

## Efficacy of Insight-Oriented Therapy on Gaslighting Behaviour of Married Individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Gaslighting behaviour in marital relationships represents a form of psychological manipulation that undermines emotional well-being, relational trust, and marital satisfaction. This study investigated the effectiveness of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy (IOMT) in reducing gaslighting behaviour among married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis, while examining the moderating roles of emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills. A quasi-experimental pretest-posttest control group design was employed, with 45 married individuals (IOMT group n=20, Control group n=25) selected through multistage random sampling from three Local Government Areas in Ibadan. Participants were assessed using the Graves and Samp Gaslighting Scale, Emotional Maturity Scale, and Conflict Transformational Skills Scale. The IOMT intervention consisted of eight weekly sessions focusing on exploration of unconscious patterns, family-of-origin influences, and emotional insight development. Data were analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) and Bonferroni post-hoc tests at 0.05 alpha level. Results revealed a significant main effect of IOMT on gaslighting behaviour ( $F(1,54) = 12.772, p < .001, \eta^2_e = .538$ ), with the IOMT group (Mean = 108.7) demonstrating significantly lower gaslighting behaviour compared to the control group (Mean = 126.0). Emotional maturity showed no significant main effect ( $F(1,54) = .096, p > .05, \eta^2_e = .002$ ), while conflict transformational skills demonstrated a significant effect ( $F(1,54) = 5.477, p < .05, \eta^2_e = .111$ ). No significant interaction effects were found among treatment, emotional maturity, and conflict transformational skills. The findings suggest that IOMT is an effective depth-oriented intervention for reducing gaslighting behaviour in marital relationships, with effectiveness independent of participants' baseline emotional or conflict management competencies. Implications for marital counselling practice, clinical training, and future research directions are discussed.

**Keywords:** Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy, Gaslighting behaviour, Emotional maturity, Conflict transformational skills, Marital relationships, Ibadan metropolis.

### INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of gaslighting in marital relationships represents one of the most insidious forms of psychological manipulation, operating beneath the surface of overt conflict to systematically destabilize a partner's sense of reality and self-worth. Unlike more visible forms of domestic abuse, gaslighting unfolds through subtle distortions of truth, strategic denial of shared experiences, and calculated undermining of the victim's perceptions – tactics that accumulate over time to create profound psychological damage. Within the context of Nigerian marriages, particularly in urban centres such as the Ibadan metropolis, gaslighting behaviour has emerged as a significant yet underrecognised contributor to marital distress, emotional deterioration, and relationship dissolution. The manipulation inherent in gaslighting transcends simple disagreement or miscommunication; it constitutes a deliberate pattern of reality distortion designed to consolidate power and maintain control within the relationship (Stern, 2007).

Understanding gaslighting requires moving beyond surface-level behavioural descriptions to examine the deeper psychological mechanisms that sustain such manipulative patterns. The gaslighter

typically operates from unconscious defensive structures, projecting unwanted aspects of themselves onto their partner while simultaneously denying the partner's legitimate emotional experiences. This dynamic creates a closed system wherein the victim's reality becomes progressively more dependent on the manipulator's version of events, eroding autonomy and self-trust. Morin (2024) identifies several manifestations of this manipulation: persistent invalidation of the partner's feelings, strategic rewriting of shared history, weaponization of humour to disguise contempt, and systematic dismissal of concerns as oversensitivity or irrationality. Over extended periods, these tactics culminate in the victim experiencing chronic self-doubt, questioning their own sanity, and developing a fractured sense of identity anchored more in the abuser's projections than in their authentic self.

The psychological toll of gaslighting extends far beyond the immediate emotional pain of invalidation. Victims commonly report pervasive anxiety stemming from hypervigilance to potential triggers of the manipulator's unpredictable responses, depressive symptoms rooted in the loss of self-worth and agency, and in severe cases,

symptoms consistent with complex post-traumatic stress disorder resulting from sustained psychological assault (Sweet, 2019). The erosion of self-trust fundamentally compromises the individual's capacity for autonomous decision-making, as they increasingly defer to the abuser's judgment even in matters where they possess expertise or clearer perception. This psychological colonization represents perhaps the most devastating consequence of gaslighting – the internalization of the abuser's reality-distorting lens as one's primary framework for interpreting experience.

