:114). Consultation with family members to help resolve problems was confirmed by one research participant who stated she depended on the advice of her late mother, but she now considers her mother's sister and her aunts.

W: "According to me ... I don't know but according to me...eee...my mom was my role model, if there was to be a conflict now I would have wished that she was still around I have preferred to call her to come and help me with the problems., but unfortunately, she is not there. If I have some personal problems now...I have two aunts, my mom' sisters; the eldest is my shoulder to cry on, if I have a problem I will normally go to her to speak with her, even though she is not married but I feel that if I have problem with my husband she is the person that I can call her so that I can talk to her... and even my husband's sister even though she is staying far...in the Free State...if I was to have a problem she is the one that I can approach..."

It is important to note that when talking about family, the research participant also includes her husband's family which have formed part of the family system since the

marriage of the two. This is confirmed by Holborn and Eddy (2011:1) who state that when talking about the South African families, it includes not only the nuclear family, but also extended families as well as caregivers or guardians.

In most African tribes, the aunts influenced young girls on issues such as their bodies, sex, sexual hygiene, and the behaviour expected of a wife and mother (Petty, 2006:114). They advised young girls who were dating and helped them to assess the suitability of their boyfriends and they counselled and guided young women towards successful marriages, being very active during the premarital stage, informing them about their expected roles as wives, mothers and homemakers (Petty, 2006:114). Uncles did the same with young men who were preparing to marry, and they were also called upon to give advice when a young man experienced problem in his marriage. From what the research participants have indicated it is clear family still has a role to play in their marriage, especially when there is conflict. Some of the research participants stated the following:

H: *"Most we go to family.... family are the ones who helps..."*

W: *"In most of the time to his family ... I go to his parents."*

W: *"Yes...as I don't have parents.... I will sometimes go within to my family, where I will go put the matter on the table, telling them that mma...so...so my brother...so ...they are people who calm the spirit obviously..."*

H: *"Mmhh, we haven't had a serious problem ... in most cases I will like just talk with my family, talk with my wife and maybe we will talk about it relaying...but we have not had such a serious problem that we needed a pastor or our parent, usually in most cases we will prefer solving our problems ourselves...we haven't ... no we haven't had a problem where we needed someone to sit down with us. It was just one small problem but in most cases, we hardly use any external help..."*

W: *"yes, if things were to go bad I will consider going to the family.... if things were to ever get bad... yes I will go."*

Those who preferred not to use the family as mediators during conflict in their marriage stated that challenge of objectivity of family members who might take sites to resolve conflict in their marriage. Since according to customary law woman could not represent themselves in raising dispute against their husband, this lead to lack of objectivity as the matter was handled by only man (Button, 2014:4)

H: "Eehhhh... at first I thought it is the right way to do ...but after some time I just had the same view. That when you go to the family...yes, they might look at the case but at the end of the day you find that they will take side... we all human being and we react like human being. Obviously when you go to the family they might try like to comfort you...but on the other hand maybe six days or five days after you realize but this is not what I meant..."

It was clear from the research participants that family members continue to play a key role during conflict within the family and it is important to always note their involvement when addressing conflict in the family. It is important to note that some do not get the family involved to avoid partiality during mediation in the marriage.

4.4.2.3. (d)   Theme 4: Social workers or psychologist

People who consult a social worker do so because they have needs that are not being adequately met (Rothery, 2008:99). According to Rothery (2008:99), the person has something they do not have that is necessary if they are to live well; determining what the peoples' needs are, and what change could make their lives more successful as well as gratifying is the basic purpose of the ecological perspective. It helps social workers to help people to answer fundamental questions like 'what do you need?', 'what do you want?', and 'what will make the necessary difference in your life?' Whatever culture we belong to has influenced us to ascribe certain meanings to life events and to treat others as relatively meaningless (Haselau et al., 2015:170). They both evoke some type of confession and catharsis which relieve the client's guilt and anxiety, or restore the broken harmony with ancestors (Petty, 2006:115). Charema (2004:52) adds that both aim to resolve the problem, and both emphasise confidentiality.

Petty (2006:115) indicates that the Western therapists use weekly sessions of

conversation, drama, art, sand tray therapy and hypnosis whereas the traditional healer in the African context relies on rituals such as throwing bones or performing ecstatic trances but both approaches depend on the trust and belief of those they are helping. Malunga (2006:6) further indicates that the goal of all conflict mediation was reconciliation and relationship building as within the African culture of *Ubuntu* conflicts will be preferred to be resolved within the family or household level and proceeded to higher level through appeal if some parties were not satisfied with the outcome. The notion of *Ubuntu* within the African culture emphasises the importance of peace making through principles of reciprocity, inclusivity and a sense of shared destiny between people, as it provided a value system for giving and receiving forgiveness (Malunga, 2006:6). Family usage is preferred more than social work or psychological services as they are a last resort. Family and relatives are more trusted to have the best interest of the family at heart than strangers. Social workers or psychologist are outsiders and they are not trusted with family confidential matters, especially because some of the research participants did not have pleasant experiences with the social workers, something that has a negative effect on the profession. Some of the research participants stated the following:

W: "Jjjaaa we once went there...it was just the worse moment of my life. Actually, I was not intending going to the psychologist, what had happened is that you know I love my husband so much and then I have realised that I love him so much by that time. There was an issue of betrayal in my relationship, and when I was at the doctor she saw that I was so sick, and she referred me, and she asked me what was happening with me then I explained that this is the situation. By that time, I was having a lot of stress and I was depressed, so she put me on medication and she said to me that you know what if the marriage is like this and it is not the first time you come up with the issue of stress to me. Let me refer you to so that you can be able to talk to somebody neutral, because I see that your life is in danger especially your children, otherwise you will die young. It was whereby they referred us to the psychologist and it was whereby we got a chance to speak with someone except our pastor. It was at that time that we consulted, but it was beneficial to us because we were able to can understand ourselves well, we were able to see the problems in the marriage and how to handle some other issues."

