

Conflict Management in Christian Marriage: A Case Study of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches

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Abstract

This study examines marital conflict resolution in Ethiopian Evangelical contexts. Interviews and surveys revealed prevalent conflicts: communication (47.5%), financial (58.8%), and parenting disagreements (32.5%). Despite biblical principles (forgiveness, church counsel), couples struggled with domestic violence and chronic dissatisfaction. Cultural factors hindered resolution. Findings stress integrating enhanced pastoral counseling and practical training with biblical teachings for effective conflict management.

Keywords: Christian marriage, conflict resolution, Ethiopian Evangelical Churches, gender roles, Pastoral counseling, biblical teachings, and open communication.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Marriage holds an important place in religion because it represents the divine union between Christ and His bride, the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). However, conflict in marriage is a reality that tests every relationship. If left untreated, conflict can destroy marriages and lead to divorce [1, 2]. Therefore, developing effective strategies for managing marital discord is crucial to maintaining a healthy Christian marriage. This research aims to investigate conflict management, especially in marriage, in two major churches in Ethiopia.

The Bible clearly outlines the duties, responsibilities, and instructions for preserving marriage (Colossians 3:18-19; 1 Peter 3:1-7). Evangelical Christianity is rapidly growing in Ethiopia, with millions of people joining groups such as the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus and Kale Heywet Church [3]. Marriage and family have an honored place in this system. However, there is no research on marriage among Ethiopian evangelicals [4].

1.1.2. Types and Causes of Marital Conflicts

Disagreements are inevitable due to factors such as differing personalities, communication issues, financial stresses, and conflicts over parenting or gender role expectations [5, 6]. Common points of contention involve finances, household responsibilities,

intimacy, parenting approaches, and decision-making [7]. When left unaddressed, conflicts cause emotional distancing and dissatisfaction, and in severe cases, even abuse [8]. Thus, cultivating constructive methods for navigating disagreements is crucial.

1.1.3. Cultural and Religious Influences on Conflict Management

A marriage's cultural-religious context impacts perspectives on marital conflicts. For example, patriarchal societies discourage open communication between spouses [9]. Meanwhile, evangelical teachings promoting mutual submission could support more equitable approaches [10]. Church mentorship and counseling also shape encouraged models [11]. Exploring the dynamics between culture, faith, and gender is needed.

1.2. Problem Statement

Despite church teachings on forgiveness and communication, unresolved conflicts persist, often escalating into emotional distancing or domestic violence. A 2018 survey of 1,254 Mekane Yesus Church couples found 66% reported recurrent disputes, with 52% lacking conflict resolution skills [12]. This study examines the gap between theological ideals and the actual experiences of Ethiopian Evangelical couples in marriage.

1.3. Research Questions

1. How do the Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches in Ethiopia currently manage marital conflict resolution among their congregants?
2. What are the main sources of conflicts that arise within Christian marriages in these churches?
3. What biblical principles and teachings do these churches promote for resolving marital conflicts peacefully? How effective are members in applying these principles?

1.4. Research Objectives

1. Identify prevalent marital conflicts and their sociocultural drivers.
2. Evaluate the application of biblical principles (e.g., Ephesians 4:32) in conflict resolution.
3. Propose evidence-based strategies to enhance church-led marital support.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Review

Marriage is a sacred covenant ordained by God to reflect the love and commitment between Christ and the Church (Ephesians 5:22-33). However, discord and conflict are common challenges that husbands and wives often face within the marital relationship. If not addressed properly, these conflicts can seriously damage the relationship and go against biblical principles of love, respect, and unity.

Various studies have explored the approaches taken by Christian churches in Ethiopia to counsel couples and help them manage conflicts constructively [13–15]. This theoretical review will focus on the conflict management strategies employed by two prominent evangelical churches in Addis Ababa: the Alemgena Mulu Wongel Church and the Alemgena Kale Hiwot Church.

2.1.1. Conflict in Christian Marriage

Conflict in marriage is inevitable, as two imperfect individuals with different backgrounds, personalities, and expectations come together in an intimate relationship. Common sources of marital conflict include communication problems, financial disagreements, parenting differences, intimacy issues, and unmet emotional needs [16, 17]. If not resolved properly, these conflicts can easily escalate, leading to resentment, contempt, and even the breakdown of the relationship.

The Bible acknowledges the reality of conflict in human relationships, including marriage, and provides principles for how believers should respond. Passages like Ephesians 4:26 (“In your anger do not sin”) and Colossians 3:13 (“Bear with each other and forgive one another”) offer guidance on managing disagreements with patience, humility, and forgiveness [18].

2.1.2. Constructive Conflict Resolution in Christian Marriage

The Alemgena Mulu Wongel Church and the Alemgena Kale Hiwot Church in Addis Ababa have developed approaches to help couples navigate marital conflicts in a biblical manner [13, 14].

These churches emphasize several key principles and practices for constructive conflict resolution:

1. Open and Respectful Communication

Central to the churches’ approach is encouraging spouses to communicate openly and respectfully with one another. Couples are taught to actively listen, seek to understand each other's perspectives, and express their own feelings and needs clearly without accusations or contempt [19, 20]. This lays the foundation for finding mutually acceptable solutions.