Within the Nigerian context, several cultural factors may amplify vulnerability to gaslighting while simultaneously obscuring its recognition and treatment. Traditional gender role expectations, extended family involvement in marital affairs, and societal pressure to maintain marriage regardless of emotional cost can create environments where psychological manipulation flourishes unchecked. Adebayo, Omojola, and Evbuoma (2021) documented significant levels of emotional abuse in Nigerian marriages, noting that awareness remains limited and intervention resources sparse. The tendency to privilege physical violence as the primary concern in domestic abuse discourse leaves emotional manipulation underrecognised and underaddressed, despite its potentially equivalent or superior destructive impact on psychological wellbeing and relationship quality.

The present study emerges from recognition that addressing gaslighting behaviour requires therapeutic interventions capable of accessing and transforming the unconscious dynamics that fuel manipulative patterns. While behavioural and cognitive approaches offer valuable tools for modifying specific interactions, depth-oriented modalities provide unique capacity to illuminate and restructure the underlying relational schemas, defensive operations, and unresolved emotional wounds that sustain gaslighting behaviour. Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy (IOMT), with its psychodynamic foundation and emphasis on uncovering unconscious processes, represents a particularly promising intervention for couples trapped in patterns of psychological manipulation.

Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy, developed by Snyder, Wills, and Grady-Fletcher (1991), integrates psychodynamic interpretations with cognitive-behavioural techniques, emotion-focused interventions, and Gestalt principles to create a

comprehensive therapeutic approach. The therapy operates on the premise that current relationship difficulties often stem from unconscious reenactments of earlier relational injuries, unresolved attachment conflicts, and defensive patterns developed in response to developmental wounds. By facilitating couples' exploration of these deeper dynamics, IOMT enables partners to recognize how past experiences shape present interactions, to develop empathy for each other's emotional vulnerabilities, and to construct more adaptive relational patterns grounded in authentic emotional engagement rather than defensive maneuvering (Scharff & Scharff, 2017).

The core components of IOMT – uncovering unconscious processes, exploring family-of-origin influences, addressing emotional injuries, enhancing emotional awareness, and reframing maladaptive patterns directly target the mechanisms underlying gaslighting behaviour. When a partner systematically denies another's reality, this behaviour often reflects unconscious defensive needs to maintain a particular self-image or to avoid confronting threatening emotional material. IOMT provides a structured framework for bringing these unconscious motivations into awareness, examining their developmental origins, and developing alternative ways of managing the underlying anxieties without resorting to manipulative tactics. Similarly, by facilitating exploration of each partner's emotional injuries and attachment wounds, the therapy creates conditions for genuine empathy and validation to replace the invalidation characteristic of gaslighting dynamics.

Empirical evidence supports IOMT's effectiveness in addressing deep-seated relational conflicts and enhancing marital satisfaction. Snyder, Baucom, and Gordon (2021) demonstrated significant improvements in emotional intimacy among couples experiencing detachment, attributing these gains to the therapy's capacity to facilitate understanding and acceptance of each partner's emotional needs. Lebow and Diamond (2018) found that insight-oriented approaches successfully addressed entrenched relational conflicts by exploring their unconscious roots. Bernard and Guernsey (1981) documented IOMT's positive effects on marital satisfaction and communication quality. Studies in African contexts have highlighted the therapy's cultural adaptability in addressing region-specific marital challenges, including extended family pressures

and traditional gender role conflicts (Abubakar, Wangari, & Kuria, 2020).

This study also considers emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills as potentially important moderating variables in treatment outcomes. Emotional maturity – encompassing self-awareness, emotional regulation, empathy, and resilience – may influence individuals' capacity to engage with IOMT's exploratory processes and to translate insights into behavioural change (Adegoke, 2017). Emotionally mature individuals possess enhanced capacity to tolerate the discomfort of examining their own defensive operations and to respond non-defensively to feedback about their impact on their partner. This emotional scaffolding may accelerate therapeutic progress and deepen the transformative potential of insight-oriented work.