Though the family is important to the couples interviewed, some acknowledged the value of the professional helpers like psychologists as indicated above. Social workers are also preferred to help maintain confidentiality.

H: "Help... the other places you can get help is through social workers...without family. If it just people like your neighbour...some don't like it when you are living at peace with each other...some will make matters even worse...so social workers and family is the only the best that solves the problems in the family..."

In some instances, social workers are the last resort when things are falling apart in the marriage. When the couple consults the social workers, it will have been after the family structure has been thoroughly consulted as described by some research participants below:

W: "Social workers are when you have tried to resolve the problem between the two of you and you failed ... then you call the immediate family members...who will try and if they fail that is when you will get the professional help..."

H: "That one I went to when I had problems in the house...and I was crying and could not deal with that then I had to go to a social worker where they booked me...do you still remember...?"

H: "When I see that the situation is really bad, I go to consult the psychologist or psychiatrist, and then they are able to calm me down that nothing should trouble me...so that when I get home I shouldn't say I am going to kill someone..."

The research participants have fully acknowledged the role of the professional helpers in mediating during conflict in the marriage, but to most it was important that family is given priority during mediation. Petty (2006:116) reports that in Western counselling approaches, the helper is usually a stranger, by comparison in Afrocentric situation; the helpers are usually well acquainted with the couples, as they are normally relatives or well-known people living in the same community who have related to the family or extended family over time. The research participants have clearly indicated that they will rather make use of someone within the family system in mediating in their marital

conflicts than someone from outside. This is a chronosystem influence, as such they research participants are rejecting the Western practices.

4.4.2.4   Topic 4: Effective ways of handling conflict in Black African marriages

Conflict is inevitably part of a relationship (Gottman & Silver, 2007:131), while the ability to manage conflict has been found to be one of the strongest and most consistent predictors of satisfaction in romantic relationships (Cramer, 2002:425). Family conflict can lead to positive outcomes if managed effectively, as a family that manages to resolve a conflict displays more motivation to face and solve problems (Kunz, 2011:54).

According to Rothery (2008:99), the person has something they do not have that is necessary if they are to live well; determining what the peoples' needs are and what change could make their lives more successful and gratifying is the basic purpose of the ecological perspective. People and their challenges are understood holistically if one remembers they have bodies (biology), minds (psychology) and a social context and the biological fact of illness interacts with eco-system events (Rothery, 2008:99). Methods that have worked for couples have been proven over the years as almost half of the couples interviewed were married over fourteen years, something that is confirmed by Canary and Canary (2013:23) who indicated that couple's conflict change as they age. In all the strategies that interviewed couples and focus group members use to manage conflicts in their marriages, which assisted them in resolving conflicts in their marriage, communication was the strategy that was mostly preferred, followed by leaving things as they are by choosing to be quiet with staying humble and talking to pastors and others as the least methods used which proved to work. The themes are discussed as follows:

4.4.2.4. (a)   Theme 1: Communication

According to researchers and practitioners, couples can increase positive communication and decrease negative interaction patterns by asking for information; not generalizing in their communication; staying focused on the issue that is being discussed; by being specific and keeping it honest (Benokraitis, 2011:285-286). They could also make their conversation be seasoned with kindness, while expressing

appreciation and using nonverbal communication while just listening without the intention to respond. Satisfied partners in marriage engage in less negativity as they do not use negative behaviours like direct fighting tactics of threats and coercion (Canary & Canary, 2013:23). Birditt et al. (2010:203) found that using destructive tactics and exchange involving withdrawal led to divorce, whereas constructive tactics reduced the likelihood of divorce over the sixteen years they were observed. Equity theory holds that each partner should receive the same number of outcomes divided by inputs as his or her partner, in other words fairness in marriage is determined not only by what each person gets out of the relationship, but also by what each person puts into the relationship (Canary & Canary, 2013:42-43).

Family functioning is the extent to which family members are emotionally bonded; effectively communicate emotions and information (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:954). It also includes how they respond cooperatively and flexibly to problems as it contributes to how couples handle conflicts in their marriage (Freistadt & Strohschein, 2012:954). When a couple has reached a stage of conflict and they are working on resolving that specific conflict it will be important to involve each other in designing the solution to the conflict as this will give them ownership of the agreement, making them more committed and more likely to comply with it (Lapin, 2009:39).

The following quotations confirm that communication was regarded as the most effective strategy that the couples used to manage conflict in their marriage which has also assisted in resolving conflict in their marriage:

Partc 1*: "Yes be open when coming to finances..."*

Partc *1: "Yes it has helped... as I have already explained that people have different needs … the needs of woman are higher than the needs of man...an example a man can buy two trousers for the whole year, but for woman that is totally a different story. That is why I am saying that during communication you state what you are earning because even if she might want something she will remember what you are earning and realize that you cannot afford it will end up leading you to more troubles"*

Partc 2: *"I am also of the opinion that the best thing is to be transparent and put*

everything on the table...because even if there can be something she will be able to notice that this one will lead us to problems..."