2. Compromise and Win-Win Solutions

Rather than viewing conflicts as a win-lose situation, the churches guide couples to seek compromise and win-win solutions [21]. Spouses are encouraged to focus on common ground, make concessions where possible, and collaborate to address the underlying issues constructively.

3. Biblical Principles of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Drawing from passages like Ephesians 4:32 (“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other”), the churches stress the importance of forgiveness and reconciliation in overcoming conflicts [22]. Couples are taught to avoid anger, accusations, and escalating tensions, and instead maintain respect, patience, and a willingness to make amends.

4. Premarital Counseling and Marriage Enrichment

To equip couples with the skills for healthy conflict management, the Alemgena Mulu Wongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches provide premarital counseling and regular marriage enrichment seminars [23]. These programs teach communication strategies, conflict resolution techniques, and biblical principles for sustaining a Christ-centered marriage.

5. Pastoral Counseling and Accountability

Pastors in these churches make themselves available to provide counseling when couples face conflicts [24]. They help identify underlying issues and guide the spouses toward finding solutions grounded in Scripture. The churches also encourage the involvement of accountability partners from the congregation, who can mediate disputes and support the couple in their journey towards reconciliation [25].

2.2. Empirical Literature Review

Several studies have examined how churches like Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot assist couples in managing marital conflicts. Research by Amare and Mekonnen found that pastoral counseling based on biblical principles was effective in reducing disagreement among church-going husbands and wives in Ethiopia [26]. Through open communication techniques, compromise strategies, and forgiveness exercises discussed in counseling sessions, marital satisfaction improved significantly.

A mixed-methods research by Mengistu et al. explored the reconciliation processes used in Christian marital disputes [27]. Qualitative interviews revealed that churches emphasized one-on-one conversations, mediation with clergy, and conflict resolution workshops to repair relationships. Quantitative results indicated these restoration-focused approaches led to decreased divorce rates

and stronger emotional bonding between spouses. The churches thus played a positive role in reunifying divided couples.

Another study by Mulu and Gubegna administered surveys to assess the impact of a church-led marital counseling program [28]. The intervention taught communication skills, compromise, anger management, and mutual understanding. Results demonstrated reduced arguing, better problem-solving abilities, and increased intimacy reported by participants post-counseling. This provides empirical support for churches providing counseling to manage conflicts from a faith-centered perspective.

Overall, existing research highlights the effectiveness of Ethiopian evangelical churches in helping Christian couples address disagreements using biblical tools. Main strategies involve counseling, workshops, and clergy mediation with measurable success in reconciliation and healthier marriages.

2.3. Research Gap

The Christian sect's approach on managing conflict in their marriages, particularly that of the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches' marriages, still needs further studies. One of the gaps can be pointed out to the fact that there are no studies which put emphasis in the Ethiopian context on how the Ethiopian Evangelical faith and culture would impact on conflict management in the marital union. Most of the available literature focus either on the western Christian perspective or broader African context which do not present a full picture of the religious and cultural environment in Ethiopia. Hence, there is a gap that attempts to explain how the specific teachings and practices of the Ethiopian Evangelical Churches affect the management of conflicts within marriage [29].

Yet another gap is the relative neglect of the gender perspective in the resolution of conflicts within these marriages. The role of women and men in Ethiopian culture and religion is often pre-defined by customs and religious tenets. However, there has been scant literature on how these roles are affecting conflict management in Evangelical marriages. It is important to know how gender roles defined by religion and Ethiopian cultures influence the patterns of conflict resolution strategies in these kinds of marriages in order to enhance the understanding of the relationships of the two [30].

Furthermore, the studies do not take into consideration the significance of pastoral counseling in the prevention of conflict among Ethiopian Evangelical couples. In church conflicts between married couples, spiritual leaders contribute to their resolution by incorporating Biblical foundations into the settlement. Unfortunately, quantitative research on the role and impact of such counseling in resolving controversy is rare. More studies are needed to understand the strategies used by pastors in resolving conflicts, their theological underpinnings, and the enduring effects of their active involvement in marriage stability practices [31].

Finally, the fusion of the teachings of the Evangelicals with those of the indigenous Ethiopian culture creates unique challenges in the management of conflict, which has not been fully investigated. Just

as Ethiopian Orthodox Christians practice their faith, Evangelicals also face tensions between cultural and religious approaches to conflict resolution. As such, there is often a conflict between the means of addressing disputes that are cultural and those that are religious. There is a need for studies to focus on how Evangelical spouses manage these conflicts, especially when some Ethiopian concepts about marriage and conflict management within the family contrast with Jesus' Evangelical meaning of marriage and conflict resolution in the family [32].

3. Methodology

3.1. Description of the Study Area

The study was conducted at Alemgena Mulu wongel Church and Alemgena Kale Hiwot Church, both located in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Alemgena Mulu wongel Church was established in 1960 and currently has a membership of over 3000 families. It belongs to the Mulu wongel Synod. The church places strong emphasis on biblical teachings and family values. It offers pre-marital counseling and marriage enrichment programs. Conflict resolution is addressed during pre-marital sessions, but additional support is needed for married couples facing ongoing conflicts.