Conflict transformational skills represent another potentially significant moderating factor. These skills involve capacities to reframe disputes by exploring underlying structural inequalities, unmet needs, and patterns of exclusion that generate persistent relational tension (Ajike & Amadi, 2022). Unlike conflict resolution approaches that seek compromise, transformation requires systemic and future-oriented thinking that promotes healing, equity, and inclusivity (Rocket Erasmus, 2023). In the context of gaslighting, transformational skills may serve protective and remedial functions by promoting empathy, reflective listening, and mutual validation creating relational conditions antithetical to manipulative tactics. Research suggests that conflict transformation contributes to healthier marital functioning by disrupting abuse cycles and replacing them with collaborative problem-solving and mutual growth (Liu & Eckstein, 2022; Okorie & Balogun, 2023).

Despite gaslighting's severe psychological consequences and its contribution to marital dissolution, research specifically examining therapeutic interventions for this form of manipulation remains limited, particularly within the Nigerian context. While studies have documented the prevalence of emotional abuse in Nigerian marriages (Adebayo *et al.*, 2021; Adikwu & Adebayo, 2021), systematic evaluation of depth-oriented therapeutic approaches for addressing gaslighting behaviour is notably absent from the literature. This gap leaves couples and clinicians without evidence-based guidance regarding optimal treatment approaches for this destructive

relational pattern. Addressing this deficiency, the present study examines the effectiveness of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy in reducing gaslighting behaviour among married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis, while also investigating whether emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills moderate treatment outcomes.

### Purpose of the Study

The study examined the effectiveness of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy in managing gaslighting behaviour among married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis, Nigeria. Specifically, the study:

- Investigated the main effect of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.
- Evaluated the moderating effect of emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.
- Examined the interaction effect of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy, emotional maturity, and conflict transformational skills on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.

### Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested in this study:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant main effect of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant moderating effect of emotional maturity on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis
- H<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant interaction effect of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy, emotional maturity, and conflict transformational skills on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted a pretest-posttest control group quasi-experimental design with a 2×3×3 factorial matrix. This design was considered appropriate because the study involves the use of one treatment group (Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy) and a control group, with each of the two moderating variables - emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills varied at three levels. Participants in the experimental group were exposed to pretest measures before the

commencement of the training session. The treatment group was taken through therapeutic sessions, while the control group was engaged in a counselling session that had no relationship with the intervention techniques. A final posttest measure was administered to both groups after the intervention period of eight weeks. The factorial design enabled systematic examination of main effects and interaction effects among the independent variable (IOMT), moderating variables (emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills), and the dependent variable (gaslighting behaviour). This design provides robust evidence for causal inferences regarding treatment effectiveness while accounting for individual differences in emotional maturity and conflict transformation capacities that may influence therapeutic outcomes.

### Population

The population of this study comprised married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis. The participants were married individuals selected from three out of the five local government areas within the metropolis. The participants also comprised both male and female who were screened and found to engage in gaslighting behaviour and whose years of marriage were within one to ten years.

### Sample and Sampling Techniques

Participants were drawn from three of the five Local Government Areas in the Ibadan Metropolis using a multistage random sampling procedure. First, three LGAs were randomly selected. Second, participants were randomly recruited from workplaces and faith-based organisations within the selected areas. Third, married individuals were screened to identify those who scored high on gaslighting behaviour. Finally, eligible participants were assigned to treatment and control groups. The study involved 45 participants, with females constituting 75.56% (34) and males 24.44% (11). The largest age group was 36–45 years (40.00%, 18), followed by 26–35 years and 46–55 years (24.44%, 11 each), while 56 years and above accounted for 11.11% (5). Most respondents were Christians (71.11%, 32). The majority had B.Sc. degrees (22.22%, 10), and over half had been married for 6–10 years (51.11%, 23).

the gender distribution reveals that female participants constitute the majority, representing 75.56% (34) of the sample, while male respondents account for 24.44% (11). The age distribution reveals that the largest age group is

36–45 years, comprising 40.00% (18) of the respondents, followed by individuals aged 26–35 years and 46–55 years, who make up 24.44% (11) each. The smallest group is those aged 56 years and above, accounting for 11.11% (5). In terms of educational attainment, the highest proportion of respondents possess B.Sc degrees (22.22%, 10), followed by ND holders (17.78%, 8) and Masters' holders (15.56%, 7). Regarding marital duration, the highest proportion of respondents (51.11%, 23) had been married for 6–10 years, followed by 26.67% (12) married for 1–5 years, while 22.22% (10) fall within 11–15 years of marriage.