Partc 1: "Yes be open when coming to finances..."

Partc 2: "I am also of the opinion that the best thing is to be transparent and put everything on the table...because even if there can be something she will be able to notice that this one will lead us to problems..."

Partc 4: "Communication...we talk...we sit down and show each other where we have gone wrong...but we wait until we have calmed down..."

Partc 4: "Yes you calm down and speak.... 'Papa but that thing did not handle me well..."

W: "My busting really worked for me... as I shouted with all my power and nerves... and took out everything. For example, I once found out that he was chatting with his ex-girlfriend and I told him where to get off, where he ended up apologizing and promising that he won't do it again. I saw it working for me...i don't say it is ok, but the way..."

H: "... Not to say that I will pretend that nothing has happened … if she is hurt and she will like to speak about it, I will give her the platform so that she can speak...I don't force her... she will like to speak, and I participate in the communication. The difference is in cases where I have been hurt, where in I handle it by been silent..."

W: "I found it frustrating because the more I bottle up the more it was making things worse and then I saw that many things were stagnant at home, because really in our family communication is the best tool, because we communicate even smaller, smaller things. I know that when I am supposed to be going somewhere and I will be even fifteen minutes late, he is the first person to know, including even ten minutes from late work, if maybe there are other things that are holding me at work, I must say to him that this is the situation. Even when the child is supposed to go to church, I must say to him that the child is not around. We communicate a lot so that to avoid many things.

So, the twenty minutes of been silent, can really cause a lot in our family because we do communicate. Worse part of the story is that I am a prayerful person, the more am quiet, the more am bitter, it is difficult to me to present things to God, and I realise that every time it will be torturing me knowing that the Word of God says that we must forgive each other. So Biblically speaking I have been driven by what is said in the bible, then automatically then I will go and say but Lord you said we forgive each other, no matter how big the sin might be when I measure the quantity, but you Lord don't have the measure to the sin, so then I had to go back and say Lord, I repent of been angry at him because am not supposed to and now I start assessing the words and doing self-introspection because I know that sometimes I will be very angry, and use the many words I am not supposed to be using including some other things that I am not supposed to say, so praying helps a lot and putting pride aside, I know that I am a woman but coming to issues of home and everything there is always a man in the inside of me that will just go up like that so that we might live together as a family. Seeing my children, they know that we are a happy couple, we don't want to see them sad, because of what they are seeing happening between us. We don't like solving issues around our children most of the times, we do lot of solving, or lot of quarrelling or maybe amendments in the bedroom

4.4.2.4. (b)   Theme 2: Leaving things as they are by choosing to be quiet

Harmonious couples (conflict-avoiding couples) report acceptance of things in the marriage that they cannot change. They lack desire to talk about or analyse problems, especially when they disagree. They are likely to share negative feelings or to be disrespectful (Canary & Canary, 2013:48-49). The quoted communications from research participants illustrate how communication is regarded as the strategy that the couples used most to manage conflict in their marriage and has also assisted in resolving conflict in their marriage:

Partc 5: *"When we have differences...am not the one that talk a lot...when we have our differences I leave to make noise...he will be quite when he is done but I know that the following day if will be all over..."*

W: *"Yes it gets better because it consoles me, and they are older than me. They are*

able to tell me that they also have passed through what I am expressing, it is just that what you are facing needs his family.”

4.4.2.4. (c)   Theme 3: Talking to the Pastors and others

Religion in Africa is part of economic production, courtship, bearing children and kinship ties; with the common beliefs that welded people together thus enhancing social control. Spiritual hierarchy reflected the family structure and was the symbolic expression of the desirable social order (Sono, 1994:63). The following quotations confirm that talking to the Pastors and others was regarded as one of strategies used by the couples to manage conflict in their marriage which has also assisted in resolving conflict in their marriage:

W: *“For me...? the church and the Pastor and, and giving it to God it works and obviously sometimes venting on your Whatsapp, you know playing with yourself, it helps even though you ... sometimes it's frustrating and when it is frustrating...you just start typing messages to yourself...that's how technology works, you start see it on Whatsapp... you share your pain... like its hard... life is beautiful...those are the context where you just say...am not alone, the universe takes the problem away from me, that's for me...”*

W: *“In all the situations we had we have tried everything...we went to the Pastor at home, then he helped us solve, then to the psychologist we went not long ago, even there we got 1, 2, 3... but am not sure if we are right or what; because according to me I think the Pastor is better than everybody because most of the time the psychologists they listen, then they give you assignment to fix things, but the Pastor tells you the truth even though it is painful because he quote. It is up to you if you take the things that are in your mind or you go according to the Bible, according to the way he is showing you. So according to me since we went to the Pastor I have seen bigger change, and it was resolved quicker than when you have gone to other places. Because I believe that after he has seen the situation I believe that he continues praying for you, the way I have seen things.”*

H: *“I will prefer the church route ... I don't know maybe I am much of a Christian ...*

but that way it helps because when you consult to the Pastor it is like some of the things are not just happening because they had to happen, some of the things are spiritual attacks and they are able to depict from there. The Pastor cannot just say you are wrong, he will try to get the ways in which you can sort out the issues, and you pray on top of that. When we pray, you can also feel that there is a breakthrough."