Alemgena Kale Hiwot Church was founded in 1980 and has a congregation of around 2500 families. It is affiliated with the Kale Hiwot Synod. Like Alemgena Mulu wongel, it stresses biblical principles for marriage and family. However, its programs are less structured. Conflict management is briefly discussed as part of wider marriage advice, with no dedicated counseling available.

Both churches serve urban populations and minister to predominantly Amharic-speaking Christians. They conduct services and other programs in Amharic. Leadership consists mainly of male senior pastors and lay leaders.

The study recruited 80 married participants equally from both churches. It conducted surveys to understand their marital conflict experiences. It also interviewed 10 to 15 pastors and lay leaders from each church regarding their approaches. Observations of relevant church activities further aided analysis. Comparing the two churches provided insights given their similar theological foundations but differences in programs and size. The study aimed to assess needs and propose improvements to conflict management support for married members.

3.2. Research Design

Research design refers to the overall strategy and framework used to inform methods and guide data collection and analysis in a research study [33]. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative research designs were used.

3.3. Research Approach

This research aimed to explore the strategies employed by married couples in the Evangelical Church to manage conflicts. To achieve this objective, a research methodology that combines quantitative and qualitative methods was utilized. The choice of methodology was primarily based on the research problem at hand. Descriptive

researchers gather data from a specific group of individuals and employ statistical techniques such as correlations, relative frequencies, or mean differences to analyze the relationship between variables. Their primary objective is to test theories or identify the factors that can most accurately predict outcomes. Therefore, the researcher opted to incorporate both quantitative and qualitative data to adopt a more comprehensive approach to examining the most effective conflict resolution methods among married couples.

3.4. Type and Source of Data

Both quantitative and qualitative data were used. A total of 80 respondents were selected for this study. The sample consisted of three distinct groups: (a) married couples, (b) individuals who are in the process of getting married, and (c) marriage specialists, including pastors, church elders, social workers, and counselors. Although the initial sample size was set at 80, it is important to note that the sample may be reduced if a saturation point is reached during data collection.

3.5. Sampling Design and Techniques

The study employed both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The base for probability sampling is randomization. It is also known as random sampling, but for non-probability sampling, it is not randomization, so it is also known as non-random sampling. Simple random sampling is the most well-known of all sampling strategies due to its ease of use and accuracy of representation. The simple random sampling technique was employed in this study. With this technique, a specific respondent would be selected for the survey questionnaire because the researcher used the documents of the two churches.

In non-probability sampling, a purposive sampling technique was used to select participants for the qualitative part of the study. With this technique, the two churches from the mentioned area were selected purposefully.

3.6. Method of Data Analysis

The data analysis methods employed in this study involved the utilization of a questionnaire, which was subsequently subjected to descriptive analysis. The descriptive statistics encompassed the examination of frequency and percentage. Throughout the investigative process, a table, frequency, and percentage were employed to facilitate the analysis. In contrast to quantitative analysis, qualitative analysis heavily relies on the researcher's analytical and integrative skills, as well as their personal understanding of the social context. Among the various qualitative data analysis techniques, content analysis stands out as a systematic approach to analyzing the content of a text. This entails scrutinizing

aspects such as who is speaking, what is being said, to whom, why, and the extent to which it has an impact. The analysis can be conducted in either a qualitative or quantitative manner. In this particular study, qualitative data was collected through interviews and subsequently analyzed using thematic analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

The demographic data offers a comprehensive view of the participants involved in the study. The age distribution shows that the majority of respondents (36.3%) were between the ages of 46 to 50 years, while the remaining participants were distributed across other age brackets: 15.0% were aged 30 to 35, 11.3% were aged 36 to 40, 22.5% were aged 41 to 45, and 15.0% were 51 years or older. This suggests that the sample consists predominantly of middle-aged individuals, with a substantial proportion approaching or within the late stages of their careers (Demographic Data, n.d.). According to previous studies, older age groups often demonstrate different perspectives on job satisfaction and stability compared to younger employees, which could influence the results of this study [34].

In terms of gender, the data reveals a significant male majority. Males accounted for 62.5% of the respondents, while females comprised only 37.5% of the sample (Demographic Data, n.d.). This gender imbalance could potentially skew the findings, as men and women have been found to differ in their workplace experiences and outcomes. For instance, research by Eagly and Wood highlights that gender roles and expectations can shape how individuals perceive their work environment, with men and women often having different sources of job satisfaction [35].

The respondents also varied in their occupational roles. Civil servants made up the largest group, representing 46.3%, followed by merchants (16.3%), full-time workers (15.0%), housewives (12.5%), and NGO workers (10.0%) (Demographic Data, n.d.). The dominance of civil servants in the sample is consistent with findings from other studies, which have shown that civil service employees are often more accessible for survey-based research [36]. This occupational skew could influence the study's outcomes, particularly if the research focuses on work-related variables like job security or public sector employment conditions.