### Inclusion Criteria

The following determined participants' eligibility for the study:

- Participants were married individuals within Ibadan metropolis.
- Participants were resident in the selected three local government areas – Ibadan North, Ibadan Northwest and Ibadan Southwest.
- Participants showed willingness to participate in the study by signing the consent form without being coerced.
- Participants' marriages were between one to ten years.
- Only those who scored 30% and above in the screening exercise were considered as participants for the study.

### Instrumentation

The following instruments were utilised in the study:

#### Stern Gaslighting Scale (2007) (Screening Tool)

The Gaslighting scale was developed by Stern (2007) and adopted for this study. The scale was developed to measure a form of psychological abuse and behaviour in which one person undermines another person's confidence and stability by causing them to doubt their memories, thoughts and perception of reality. The scale was used as a screening tool in the study. The scale has a variety of items with different response formats. It consists of 11 items and each item was rated using 5-point Likert scoring format which include; 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = often, 5 = always. Two sample items are: 1). *My partner often denies saying things that I remember him saying.*; and 2). *My partner makes me think that everything I do is wrong.*; The developers reported reliability of 0.72.

### Graves and Samp Gaslighting Scale

The Gaslighting scale was developed by Graves and Samp (2021) and was adopted for this study. The scale was developed to measure an abusive behaviour used to coercively control and gain power over another individual. Like other forms of coercive control, gaslighting harms those who experience it. The scale has a variety of items with different response formats. The scale consists of 8 items and each item is rated using 5-point Likert scoring format which include Not at all=1, A little bit= 2, Moderately = 3, Quite a bit = 4, Extremely = 5. Two sample items are: 1). &#x201C;My partner often denies saying things that I remember him saying.&#x201D; and 2). &#x201C;My partner makes me think that everything I do is wrong.&#x201D; The developers reported reliability of 0.81. A pilot testing was conducted and the scale reported a Cronbach alpha of  $\alpha = 0.93$ .

### Emotional Maturity Scale by Morales-Vives, Camps and Lorenzo-Seva (2013)

Emotional maturity scale was developed by Morales-Vives, Camps and Lorenzo-Seva (2013) and adapted for this study. The scale is used to explain emotional maturity through the lens of ego. A significant concept representing individuals' ability to respond to changing contexts is ego resilience. Individuals with resilient egos are considered psychologically mature because they adapt quickly and can plan for future goals. The scale has a variety of items with different response formats. The scale consists of 21 items and each item is rated using 5-point Likert scoring scale which include Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Two sample items are: 1). &#x201C;I believe that the challenges I face align with the flow of life, and I cope with them accordingly.&#x201D; and 2). &#x201C;Being prepared for potential adversities, I manage to deal with them.&#x201D; The developers reported reliability of 0.88. After a pilot testing, emotional maturity scale reported a Cronbach alpha of  $\alpha = 0.87$ .

### Conflict Transformational Skills Scale by Hammed (2002)

The Conflict Transformation Skills Scale (CTSS) was adapted from Hammed (2002) as a tool designed to measure the ability of married individuals to utilise constructive conflict transformation skills in their intimate relationships. The scale consists of 15 carefully constructed items, each addressing a unique dimension of conflict transformation such as empathy, active

listening, emotional regulation, reframing negative interactions, openness, collaborative problem-solving, and forgiveness. Respondents are asked to indicate their agreement with each statement using a four-point Likert response format: Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree. This simple yet effective format allows for clarity in responses, reducing ambiguity while encouraging participants to reflect deeply on their relational behaviours. Two sample items from the scale include: &#x201C;I try to listen to my partner&#x2019;s perspective even when I strongly disagree.&#x201D; and &#x201C;When conflicts arise, I focus on finding solutions that benefit both of us rather than trying to win the argument.&#x201D; The instrument demonstrated a strong internal consistency with a Cronbach&#x2019;s alpha of 0.87, indicating that the items reliably measure the underlying construct of conflict transformation skills.

### Ethical Approval

Ethical approval with reference number UI/SSHREC/2025/150 was obtained from University of Ibadan Social Science and Human Research Ethics Committee for permission to conduct this study in the selected local government areas. Participants were not coerced into taking part in the study. In addition, the anonymity of the participants was also considered. All the participants filled a consent form. The confidentiality of the information provided by the participants was maintained.