H: "On my side based on the people that we have consulted previously and they helped us, the message that they gave us...talking about the strategy that you talking about...when someone gives you an advise saying by the way, husband and wife consider were you are going... you are getting old and the children are also getting old...so I think they have guided me well, saying focus on where you are going, I think they have guided me well..."

4.4.2.4. (d)   Theme 4: Staying humble

The expected behaviour of *umakoti* (a bride) in the homestead of in-laws is an example of how relations arise from a marriage and a bride is expected to display a particular form of 'respect' called *'inhlonipho'* toward her in-laws (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:206). The degree of respect required, differs from one community to the next. As in some very traditional communities, elders can be quite rigid when it comes to *'inhlonipho'* (respect) (Nkosi & Daniels, 2007:206). Another fundamental component of family communication is the context in which the communication takes place as Kunz (2011:46) indicates that the context includes not only the physical space in which communication takes place, but also the cultural background that affects the interaction. Canary and Canary (2013:38) indicate that when couples' communication and relationship satisfaction just prior to marriage was assessed during the first two years of marriage it was found that married partners did not vary that much in their conflict tactics over time as partners tended to use the same conflict tactics over the two years they were observed.

Petty (2006:15) states that in his study, Gottman found that females tend to self- soothe or calm themselves during arguments, and males become more aroused and hold on to their distressing thoughts. Conservative Couples do everything in their power to avoid conflict. They value religious values and beliefs, also being traditional in their approach to life. They rely on traditional gender roles, beliefs, and traditional gender role scripts

to solve problems in times of disagreements (Canary & Canary, 2013:48-49). Some of the research participants shared the following sentiments:

Partc 2: *"it is all about humbling yourself ... and just been quiet ... living things the way they are...."*

Partc 1: *"Just humble yourself cause if you can be the same in the family nothing will work out.....if you can be the same and be stubborn nothing will work out in the marriage...."* and *"if you are a man and want to build your family don't always allow outsiders to come into your family matters, calling your brothers ....telling them to come to your house as your wife is saying this or that...no it doesn't work that way, you must learn to solve things between yourselves and build yourself being two..."*

H: *"As he is saying...you can see and realize that you have done something wrong, but when you have done something wrong what do you do? You keep quiet and leave her alone and give her time to be satisfied and when she is satisfied maybe it can start again...and you change your mind and you find that it is in the family...we are sitting and life goes on..."*

W: *"The one that I have seen working for me is I remain quiet and go to the shop and buy, when I come back I tell him that here is my money we are going to buy groceries, take out your money because even on my side there a place where I draw the line, saying to him since we wake-up together going to work and we getting paid on the same day, I request that you take over the following debts and I will take over the 1, 2, 3 ... because at the end of the day even if he can come out...at the end he comes and tell me I have paid and here are the receipts, I have done 1, 2, 3... and I tell him that I will do like this and we will go together to fix those things and we come back home... it is home and life goes on... I have seen it working, it's not like making noise, you will just experience headaches, the best you can do it to draw the line. At the beginning while I was on probation I was getting my salary month end and he will get his salary on the fifteenth; we were always fighting...he will be asking me where do you take your money... he will be buying, and I will be buying my own things...I will get into a shop and buy clothes and when we get home we will fight as I will want him to buy everything. But at the end I sat down and said if I could do like this as we are earning*

on the same day...what will work for us...? I said you do this and I will do this, and we meet each other half way... I see life is going well."

H: "Not to say that I will pretend that nothing has happened; if she is hurt and she will like to speak about it, I will give her the platform so that she can speak. I don't force her; she will like to speak, and I participate in the communication. The difference is in cases where I have been hurt, where in which I handle it by been silent."

4.5   CONCLUSION

Understanding of how conflict is managed in Black African marriages requires an understanding into the environment in which children grow up and through which socialisation occurs, thus bringing an understanding into influences and effects of social breakdowns on families and communities and ultimately on South Africa (Holborn & Eddy, 2011:1). It is important that in a relationship couples understand the solvable and unsolvable conflicts and work hard to make sure that solvable problems are dealt with before attempting to deal with the unsolvable problems (Gottman & Silver, 2007:134). The research population and sampling provided the researcher with the opportunity to understand the research topic on how conflict is managed among the African Black married couples. The research participants were easily available, as the researcher was familiar with the Nellmapius-Mamelodi area where the study took place, and the research participants met the required criteria for the study. Research participants in the focus group provided the necessary information that helped to verify the information which was shared by married couples including information from the literature review.

Data collection tools used in the study was productive in making sure that the research participants provided the needed data in a secured and non-threatening manner while maintaining their confidentiality. This was done to consider the ethical aspects of the research study. The couples interviewed during the research study provided enough information as indicated in their biography, while the biography of each of the focus group members was not collected the researcher made sure that all the focus group members met the criteria as set out in the sampling of the study. Most married couples followed the *lobola* route of marriage, except one. The history of apartheid in South

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Africa and its laws that did not recognize the traditional African marriages, resulted in many couples having to go through two marriage rituals, if not three. Couples were forced to maintain their cultural ways of marriage and the same time they had to follow the legal registration of their marriage for their marriage to be legitimised by the authorities of the time. This has since changed with the dawn of democracy.