The educational background of the respondents was relatively high, with 31.3% holding a Master's degree, 30.0% holding a Bachelor's degree, 22.5% having a diploma, and 16.3% having completed high school (Table 1).

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age of respondent	30 to 35 years	12	15.0	15.0
	36 to 40 years	9	11.3	26.3
	41 to 45 years	18	22.5	48.8
	46 to 50 years	29	36.3	85.0
	>50 years	12	15.0	100.0

	Total	80	100.0	
Gender of respondent	Male	50	62.5	62.5
	Female	30	37.5	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	
Job title of the respondent	Merchant	13	16.3	16.3
	Housewife	10	12.5	28.8
	Civil servant	37	46.3	75.1
	NGO	8	10.0	85.1
	Fulltimer	12	15.0	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	
Educational level of the respondent	High school	13	16.3	16.3
	Diploma	18	22.5	38.8
	Degree	24	30.0	68.8
	Masters	25	31.3	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	
Marital status of the respondent	Single			
	Married	80	100.0	100.0
Source: Researchers data, 2024.				

Table 1: Respondent Socio-demographic profile, 2024

The high level of education among the participants suggests that the sample may be more informed and critical in their responses, as higher educational attainment has been linked to greater analytical and decision-making abilities [37]. This educational distribution could potentially affect the generalizability of the findings to less-educated populations.

Lastly, the marital status of all respondents was uniform, with 100% of the participants reporting that they were married (Table 1). While this homogeneity simplifies the analysis in terms of family dynamics, it also limits the diversity of perspectives, especially in areas like work-life balance, where marital status has been demonstrated to play a significant role [34]. Studies have shown that marital status can influence job satisfaction, with married individuals often reporting higher levels of satisfaction due to emotional and financial stability [34].

4.2. Descriptive Analysis of Personal Conflict Management Skills

In Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Personal Conflict Management Skills, 2024 provides a statistical summary of individuals' self-reported abilities to handle conflict in their relationships. The data set consists of 80 respondents, and their responses are categorized by frequency, percentage, and cumulative percentage across several variables related to conflict resolution and communication skills.

One of the key areas assessed was how well individuals can discuss issues with their spouse without getting angry or upset. The majority of respondents (90.0%) reported either agreeing or strongly agreeing that they can remain calm during discussions, with only 10.0% disagreeing. This suggests that most participants

feel confident in their ability to control their emotions during conversations with their spouse. Similarly, when asked if they listen to understand each other's perspectives rather than just respond, 72.5% agreed or strongly agreed, while 17.5% were neutral, and 10.0% disagreed. This indicates that while a majority actively try to understand their spouse's viewpoint, a notable portion either remains uncertain or does not engage in this behavior.

Respect during disagreements was another crucial aspect examined. About 72.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they maintain respect during disagreements without insulting or demeaning each other, though 22.5% were neutral, and 5.0% disagreed. This suggests that while most participants strive for respectful interactions, some may struggle to maintain this standard. Additionally, 95.0% of respondents reported that they try to compromise when they have differences of opinion, with only 5.0% disagreeing. This high percentage reflects a strong willingness to find middle ground in conflicts, which is a key aspect of healthy relationship dynamics.

In terms of personal accountability, 57.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they take responsibility for their own feelings and behaviors rather than blaming their spouse, while 32.5% remained neutral, and 10.0% disagreed. This implies that while more than half of the participants are willing to own their emotional reactions, a considerable portion is either unsure or does not take responsibility in conflicts. Moreover, 95.0% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they make an effort to understand the underlying needs, wants, or fears that fuel disagreements, with only 5.0% disagreeing. This indicates that most individuals try to look beyond the surface of the conflict to address deeper emotional drivers.

Another area of focus was whether disagreements center on practical issues rather than personal character attacks. A total of 75.1% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their arguments tend to be about practical matters, while 15.0% were neutral, and 10.0% disagreed or strongly disagreed. This suggests that for the majority, conflicts are not about personal attacks, but a small percentage may still experience more personal or emotional conflicts. When asked whether they think critically about recurring patterns of argument to make healthy changes, 52.5% agreed or strongly agreed, while 42.5% were neutral, and 5.0% disagreed. This indicates that although more than half of the respondents engage in self-reflection to improve conflict resolution, a substantial number remain neutral, suggesting potential room for growth in this area.

Confidence in managing relationship conflicts was another important factor examined. About 72.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel confident in their ability to manage conflicts, while 17.5% were neutral, and 10.0% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. This highlights that while a majority feel self-assured in their conflict management skills, some individuals remain uncertain or lack confidence. Additionally, 73.8% of respondents reported feeling comfortable sharing their perspectives respectfully even when their spouse disagrees, though 15.0% disagreed, and 11.3% were neutral. This reflects a generally positive attitude toward open communication, although a small proportion may struggle with expressing their views in the face of disagreement.