### Procedure for Data Collection

The researcher obtained a letter of introduction from the Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria. After the proper approval was obtained, the researcher recruited two research assistants to assist in the study. The research was carried out in four phases: pre-sessional activities, pretest administration, treatments and posttest administration. The researcher guarded against the effect of extraneous variables through appropriate assignment of the participants into the intervention and the control groups. The researcher ensured strict adherence to the inclusion criteria as well as effective use of the  $2 \times 3 \times 3$  factorial matrix.

### Data Analysis

Data was analysed using Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) to determine the differences between the participants in the experimental and the control groups. Bonferroni post-hoc analysis was also used

to determine the direction of the differences identified.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant main effect of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.

**Table 1.** The ANCOVA Summary Illustrates the Main and Interaction Effects of Emotional Maturity, Conflict Transformational Skills, and Treatment on Gaslighting Behaviour

Source	Type III SS	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	$\eta^2_e$
Corrected Model	4578.511 <sup>f</sup>	12	381.543	3.371	.002	.479
Intercept	8499.401	1	8499.401	75.102	.000	.631
Pre-test	120.112	1	120.112	1.061	.309	.007
Treatment	1445.414	1	1445.414	12.772	.000	.538
Emotional Maturity	10.908	1	10.908	.096	.758	.002
Conflict Transformational Skills	619.819	1	619.819	5.477	.024	.111
Treatment × Emotional Maturity	517.274	2	258.637	2.285	.114	.094
Treatment × Conflict Transformational Skills	83.076	2	41.538	.367	.695	.016
Emotional Maturity × Conflict Transformational Skills	3.317	1	3.317	.029	.865	.001
Treatment × Emotional Maturity × Conflict Transformational Skills	3.762	2	1.881	.017	.984	.001
Error	4979.545	54	113.171			
Total	836450.654	67				
Corrected Total	9558.056	66				

<sup>f</sup> R Squared = .479 (Adjusted R Squared = .337)

Source: Fieldwork (Ibadan Metropolis, 2025)

A significant main effect of treatment on gaslighting behaviour among married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis was demonstrated by the analysis in Table 2:  $F(1, 54) = 12.772, p < 0.001$ , with a partial eta-squared value ( $\eta^2_e$ ) of .538. These results led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that the Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy intervention had a statistically significant effect on gaslighting behaviour levels. The effect size ( $\eta^2_e = .538$ ) indicates a large effect, suggesting that 53.8% of the variance in participants' gaslighting behaviour can be attributed to the treatment intervention. This substantial effect size demonstrates not only statistical significance but also practical significance, indicating that IOMT produced meaningful reductions in gaslighting behaviour among the married individuals.

According to the first research hypothesis, married individuals in the selected faith-based centres in Ibadan would not exhibit a statistically significant difference in gaslighting behaviour levels when exposed to Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy. However, this hypothesis was negated by the results presented in Table 1, thereby showing that the treatment had a main effect for the reduction of gaslighting behaviour. The study established that

IOMT was useful in addressing the unconscious patterns and defensive structures that underpin gaslighting. Remarkably, the findings revealed that participants who received IOMT reported improved outcomes, implying that IOMT was effective in reducing gaslighting tendencies through depth-oriented exploration of relational dynamics and emotional insight development.

This research suggests that married individuals may engage in gaslighting behaviour as a result of unconscious defensive operations and unresolved relational injuries, and that the negative effects of such behaviour on communication, emotional intimacy, and marital satisfaction may be long-lasting. Interestingly, concerning married individuals who engage in gaslighting behaviour, the literature indicates that the behaviour often stems from unconscious projective identification, power imbalances rooted in family-of-origin dynamics, and maladaptive defensive strategies, which increases negative outcomes including erosion of trust, emotional distress, and relational dysfunction. The findings thus revealed that Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy received the highest efficacy rating in this context. Particularly, IOMT was found to be extremely helpful in assisting participants in exploring unconscious

patterns, understanding family-of-origin influences, and developing more authentic emotional engagement to counteract the psychological consequences of gaslighting (Scharff & Scharff, 2017; Snyder, Baucom, & Gordon, 2021).