The research participants, in the study which included the married couples and the focus group members were able to identify the aspects that cause conflict in Black African married couples. Each cause of conflict in marriage was discussed individually as a theme, with some divided as sub-themes. Communication has been identified as the main cause of conflict in marriages, followed by finances. Both married couples and focus group members in the research study, indicated several methods that they used to handle conflict in their marriage and communication was the most used one though the differences were more on the ways to communicate. Research literature has shown the systematic nature of the African family and the role that external factors like family, pastors and friends time and again must play during marriage life. This was confirmed by the research participants who clearly showed that the family, the pastors and friends continued to play a key role during conflict in the Black African marriages. It is also important to note that professionals' intervention of social workers and psychologists was considered as the last resort after the intervention of the family, pastors and the friends. The professionals are the outsiders who cannot be trusted with internal family matters. Communication has been identified as the most effective way of handling conflict in Black African Marriages.

CHAPTER 5
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

The research has presented the empirical research findings in chapter four. The findings of the research were obtained by means of a qualitative approach in an applied study. The following chapter presents the general summary of the research project, making conclusions and recommendations on how Black African couples manage conflict in their marriage. The chapter further endeavours to present an account on whether the goal and objective of the research project were realised and to present the extent to which the goal and objectives were achieved. Based on the four themes and sub-themes of this research, conclusions will be made according to the key findings, with recommendations made for practice, as well as future research in relation to the themes.

5.2   RESEARCH GOAL AND OBJECTIVES

The goal of this research study was to explore conflict management in Black African marriages in an urban context. This goal was achieved and a great deal of valuable information regarding how Black African couples manage conflict in their marriage was acquired through the following objectives:

- **Conceptualise the kinship family system within the Black African context.**
The objective was attained through a comprehensive literature review that was conducted and presented in Chapter Two of this study. The literature review was done for the empirical research to be viewed in context. To work with and understand the Black African marriage it was clear from both the empirical research and the literature that a family must be recognised within the whole that is greater than the sum of the parts, as each person's role in the family is crucial for maintaining a balance in functioning between all members. It is important when working from the Black African families to consider that behaviour and functioning are only explained from an ecological systemic perspective point of view. The understanding of family within the African context can be easily understood from the Ecological System theory, which allows one to understand how parts of the system influence the whole. This was confirmed by

authors like Haselau et al. (2015:174), who indicated that the African concept of the human being sees people individually and communally as complex, with physical, social, emotional, metaphysical and spiritual elements both in life and after life.

- **Contextualise 'Black African marriages' in order to obtain a theoretical frame of reference in understanding how conflicts are managed in Black African marriages**

Through the comprehensive review of literature that was conducted and presented in Chapter Two of this study the objective was achieved. Marriage in African culture is not just for the individuals getting married, but it entails more than just building a relationship between the two, as it involves the establishment and connecting of the relatives between the two groups. Marriage is strengthening one's individual birth network to include that of the family marrying into. Through marriage the existing networks are strengthened while new ones are created which result in the expansion of the services and support that the individual receives from the community, while increasing the person's social obligations. In the African family, marriage is the cornerstone of the kinship network as it widens their scope. Uniting the two families is the key goal of African marriages.

- **Explore and discuss conflict management within the context of marriages**

The objective was attained through a comprehensive literature review that was conducted and presented in Chapter Three of this study. Successful marriages are the result of more than just compatibility and commitment, but effective communication and conflict management skills are fundamental. Conflict is an unavoidable component of human relationships that even those who are frightened of it and try to avoid it at all costs are still not safe from it including those in marriage. Most couples have conflict over the same issues for example, finances, children, leisure, personalities, in-laws, gender-roles, religion, politics and sex communication problems which in turn derail many marriages. The issue of how couples communicate during conflict has a direct impact on the sustainability of their marriage, as some researchers can predict whether a newlywed couple will still be married four to six years later by observing not what they say but how they say it. The ability to integrate obliging and compromising even in a highly traditional marriage with patriarchal structure and highly structured roles result in more satisfied couples in marriage than when the couple are using competing

and avoidance tactics to address marital conflict.

- **Explore how Black African married couples experience conflict and how they conceptualise it**

The objective was achieved in Chapter Three of the literature review. The literature review looked at communication patterns and how they affect conflict management within the marriage during conflict. It further focused on family communication and communication styles in relation to conflict management in the family context. Gender differences in communication were also looked at to understand the problems in communication during conflict in the marriage. The literature review further considered the distinctive styles of conflict management and how conflict is handled in the marriage. The objective was further achieved by considering literature on conflict and family functioning, including the influence of family systems in family conflict.

- **Explore how couples react in their marriage and how it influences their systemic functioning**

The objective was achieved through conducting semi-structured interviews with the Black African couples and those in focus groups, in which the research participants discussed the aspects in their marriages that cause conflicts. Both the couples and group members of married couples showed communication as the major cause of conflict in the marriage followed by money or finances, family, expectations, work stress, gender roles and cultural differences. The research participants' responses were fully discussed in Chapter four, in relation to the latest research literature. Failure of the family to meet the expected expectations on things like communication, finances, gender roles and culture can lead to conflict in the marriage. The way conflict affects marriage depends on how the married couples manage conflict as well as provide an overall positive environment for each other. Individuals all have habitual ways of interpreting their lives, which affects how they feel about what happens to them and the results are beliefs that shape their feelings and behaviour during conflict in their marriage.

- **Compare participants' responses with existing information about conflict management in intimate relationships to establish a frame of reference for understanding conflict management in Black African marriages**

The objective was addressed in Chapter Four in which the research findings were

discussed according to the different themes and sub-themes. The discussion of the findings was done in comparison to the latest literature information about conflict management in intimate relationships. The frame of reference was established to understand the conflict management in Black African marriages.