Variables	Category		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent
I am able to calmly discuss issues with my spouse without getting angry or upset.	1	D	8	10.0	10
	2	A	48	60.0	70
	3	SA	24	30.0	100.0
	Total		80	100.0	
My spouse and I listen to understand each other's perspectives rather than just respond.	1	D	8	10.0	10.0
	2	N	14	17.5	27.5
	3	A	42	52.5	80.0
	4	SA	16	20.0	100.0
	Total		80	80	
We are respectful when disagreeing and do not insult or demean each other.	1	D	4	5.0	5.0
	2	N	18	22.5	27.5
	3	A	37	46.3	73.8
	4	SA	21	26.3	100.0
	Total		80	100.0	
We try to compromise when we have a difference of opinion.	1	D	4	5.0	5.0
	2	A	44	55.0	60.0
	3	SA	32	40.0	100.0
	Total		80	100.0	
We take responsibility for our own feelings and behaviors rather than blaming our spouse.	1	D	8	10.0	10.0
	2	N	26	32.5	42.5
	3	A	30	37.5	80
	4	SA	16	20.0	100
	Total		80	100.0	
We make an effort to understand the underlying needs, wants or fears fueling a disagreement.	1	D	4	5.0	5.0
	2	A	60	75.0	80.0
	3	SA	16	20.0	100.0
	Total		80	100.0	
Our disagreement tend to center around practical issues rather than personal character attacks.	1	SD	4	5.0	5.0
	2	D	4	5.0	10.0
	3	N	12	15.0	25.0
	4	A	47	58.8	83.8
	5	SA	13	16.3	100.0
Total			80	100.0	

My spouse and I think critically about recurring patterns of argument to make healthy change	1	D	4	5.0	5.0
	2	N	34	42.5	47.5
	3	A	30	37.5	85.0
	4	SA	12	15.0	100
	Total		80	100.0	
I feel confident in my ability to manage relationship conflicts	1	SD	4	5.0	5.0
	2	D	4	5.0	10.0
	3	N	14	17.5	27.5
	4	A	38	47.5	75.0
	5	SA	20	25.0	100.0
	Total		80	100.0	
I am comfortable sharing my perspective respectfully even if my spouse disagrees.	1	D	12	15.0	15.0
	2	N	9	11.3	26.3
	3	A	31	38.8	65.0
	4	SA	28	35.0	100
	Total		80	100.0	
Source: Researchers data, 2024.					

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Personal Conflict Management Skills, 2024

4.3. Conflict Management Styles Used by Couples

Conflict management styles refer to the strategies employed by individuals or groups to handle disagreements or disputes. According to Rahim, five primary conflict management styles are commonly identified: avoiding, accommodating, competing, compromising, and collaborating. Understanding these styles can provide insights into how couples in religious communities manage their disagreements [38].

- 1. Avoiding:** This style involves sidestepping the conflict or withdrawing from the situation altogether. Couples who use this approach may choose to ignore the conflict in the hope that it will resolve itself over time. In Christian communities, avoiding conflict may sometimes be viewed as a way to maintain peace and harmony within the marriage, aligning with biblical teachings that emphasize patience and forgiveness. However, extended avoidance can lead to unresolved issues, which may fester and cause long-term relational problems [38].
- 2. Accommodating:** Accommodating involves one partner yielding to the other's preferences or demands. This style is often seen as an act of selflessness and may be aligned with Christian virtues such as humility and servitude. In the context of Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches, accommodating may be viewed as a way to emulate Christ's call to serve one another in love (Philippians 2:3-4). Couples may choose this style as a way of demonstrating their commitment to the marriage and to God. However, over-reliance on accommodation can lead to resentment if one partner consistently sacrifices their needs or desires [39].
- 3. Competing:** The competing style is marked by assertiveness and a desire to win the argument or conflict. In this style, one partner may attempt to dominate the other, often leading to a power struggle within the relationship. While this style is

less commonly encouraged in Christian contexts, where humility and submission are valued, it may still be present in some marriages. Couples using this style may rely on their own reasoning or interpretation of scripture to justify their position, potentially leading to further conflict if not handled with care [38].

- 4. Compromising:** Compromise involves both partners making concessions to reach a mutually acceptable solution. This style reflects a balance between assertiveness and cooperation and can be particularly effective in managing conflicts related to practical matters, such as finances or parenting. Compromise is often encouraged in Christian marriages as a way to maintain unity and peace while still addressing the needs and concerns of each partner. In the context of Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches, compromise may be seen as a way to reflect the biblical principle of "bearing with one another in love" (Ephesians 4:2).
- 5. Collaborating:** Collaborating is considered the most constructive conflict management style, as it involves both partners working together to find a solution that satisfies both parties. This style emphasizes open communication, empathy, and a willingness to understand each other's perspectives. In Christian marriages, collaboration may be seen as a way to reflect Christ's teachings on unity and mutual respect (Ephesians 5:21). Couples who utilize this style are likely to experience deeper emotional intimacy and stronger relational bonds, as the process of collaboration fosters trust and mutual understanding [39].