The evidence from the mentioned studies provides solid proof and supports the existing evidence pointing to the efficacy of IOMT in modifying maladaptive relational behaviours and improving relational outcomes among different population groups. It is noteworthy that many researchers have proved the efficacy of depth-oriented psychodynamic approaches in the management of manipulative interpersonal behaviours rooted in unconscious processes and psychological distress in adults. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews conclude substantial improvements in relational

functioning, emotional insight, and authentic engagement after the implementation of insight-oriented interventions. For example, Snyder, Baucom and Gordon (2021) reported significant overall effect sizes in treating couples presenting with entrenched maladaptive relational patterns using insight-oriented marital therapy. The efficacy of this intervention is further supported by the findings of Lebow and Diamond (2018), which indicated that IOMT is effective in uncovering unconscious dynamics and facilitating emotional growth within the marital context. As observed in this study, the effectiveness of IOMT has been supported in various cultural environments and real-life situations, demonstrating its adaptability to diverse cultural settings including Nigerian contexts.

**Table 2.** Bonferroni pairwise comparison showing the significant differences among the treatment group and the control group

(I) Treatment	(J) Treatment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
IOMT (Mean = 108.7)	Control	17.270*	4.086	.000
Control (Mean = 126.0)	IOMT	-17.270*	4.086	.000

Source: Fieldwork (Ibadan Metropolis, 2025)

The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

A Bonferroni pairwise comparison was conducted to examine the difference in posttest gaslighting behaviour scores between participants in the IOMT group and the control group. Results revealed that the IOMT group (Mean = 108.7) scored significantly lower than the control group (Mean = 126.0), with a mean difference of 17.270,  $p = .000$ . This difference remained statistically significant after applying the Bonferroni correction, indicating that IOMT was effective in reducing gaslighting behaviour compared to no treatment. The observed differences suggest that the introduction of structured depth-oriented psychological intervention, particularly those focusing on Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy, had a measurable impact on the gaslighting behaviour of the participants.

**Hypothesis two:** There is no significant main effect of emotional maturity and conflict transformational skills on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.

The study showed that emotional maturity did not significantly affect the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis. According to the hypothesis, emotional maturity

has no discernible main impact on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals. This was supported by the study's results, as Table 2 shows that there is no significant main effect of emotional maturity on gaslighting behaviour:  $F(1, 54) = .096$ ,  $p > 0.05$ , partial eta-squared ( $\eta^2_e = .002$ ). The findings show that there were no significant variations in gaslighting behaviour levels between participants with high, moderate, or low levels of emotional maturity. The standardised relational context and the nature of gaslighting as a subtle, context-dependent behaviour may be the reason for the observed absence of substantial variance in gaslighting behaviour across various emotional maturity levels. The influence of emotional maturity may be lessened since gaslighting often operates through mechanisms that go beyond an individual's capacity for self-regulation and emotional awareness alone.

Beyond straightforward classifications of emotional maturity, this nuanced result emphasises the complexity of manipulative behaviours within marital relationships, showing that emotional maturity and gaslighting behaviour are impacted by complex interpersonal and relational interactions. This means that, regardless of whether individuals possessed high or low emotional maturity, the occurrence and persistence

of gaslighting behaviour was not meaningfully altered. Essentially, the complex relational dynamics inherent in gaslighting may override the protective effects of emotional maturity, making any individual difference in this capacity less impactful in isolation (Stosny, 2019; Sarkar and Sinha, 2021).

In contrast, the results reveal that there is a significant main effect of conflict transformational skills on gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis:  $F(1, 54) = 5.477, p < 0.05$ , partial eta-squared ( $\eta^2_e = .111$ ).

**Table 3.** Bonferroni pairwise comparison showing the significant differences in gaslighting behaviour based on the level of conflict transformational skills

(I) Conflict Transformational Skills	(J) Conflict Transformational Skills	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
High (Mean = 123.7)	Moderate (Mean = 116.1)	7.647	3.268	.024
	Low (Mean = 110.0)	13.700	3.268	.001
Moderate (Mean = 116.1)	High (Mean = 123.7)	-7.647	3.268	.024
	Low (Mean = 110.0)	6.100	3.268	.062
Low (Mean = 110.0)	High (Mean = 123.7)	-13.700	3.268	.001
	Moderate (Mean = 116.1)	-6.100	3.268	.062

Source: Fieldwork (Ibadan Metropolis, 2025)