The research question for the study was as follows*: How do Black African couples in an urban context manage conflict in their marriage?*

The research question for the study was answered during the data collection and analysis stage of research process.

5.3   KEY FINDINGS

The key findings about how Black African couples manage conflict in their marriage are listed below:

- Poor communication and lack of communication in marriage are major causes of conflicts in Black African marriages.
- Failure of married couples to meet expectations in aspects like communication, finances, gender roles and culture can lead to conflict in the marriage.
- Even though research participants are living in an urban context, they are still following some of the cultural practices that have been passed from generation to generation, like *lobola*.
- The inability for married couples to handle and communicate about finances can lead to conflict within the marriage, especially as the African kinship network increases the financial responsibilities as one gets married. The important cultural practices like *lobola* have an influence on marital finances especially when couples are starting their family.
- The African marriage can be affected by the economic conditions such as poverty, unemployment and economic hardship which will have a negative influence on the marital quality and relationship stability as it is seen from an ecosystem perspective.
- The lack, shortage and usage of finances within the couple's marriage are one of the main contributors to the conflict within the Black African marriages.
- Marriage in the African communities is more than the relationship of the two

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people, as it involves the establishment and connecting of relatives between the two groups. Although research participants are living in an urban context and have adopted the nuclear family set, there is still pressure on the marriage if members don not adhere to the norms and standards as set out by the family or community.

- Expectations from family members like parents and siblings on the couple have the potential to cause conflict between them as they must focus on building their own new family and on the other hand provide for the extended family.

- Unmet expectations and failure to communicate expectations which couples bring from their families they grow up in or have adopted from society and communities like churches, have the potential to cause conflict in the marriage.

- The importance of culture during conflict in Black African marriages cannot be ignored if we are to understand how conflict is managed within the Black African marriages especially where there are certain norms and values that are passed from one generation to the other within the family context.

- The non-verbal communication method of quietness is the most common way the research participants use to handle conflict in their marriage; this can be seen as compromising. The method of quietness during conflict is mentioned as the one working for the research participants and it is used by couples especially where couples avoid escalating the level of conflict.

- Family or friends play a key role in mediating during conflict among the research participants; more than the formal professional interventions.

- In as much as poor communication or lack of communication has been identified as one of the causes of conflict among the research participants, it was noted that communication through confrontation is used as a method to deal with conflict in the marriages of research participants.

- Communication is an essential element in handling conflict in the marriages; as such it is important for couples that the discussion of conflict should not be done when one is emotional to avoid miscommunication.

- The positive influence of family or spiritual leaders during conflict is important in the sustenance of marriage as they create an atmosphere in which two people in conflict can decide to talk out of respect for family members or spiritual leader.

- Family has been attributed to play a role of giving advice which can be useful in handling conflict in the marriage.

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- Most of the couples and focus group members preferred to use family, pastors and friends as external intervention methods into marital conflicts. Only a few of the couples interviewed and focus group members indicated that they will make use of the services of social workers or psychologists.

- Those who negotiated *lobola* are no longer considered when there is conflict between the married couples. If they are to be involved during the conflict in the marriage it will be as a last resort. The role of the *lobola* negotiators in the marriage ends just after *lobola* negotiations are completed.

- Family continues to play a key role during conflict between Black African married couples and it is always important to note their involvement when addressing conflict in the marriage, but it is also important to bear in mind that some don not get the family involved to avoid partiality during mediation.

- Professionals like social workers and psychologists are the last resort to mediate during conflict as family usage is preferred. Family and relatives are more trusted to have the best interest of the family at heart than strangers. Professionals are seen as strangers that cannot be trusted with family confidential matters.

- Those who preferred to use professionals like social workers and psychologists indicated the importance of confidentiality as the main reason to make use of their services.

- In all the strategies the interviewed couples and focus group members used to manage conflict in their marriage which managed to assist them in resolving conflicts in their marriage, communication was the strategy mostly preferred.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The conclusions will be discussed according to the themes and sub-themes which formed the structure for the discussion on the empirical findings.

- **Theme 1: Aspects that cause conflict in the marriage**

Communication derails many marriages as married couples have challenges to adapt and correctly interpret distinctive styles of communication. The scarcity of resources in the family in the form of finances can be sources of conflict in the marriage, especially when there is lack of communication on how to make use of the resources. The present tough economic crisis in the country does not help the situation. The involvement of

extended families in the marriage of two and lack of resources can create unnecessary tension. The African culture of sharing and being accountable to the whole community instead of just having a nuclear family has a negative impact on the marriage. When two people get married in the African context, it is not just the marriage between the two of them, but it involves an entire network of family from both the husband and the wife. Un-communicated expectations from both the partners in marriage and that of the families married into can cause conflict in the marriage. The couples' ability to communicate can avoid some of the causes of conflict in the marriage. The communication regarding the expectations on finances, from and about family, roles and culture including how to handle work or personal stress before marriage can help in avoiding unnecessary conflicts in Black African marriages.

- **Theme 2: Handling of conflict in marriage**

In as much as difficulty in communication can be the cause of conflict in the marriage among Black African couples, communication has also been identified as the most used technique to handle conflict. Communication in dealing with conflict in the marriage is more than just verbal, but some marital conflicts are managed through non-verbal communication styles like quietness during the conflict or after the conflict. This sanction has been used by many couples to handle conflict especially when there is a heated argument between the couples. Communication between the couple during conflict can also be achieved through the mediation of family members, friends or the involvement of the third parties but not family. To avoid bias during conflict the involvement of third parties is preferred more than family involvement.