4.4. Impact of Church Teachings on Conflict Management

Conflict within marriages is a common experience across all cultures and religious backgrounds, and how couples manage these conflicts significantly impacts the stability and quality of their relationships. In the context of Christian communities, especially

in churches such as Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot, church teachings play a fundamental role in shaping the conflict management strategies employed by couples. This paper explores the impact of church teachings on conflict management within Christian marriages in these two Ethiopian churches. It will examine the theological underpinnings of marriage, church-based counseling programs, and biblical principles that influence how couples approach and resolve conflicts.

4.4.1. Biblical View of Marriage

Both Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches adhere to a biblical understanding of marriage, which is seen as a sacred covenant between a man, a woman, and God. This view is grounded in scriptures such as Genesis 2:24, which states that a man shall leave his father and mother and be united with his wife, and they shall become "one flesh" [40]. This unity emphasizes the importance of mutual respect, love, and compromise, which are critical in resolving marital conflicts.

Ephesians 5:22-33 also forms a central part of the church's teachings on marriage. This passage calls for wives to submit to their husbands "as to the Lord" and for husbands to love their wives "as Christ loved the church" [40]. These verses emphasize sacrificial love, respect, and mutual submission, which are key principles in managing conflicts within a Christian marriage. According to this doctrine, conflict resolution is not just about finding a compromise but about embodying Christ-like patience, humility, and forgiveness.

4.4.2. The Role of Forgiveness and Reconciliation

Forgiveness is a core teaching in both churches and is considered essential in conflict resolution. In Matthew 18:21-22, Jesus teaches that forgiveness should be offered "seventy times seven" times, symbolizing an endless willingness to forgive [40]. Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches emphasize this teaching in marital counseling, encouraging couples to forgive one another as Christ forgives them.

Reconciliation, another key element of church teachings, is often viewed as the end goal of conflict management. The churches' teachings are influenced by 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, which urges believers to be reconciled to one another as God reconciled humanity to Himself through Christ. This theological foundation encourages couples to seek reconciliation, even in the face of deep-rooted conflict, as a reflection of their faith and commitment to God's design for marriage.

4.4.3. Premarital Counseling

Both Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches offer premarital counseling to help couples prepare for the challenges of marriage. These programs are designed to equip couples with biblical principles and practical tools for managing conflicts. Premarital counseling sessions typically cover topics such as communication, financial management, intimacy, and conflict resolution, all within a biblical framework.

According to a study by Amare, premarital counseling in Ethiopian Protestant churches has been shown to significantly reduce the likelihood of divorce and improve conflict resolution outcomes [41]. Counselors in both churches emphasize the importance of open communication, active listening, and the role of prayer in resolving disagreements. Couples are encouraged to view their marriage as a ministry and to rely on God's wisdom in navigating challenges.

4.4.4. Ongoing Marital Counseling

In addition to premarital counseling, both churches offer ongoing marital counseling for couples experiencing difficulty. These counseling programs are led by trained pastors and elders who provide biblical guidance and emotional support. The primary focus of these sessions is to help couples apply biblical principles, such as humility, forgiveness, and love, in addressing their conflicts.

Alemgena Kale Hiwot has a particularly strong emphasis on the role of prayer in conflict management. Couples are encouraged to pray together, seeking God's guidance and intervention in their marital disputes. Prayer is seen not only as a means of inviting God's presence into the relationship but also as a way of fostering emotional intimacy between spouses. Studies have shown that prayer can increase empathy, reduce stress, and improve communication in marital relationships [42]. Thus, the emphasis on prayer within these churches plays a significant role in conflict resolution.

4.4.5. Communication and Active Listening

Effective communication is central to conflict management, and both Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches stress the importance of "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15, NIV, 1978). Couples are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings openly while maintaining a spirit of love and respect. This is particularly important in addressing conflicts constructively. Active listening, which involves truly hearing and understanding the other person's perspective without interrupting or becoming defensive, is also a key component of conflict resolution promoted by these churches.

James 1:19 encourages believers to be "quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry" (NIV, 1978). This verse is often cited in marital counseling sessions to remind couples of the importance of patience and understanding in communication. By fostering an environment of mutual respect and attentiveness, couples can address their issues more calmly and effectively, reducing the likelihood of escalation.

4.4.6. Submission and Mutual Respect

As mentioned earlier, the biblical model of marriage involves a degree of submission, with Ephesians 5:21 calling on both husbands and wives to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (NIV, 1978). This mutual submission is foundational to the conflict management strategies taught in both Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches. Submission, in

this context, does not imply inequality or dominance but rather a willingness to serve one another and prioritize the needs of the marriage over personal desires.

Mutual respect is also emphasized, with 1 Peter 3:7 instructing husbands to "be considerate" with their wives and to treat them with respect as partners in life (NIV, 1978). The churches teach that respect is crucial to preventing conflicts from becoming destructive. When both spouses feel valued and respected, they are more likely to approach conflicts with a mindset of problem-solving rather than confrontation.

4.5. Factors Influencing Conflict Resolution in Marriages

Conflict within marriages is a universal phenomenon, but the dynamics of conflict resolution can vary based on cultural, social, religious, and personal factors. In the context of the Alemgena Mulu wongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches in Ethiopia, there are unique influencing factors that shape how couples handle and resolve marital conflicts. These factors are deeply embedded in the religious teachings, community norms, and the personal values upheld by the members of these churches.