Table 3 presents the results of the Bonferroni pairwise comparison, highlighting differences in gaslighting behaviour among participants based on the level of conflict transformational skills. The analysis compared participants with high, moderate, and low levels of conflict transformational skills to determine whether these skills influenced gaslighting behaviour. The findings indicate that participants with high conflict transformational skills (Mean = 123.7) exhibited significantly lower tendencies towards gaslighting behaviour compared to those with moderate skills (Mean = 116.1), with a mean difference of 7.647 ( $p = .024$ ). Similarly, participants with high skills showed a significantly greater reduction in gaslighting behaviour than those with low skills (Mean = 110.0), with a mean difference of 13.700 ( $p = .001$ ). These results suggest that possessing higher levels of conflict transformational skills is associated with more effective management of interpersonal conflict, which in turn contributes to a reduction in gaslighting behaviours. In contrast, the difference between participants with moderate skills (Mean = 116.1) and those with low skills (Mean = 110.0) was not statistically significant (mean difference = 6.100;  $p = .062$ ). This indicates that moderate levels of conflict transformational skills may not be sufficient to produce a meaningful reduction in gaslighting behaviour compared to low levels,

Hence, the null hypothesis regarding conflict transformational skills is rejected. This implies that the level of conflict transformational skills is a significant determinant of gaslighting behaviour among married individuals. The effect size indicates that conflict transformational skills explained 11.1% of the variance in gaslighting behaviour. To further show the margin of differences caused by conflict transformational skills, the Bonferroni pairwise comparison was carried out, and the result is shown in Table 4 below.

emphasising that higher competency in these skills is critical for observable behavioural change (Johnson and Brown, 2019; Williams and Thompson, 2022).

The study by Mohamed, Mosallem, and Mohamed (2014), which also found no statistically significant correlation between emotional maturity and manipulative interpersonal behaviours among adults in relational contexts, is consistent with these research results. According to their research, a variety of intricate interactions that go beyond the direct reach of emotional maturity may have an influence on individuals' engagement in manipulative behaviours. Factors such as unresolved relational dynamics, personality traits, or individual coping mechanisms could play a more substantial role in influencing gaslighting behaviour in this population. This was substantiated by Stosny (2019), who pointed out that relational settings may have varying dynamics that can influence the effectiveness of individual emotional capacities, such as the quality of communication patterns, power dynamics, and overall relational functioning, which can impact how effectively emotional maturity contributes to reducing manipulative behaviours. The findings confirm that conflict transformational skills are a key factor in reducing gaslighting behaviour, particularly when developed to a high level. The

results provide empirical support for structured interventions that enhance conflict management abilities and suggest that achieving high skill proficiency is critical for meaningful behavioural change (Williams and Thompson, 2022).

**Hypothesis three:** There is no significant interaction effect of Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy, emotional maturity, and conflict transformational skills on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in the Ibadan Metropolis.

According to the third hypothesis, treatment, emotional maturity, and conflict transformational skills would not significantly interact in either direction to affect the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals in Ibadan. The results presented in Table 2 confirm that treatment and emotional maturity, and conflict transformational skills were shown to have no discernible combined effects on the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals. This indicates that the impact of the intervention on gaslighting behaviour was not substantially moderated by either emotional maturity or conflict transformational skills. The lack of significant interaction effects indicates that the degree of emotional maturity or conflict transformational skills the participants possessed had no bearing on how effectively the treatment reduced gaslighting behaviour. In other words, the effectiveness of the intervention to reduce gaslighting behaviour was independent of an individual's level of emotional maturity or conflict transformational skills. As a result, neither emotional maturity nor conflict transformational skills had a discernible effect on how the therapy affected the gaslighting behaviour of these married individuals.

The results of several research consistently support the idea that individual trait variables and therapeutic interventions do not significantly interact to affect manipulative interpersonal behaviours among married individuals. The knowledge that therapy and pre-existing personal competencies do not jointly affect gaslighting behaviour in the anticipated way is reinforced by this discussion, which synthesises findings from several studies that have examined related topics. On the gaslighting behaviour of married individuals, studies have found no significant interaction effect between treatment types and the presence of moderating variables such as emotional maturity or conflict management skills. These results show that the observed phenomena is

resilient since they hold true across a range of geographic regions and demographic characteristics. The gaslighting behaviour of married individuals, for example, was not significantly impacted by the type or degree of therapy received, even in the face of differing levels of personal competencies, as demonstrated in the present study. In a similar vein, Harrison and Cooper (2019) highlighted that, when compared to their counterparts who did not receive structured interventions, neither therapeutic methods nor the degree of pre-existing personal skills substantially changed the behavioural outcomes of individuals engaging in manipulative relational patterns.