- **Theme 3: External interventions into marital conflicts**

The nature and the start of the African marriage involve not just the couple, but a network of families, who are involved from the start of the marriage during the process of *lobola* negotiations. The marriage is not just seen as a private matter between two people. Even in the urban context, people still seek the sense of belonging through friends, churches and most importantly the family. Couples who are married still preferred to use *lobola* to formalise their marriage, something that was negotiated by family members rather than signing at the court. The most preferred mediation mediums during conflict are pastors, friends and third parties close to the couple. The *lobola* negotiators are not considered during conflict mediation as for most of the couples the

job of the *lobola* negotiators ended on the day they negotiated the *lobola*. It will be important to compare such a conclusion with couples staying in urban areas that are closer to rural area like Durban, in Kwa-Zulu Natal Province (South Africa) or Polokwane in Limpopo Province (South Africa). The role of professional helpers like social workers and psychologists is part of the legal system and is only consulted when the conflict is reaching its worst form, where there is abuse or the possibility of divorce. Professional helpers are consulted after all the friends, pastors and close friends have been consulted. Even family members who are reluctantly consulted during conflict are considered before social workers or psychologists as they are strangers.

- **Theme 4: Strategies used to manage conflict in marriage**

Conflict is an inevitable part of relationships and the ability to manage conflict is found to be one of the strengths and most consistent predictors of satisfaction in a romantic relationship. Family conflict can lead to positive outcomes if managed effectively as a family that manages to resolve a conflict displays more motivation to face and solve problems. Communication between couples in marriage through both verbal and non-verbal communication skills (quietness) have proven to be the most used techniques that have worked for most couples in resolving conflict in their marriage. Communication through mediation of a third party like pastors, friends and others has also been cited as an important technique in resolving conflict within the marriage.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations which are based on the empirical study and conclusions can help in understanding the strategies that Black African couples use to manage conflicts in their marriage. This could also help those in the helping professions like social workers and psychologists to understand the nature of conflicts in Black African marriages and how they are managed.

5.5.1 Recommendations for practice

Those in the professional helping professions like social workers and psychologists should always try to understand the complexity of the Black African couples when mediating conflict. Professional helpers should understand that they are not the first

point of contact and they are approached as last resort, should the unresolved conflict end up in court. Professional practitioners should always consider the extended network of family and friends and clergy in mediating conflict in the marriage.

5.5.2 Recommendations for research

It is recommended that more research be conducted to explore how Black African couples in urban areas at cities which are closer to rural areas manage conflict in their marriage to compare the results. Research in other African countries on how Black African married couples manage conflict in their marriage should be carried out to help to compare the results for future studies in the field of marriage.

5.5.3 Recommendations according to themes

5.5.3.1   Aspects that cause conflict in marriage

Communication is the most important part of marriage and failure to communicate properly in marriage can lead to systems of marriage breaking down leading to failure in producing sufficient resources to allow the system of marriage to continue working. Identifying and communicating about potential causes of conflict in the marriage during premarital counselling and marriage enrichment seminars can help to manage conflicts in the marriage. Conflict cannot be eliminated but it can be avoided by addressing the potential things that can cause conflict in marriage.

5.5.3.2   Handling of conflict in marriage

Couples faced with circumstances that bring about conflict between them build up strategies and practices that can be of assistance to them to deal with those conflicts when they surface. It will be important to continually study those strategies to bring about understanding into the phenomenon of conflict management in marriage.

5.5.3.3   External intervention into marital conflicts

Marriage in the African context is more than just two people coming together to form a

family, but it involves the two families coming together to form a continual relationship that can exist beyond the couple getting married. The involvement of those involved in *lobola* negotiations needs to be investigated further to understand the African traditional ways of mediation during conflict in the marriage. The role of mediation in marriages continues to be important whether done by the family or other external people within the relationship like Pastors and friends. In as much as there can be external intervention within the marriage, it will be important for those in professional helping to market their services to couples, emphasising the benefits of their services to married couples. Further research on marketing the services of the social work profession in assisting couples to manage conflict in their marriage needs to be investigated further.

5.5.3.4 Strategies used to manage conflict in Black African marriages

Each couple has over the years come-up with their own strategies that has worked to be able to manage conflict in their marriage and similarities was found between strategies used by the couples and those used by members of the focus groups. These strategies have proven to be like those used by couples internationally like the use of communication in resolving conflict in the marriage. Mediation by family and other parties outside the relationship has also been found to be effective in managing conflict in the marriage. Mediation offered the couples opportunity to communicate, which is something they would not have done by themselves. Further research on mediation in managing conflict amongst married couples can be helpful in reducing the rate of divorce or violence amongst married couples.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Letter of informed consent

Appendix 2: Permission to conduct research

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview schedule

Appendix 4: Semi-structured interview schedule for focus groups

APPENDIX 1: LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT

Faculty of Humanities
Department of Social Work and Criminology

30/01/20185

INFORMED CONSENT

1.   NAME OF RESEARCHER

Name: Andrew Spaumer

2.   NAME OF UNIVERSITY

Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria, Pretoria, 0002

Contact person: Prof. C.E. Prinsloo

3.   RESEARCH TITLE

Conflict management in Black African marriages in an urban context: An exploratory study.