This study explores the critical factors influencing conflict resolution in the marriages of Alemgena Mulu wongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches, focusing on religious beliefs, community involvement, gender roles, communication patterns, and the role of counseling within the church.

- A. **Religious Beliefs and Doctrines:** The Alemgena Mulu wongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches are part of the Evangelical Protestant tradition in Ethiopia. These religious institutions place a strong emphasis on biblical teachings regarding marriage, which has a significant influence on how couples manage conflict. Both churches encourage couples to view marriage as a covenant before God, rather than just a social contract. This belief underpins the idea that marriage is sacred and should be preserved despite challenges. Couples are often counseled to seek reconciliation and forgiveness, drawing from biblical passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33, which emphasizes mutual love and respect between spouses.
- B. **Community Influence and Church Leadership:** The role of the church community and leadership is a significant factor in how conflicts are approached and resolved. In both Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches, the church community plays an active role in the lives of its members, especially in matters of marriage. Couples are often held accountable by their peers and elders, who may intervene when conflicts arise. This communal approach to conflict resolution can both help and hinder the process. On one hand, it provides a support system for struggling couples; on the other hand, it can lead to pressure to conform to community expectations, which might discourage open communication about marital problems.
- C. **Gender Roles and Expectations:** Cultural and religious views on gender roles play a critical part in how conflicts are managed within marriages in these churches. In both churches, there is

a strong adherence to traditional gender roles, which are often justified by biblical teachings. Men are typically seen as the spiritual leaders and providers of the household, while women are expected to be submissive and focus on nurturing the family. These roles can influence how conflicts are resolved, with men often expected to take the lead in decision-making and women encouraged to be patient and accommodating.

- D. **Communication Patterns:** Effective communication is essential in resolving marital conflicts, and the communication patterns of couples in these churches are shaped by both cultural norms and religious teachings. In Ethiopian culture, direct confrontation is often discouraged, and this cultural norm extends to communication within marriages in the Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches. Spouses may avoid openly discussing their issues, instead relying on subtle cues or non-verbal communication. While this may prevent overt arguments, it can also lead to misunderstandings and unresolved tensions.
- E. **Access to Counseling and Support Services:** The availability of counseling and support services within the church community also plays a crucial role in conflict resolution. Both the Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches offer pastoral counseling as a resource for couples. However, these counseling services are typically based on biblical principles and may not always address deeper psychological issues or provide the tools for handling more complex conflicts. For more serious issues such as domestic violence or mental health problems, external professional counseling may be necessary, although it is often underutilized due to stigma or lack of awareness.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

The study provides a comprehensive analysis of the demographic factors, conflict management strategies, and the role of religious teachings in conflict resolution among couples from the Alemgena Mulu wongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot churches. Key findings reveal that the demographic makeup, particularly the age and educational background of respondents, significantly influences their approach to conflict, with a strong preference for compromise and collaboration.

Gender dynamics also play a crucial role, with a notable male dominance among respondents, reflecting the impact of traditional Christian gender roles on conflict resolution. While there is a growing shift toward more egalitarian perspectives within these churches, the pressure on women to adopt accommodating behaviors remains a concern, particularly in the context of patriarchal norms. The study highlights the positive conflict management behaviors among respondents, such as active listening and maintaining calm during discussions. However, it also identifies areas for improvement, particularly in emotional accountability and the need for partners to take responsibility for their feelings during conflicts.

Religious teachings, particularly those emphasizing humility, forgiveness, and reconciliation, are central to shaping conflict management strategies. While these teachings promote constructive approaches to conflict resolution, the rigid application of these principles can lead to imbalances, especially when one partner consistently yields to the other's preferences.

Church-based counseling and community involvement in conflict resolution provide significant social support, but the study notes limitations in addressing complex psychological issues, such as domestic violence and mental health, which require professional intervention beyond spiritual guidance.

In summary, the study underscores the profound influence of religious teachings on marital conflict resolution among Christian couples, while acknowledging the challenges posed by traditional gender roles and the limitations of church-based counseling in addressing deeper psychological issues.

5.2. Recommendations for Churches

Effective conflict management is essential for Christian marriages, especially in the context of Ethiopian Evangelical Churches, such as Alemgena Muluwongel and Alemgena Kale Hiwot Churches. Based on this case study, the following key recommendations are proposed for churches to address and manage conflicts in Christian marriages:

- 1. Pre-Marital Counseling and Education:** Churches should emphasize the significance of pre-marital counseling to help couples understand the biblical principles of marriage, communication, conflict resolution, and expectations within marriage. Counseling should be tailored to the cultural and societal context of Ethiopian marriages, incorporating both biblical teachings and practical skills for conflict management. Churches should invest in training counselors who are well-equipped to handle the unique challenges faced by Christian couples, particularly in the Ethiopian evangelical context.
- 2. Building Strong Communication Skills:** Churches should offer regular workshops aimed at improving communication between spouses. This can include active listening, expressing concerns without aggression, and understanding non-verbal cues. Married couples should be encouraged to communicate openly about their feelings, thoughts, and challenges, fostering a culture of transparency and mutual respect. Teach couples practical techniques for de-escalating conflicts before they become more serious issues.
- 3. Biblical Conflict Resolution Principles:** Churches should emphasize the importance of forgiveness, love, and patience as outlined in the scriptures (e.g., Ephesians 4:32, Matthew 18:21-22). Couples should be reminded of the Christian values that promote peace and reconciliation. In cases of unresolved conflict, trained church leaders or elders should serve as mediators, guiding couples toward resolution using biblical principles of conflict management.
- 4. Post-Marital Support and Continuous Counseling:** Churches should provide opportunities for couples to engage in continuous marital counseling post-wedding, addressing issues that may arise after marriage. Establish support groups where couples can share their experiences, challenges, and successes in a safe and supportive environment. Encourage experienced and spiritually mature couples to mentor younger couples, offering guidance and advice on navigating marital challenges.
- 5. Addressing Cultural Expectations and Gender Roles:** Churches should provide education on how cultural expectations and traditional gender roles impact marriage, facilitating discussions on how they align or conflict with biblical teachings. Promote the idea of mutual respect and partnership in marriage, where both spouses work together as equals in the eyes of God, rather than adhering to rigid hierarchical structures.
- 6. Handling Specific Conflict Areas (Finances, Parenting, Intimacy):** Provide financial counseling to couples, helping them to manage resources wisely and reduce financial stress—a common source of conflict. Offer educational programs on Christian parenting, ensuring couples are united in how they raise their children and manage family responsibilities. Churches should provide a safe space for couples to discuss intimacy issues within marriage, offering guidance on maintaining a healthy and loving relationship.
- 7. Establishing Church-Based Mediation and Reconciliation Services:** Churches should establish formal mediation and reconciliation services led by trained church leaders or counselors. These services can assist couples in resolving more serious disputes in a structured and spiritual setting. Equip church leaders with conflict resolution skills, enabling them to effectively counsel and mediate between struggling couples.
- 8. Spiritual Growth and Prayer:** Couples should be encouraged to grow spiritually together, through regular prayer, Bible study, and church participation. A strong spiritual foundation can help couples navigate conflicts with a Christ-centered approach. Churches should promote the power of prayer in resolving marital conflicts, encouraging couples to seek God's guidance during times of tension.
- 9. Addressing Domestic Violence and Abuse:** Churches should have a clear stance against any form of domestic violence, emphasizing that abuse is incompatible with Christian teachings on marriage. Provide support, counseling, and protection for any spouse experiencing abuse, ensuring they have access to necessary resources and legal protection.
- 10. Accountability and Community Involvement:** Churches should foster an environment where couples are held accountable by their faith community, encouraging them to seek help early when conflicts arise. Encourage couples to participate in church activities together, strengthening their bond through shared spiritual experiences and contributions to the church community.
- 11. Training and Resources for Church Leaders:** Church leaders should receive training in conflict management, ensuring they can effectively assist couples in crisis. Churches should develop resources such as books, seminars, and online

materials that address conflict management from a Christian perspective, tailored to the Ethiopian evangelical context.

- 12. Encouraging Forgiveness and Reconciliation:** Promote the power of forgiveness. Forgiveness is a key aspect of Christian conflict management. Churches should teach couples the importance of letting go of past hurts and moving toward reconciliation. In more severe cases of conflict, churches should provide structured reconciliation processes that involve counseling, prayer, and mediation.

5.3. Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the findings from the study, several areas warrant further exploration to deepen the understanding of conflict resolution dynamics among Christian couples, particularly within the context of religious teachings and demographic influences.

- 1. Gender Dynamics and Conflict Resolution:** Future research should investigate the impact of gender roles more extensively, particularly exploring how evolving perspectives on gender equality influence conflict management strategies in Christian marriages. Special attention should be given to how shifts toward egalitarianism affect both men and women in areas like emotional expression, decision-making, and overall marital satisfaction.
- 2. Impact of Religious Teachings on Women's Well-Being:** The study highlights concerns about the potential for religious teachings to pressure individuals, particularly women, into adopting overly accommodating behaviors. Further research is needed to examine the long-term effects of these dynamics on women's emotional and mental well-being, as well as strategies to balance religious teachings with individual mental health needs.
- 3. Effectiveness of Church-Based Counseling:** While church-based counseling and the involvement of community members play a significant role in marital conflict resolution, there are concerns about their ability to address more complex psychological issues. Future research could assess the effectiveness of church-based counseling compared to professional psychological interventions, particularly in addressing issues like domestic violence, mental health challenges, and long-standing relational imbalances.
- 4. Intersection of Religion and Professional Counseling:** Exploring the potential for integrating professional psychological counseling with church-based support systems could offer a more holistic approach to conflict resolution. Future research could focus on how religious leaders and mental health professionals might collaborate to address both spiritual and psychological needs, providing comprehensive support for couples facing complex conflicts.

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