Additionally, the study by Lin and Chen (2020) examined protective and risk variables for relational health among married individuals, emphasising that behavioural outcomes were not substantially influenced by the therapies or the presence of pre-existing personal competencies. The psychological well-being and relational functioning of married individuals taking part in structured intervention programmes was also found to be positively impacted by therapy regardless of baseline competencies, according to Ibrahim and Bello (2021). The idea that personal competencies and therapies would work in concert to lessen gaslighting behaviour in married individuals is called into question by these data taken together. Rather, findings imply that characteristics other than these could have a greater impact on how behavioural outcomes are shaped in marital contexts. The robustness of the interventions themselves, the consistency of the therapeutic environment, or the specific nature of the relational challenges these individuals encounter are all potential explanations. This highlights that the interventions themselves, rather than pre-existing individual traits, were the main factors driving behavioural change, and that treatment programs aimed at reducing manipulative behaviours like gaslighting can be widely applied across married populations without the need to tailor interventions based on emotional maturity or conflict management skills (Chukwuemeka, 2020; Ibrahim and Bello, 2021).

From a psychodynamic perspective, these findings align with object relations theory and attachment-based frameworks, which suggest that therapeutic change emerges primarily through the therapeutic relationship and the systematic exploration of unconscious patterns rather than being contingent upon pre-existing individual capacities. The therapeutic process in Insight-Oriented Marital

Therapy creates a containing environment where couples can explore projective identifications, examine defensive operations, and work through relational injuries regardless of their initial levels of emotional maturity or conflict management abilities (Scharff & Scharff, 2017). The therapy's effectiveness appears to derive from its structured approach to uncovering unconscious dynamics and facilitating emotional insight, which operates independently of participants' baseline competencies.

In practical terms, these findings are particularly encouraging for clinicians and program implementers. They indicate that Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy programs aimed at reducing gaslighting behaviour can be applied broadly across diverse populations of married individuals, without requiring extensive pre-screening for emotional maturity or conflict transformational skills. This is especially relevant for marital counselling centers, pastoral care programs, and community mental health services where participants often present with varying levels of personal competencies and relational functioning. Practitioners can therefore implement IOMT interventions confidently, knowing that participants with varying skill levels and emotional capacities are likely to benefit equally from the structured therapeutic approach.

## CONCLUSION

The study found that Insight-Oriented Marital Therapy (IOMT) was effective in reducing gaslighting behaviour among married individuals in the Ibadan metropolis. Participants who received the intervention showed improved relational functioning, including reduced manipulative behaviours and greater emotional insight, compared to those in the control group. The findings further indicate that emotional maturity and conflict transformation skills did not significantly influence the effectiveness of the therapy, suggesting that IOMT can be applied across individuals with varying personal characteristics. However, the relatively small sample size and short intervention period may limit the generalisability of the results. Future studies should involve larger samples and longitudinal assessments. Overall, IOMT shows promise as a practical intervention for addressing gaslighting behaviour and improving marital relationships.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The study found that gaslighting behaviour is significantly reduced with the intervention strategy, which is IOMT. Therefore, this depth-oriented therapeutic strategy for managing gaslighting behaviour should be used by counselling and clinical psychologists, guidance counsellors, marital therapists, and other mental health professionals working with couples experiencing psychological manipulation in their relationships.
- Extensive training of professionals, comprising guidance counsellors, marital therapists, pastoral counsellors, and social workers, on the principles and application of IOMT should be conducted so that these therapies are administered in the right way and consistently.
- Training programmes should emphasise the structured nature of IOMT, including exploration of unconscious dynamics, interpretation of transference and countertransference, examination of family-of-origin influences, and techniques for facilitating emotional insight specifically tailored to address gaslighting behaviour in marital contexts.
- Marital counselling centres, religious institutions, and community organisations should create comprehensive relational health programmes where regular IOMT sessions would be built in, along with provision of supportive services such as individual psychodynamic therapy, couple's groups, and psychoeducational workshops on understanding unconscious patterns in relationships. These programmes should be accessible to married individuals exhibiting manipulative behaviours and should be delivered by trained professionals who can effectively implement the structured depth-oriented interventions.

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