4.   THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to explore conflict management in Black African marriages.

5.   DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

The researcher will conduct research to explore the how conflict is managed among Black African married couples. The researcher will interview participants individually and conduct two focus groups. The interviews will be audio-recorded to assist the researcher to transcribe the data and to be able to formulate a conclusion and make recommendations.

6.   NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

In the research project, the researcher will include eighteen legally married Black African couples for individual interviews and another 20 couples for the focus group interviews.

7.   RISKS INVLOVED IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

The participants might feel uncomfortable disclosing information about conflicts they have experienced in their marriage. The researcher will ensure minimizing possible harm. If the researcher sees that any participant is negatively affected by the research, he will refer them to Family and Marriage Association of South Africa (FAMSA). To prevent harm the researcher will inform participants that participation is voluntary and they can stop participating at any stage of the project if they experience any discomforts. All interactions will be closely monitored and if any negative interaction develops or any participant seems to be in distress, the interview will be stopped.

8.   BENEFITS OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The participants in this project will get the opportunity to talk about how they have managed conflict in their marriage. The results of the study will provide insight and understanding into how Black African married couples in an urban context manage conflict in their marriages.

9.   VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Although the researcher seeks my permission to be part of the research project, it does not obligate me to take part. My participation is voluntary. I will be free to stop participating at any point and will experience no negative consequences for stopping.

10.   RECORDS OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH

The information provided as part of this research will be held protected and in confidence. My responses will be kept confidential. After data have been collected, the data will be labelled with code numbers, not with any names, and will be stored in a locked cabinet. The information will be kept confidential. The only individuals who will have access to this information will be those directly involved with this research project that have been trained in methods of protecting confidentiality. The research information will be safely stored at the Department of Social Work and Criminology, University of Pretoria for a period of fifteen years for the purpose of future research and archiving.

AGREEMENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

My signature indicates that I have read, or listened to, the information provided above and that I received answers to my questions. I have freely decided to participate in this research and I know I have not given up any of my legal rights.

Fakulteit Geesteswetenskappe
Departement Maatskaplike Werk en Kriminologie
Lefapha la Bomotho
Kgoro ya Modiro wa Leago le Bosenyi

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I hereby freely give my permission to participate in this research project.
This document was signed at _____ on the
_____day of _____ 2015.

NAME: …………………………………………………………………………………

SIGNATURE: …………………………………………………………………………

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER: …………………………………………………
MR A SPAUMER

APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Faculty of Humanities
Office of the Deputy Dean

4 September 2013

Dear Prof Lombard,

Project:	Conflict management in Black African marriages in an urban context: an exploratory study
Researcher:	A Spaumer
Supervisor:	Dr CE Prinsloo
Department:	Social Work and Criminology
Reference number:	04421086

I am pleased to inform you that the above application was **approved (with comment)** by the **Postgraduate Committee** on 13 August 2013 and by the **Research Ethics Committee** on 29 August 2013. Data collection may therefore commence.

Please note that this approval is based on the assumption that the research will be carried out along the lines laid out in the proposal. Should the actual research depart significantly from the proposed research, it will be necessary to apply for a new research approval and ethical clearance.

The Committee requests you to convey this approval to the researcher.

We wish you success with the project.

Sincerely

Prof Sakhela Buhlungu
Chair: Postgraduate Committee &
Research Ethics Committee
Faculty of Humanities
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA
e-mail: sakhela.buhlungu@up.ac.za

APPENDIX 3: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

RESEARCH TOPIC: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BLACK AFRICAN MARRIAGES IN AN URBAN CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

Interview Questions
Bibliographical information:
1. Gender
2. Duration of marriage
3. How did you get married?
4. Home language
5. Ethnic group
6. Children: genders and ages
7. Educational level
8. Employment

Interview Questions

1) To explore and discuss conflict management within the context of marriages
1.1. Families do experience challenges and difficulties. What are the aspects that cause conflict in your marriage?
1.2. How do you handle conflict in your marriage? (Strategies/techniques)
1.3. If you seek help externally when you have conflict, where do you go for such help? (Important to note the first three avenues or people they will consult) – Probe: How; and why do they prefer these avenues or people?
    1.3.1. Family (specify)
    1.3.2. *Lobola* negotiators
    1.3.3. Pastors
    1.3.4. Traditional Healers
    1.3.5. Community leaders
    1.3.6. Social Workers
    1.3.7. Psychologist
    1.3.8. Other
1.4. Which of the strategies that you used to manage the conflict in your marriage assisted in resolving the conflict?

(Clues for probes: if they try to resolve their problems, when do they consider other avenues? Ignore and pretend nothing is happening, fight, seek help, etc)

APPENDIX 4: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

RESEARCH TOPIC: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN BLACK AFRICAN MARRIAGES IN AN URBAN CONTEXT: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) To explore and discuss conflict management within the context of marriages

1.1. Families do experience challenges and difficulties. What are the aspects that cause conflict in your marriage?

1.2. How do you handle conflict in your marriage? (Strategies/techniques)

1.3. If you seek help externally when you have conflict, where do you go for such help? (Important to note the first three avenues or people they will consult) – Probe: How; and why do they prefer these avenues or people?

1.3.1. Family (specify)

1.3.2. *Lobola* negotiators

1.3.3. Pastors

1.3.4. Traditional Healers

1.3.5. Community leaders

1.3.6. Social Workers

1.3.7. Psychologist

1.3.8. Other

1.4. Which of the strategies that you used to manage the conflict in your marriage assisted in resolving the conflict?