

# RELATIONSHIP DYNAMICS AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING OF COMMUTING COUPLES IN UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

Olumuyiwa, Bukola Opeyemi<sup>1\*</sup>, Edinenido Hezekiah Udoudom<sup>2</sup>

Department of Home Economics Education, Faculty of Vocational Education, Library & Information Science, University of Uyo.

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**Abstract:** The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of relationship dynamics on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. Two specific objectives, two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The target population for this study comprised of married couples residing in Uyo Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The sample size of 80 commuting couples was selected using a combination of snowball and purposive sampling techniques. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Relationship Dynamics and Emotional Wellbeing of Commuting Couples Questionnaire (RDEWCCQ)". The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts from University of Uyo. The reliability coefficient of the instrument 0.86 was achieved using inter-item reliability method computed using Cronbach Alpha statistics. The data collected for the study was analyzed using simple linear regression analysis to answer the research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of probability to determine the acceptance or rejection of the null hypothesis. Findings revealed that communication pattern and trust contributed 34.6% and 66.3% respectively on variations in emotional well-being of commuting couples thus, communication pattern and trust highly influence well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. It was also found that there was a positive and significant influence of communication pattern and trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in the study area. It was recommended among others that commuting couples should adopt flexible work arrangements, remote work options, and access to counseling services as coping measures for promoting emotional stability of partners in commuting relationships.

**Keywords:** Commuting couples, Communication, Emotional well-being, Trust.

## Introduction

Marital relationships play a pivotal role in the well-being and productivity of individuals. Relationships, marriage and family are at the core of every community. Families are universally recognized as an important source of support and security. They can provide safe and stable environments which nurture the growth and development of each member throughout the different stages of life, from birth to old age. In the traditional family setting the husband and wife live together and share their daily lives, fulfilling complementary roles. According to Mohamad, Salina and Norulhuda (2024), living together and sharing life is an essential element that strengthens the marital bond between husband and wife.

Emotional well-being encompasses an individual's subjective experience of positive and negative emotions, life satisfaction, and overall psychological functioning. The emotional well-being of couples centers on mutual emotional support, fostering open communication, cultivating trust, and maintaining a sense of safety and connection (Maqbool et al., 2022). Couples with high emotional well-being express regular affection, active listening and empathy, taking responsibility for one's actions, and handling conflict maturely. Nurturing emotional well-being

strengthens the relationship's resilience, increases emotional intimacy, and improves overall mental health for both partners. However, modern life changes have significantly altered the structure of marriage, such as the existence of commuter couples.

Globally, the phenomenon of commuting couples, often referred to as commuter marriages or living-apart-together (LAT) relationships, has gained increasing scholarly attention due to globalization, urbanization, career mobility, and economic pressures. Wu and Wang, (2022) viewed commuting couples as married couples who live separately, usually far apart, and only meet or spend time together periodically. While commuting in marriage offers advantages regarding individual growth and financial stability, it also presents emotional and relationship challenges. Maintaining intimacy, managing domestic responsibilities, and meeting social expectations can be sources of stress for commuter couples hampering their emotional well-being. The geographical separation and the frequent commuting between residences can present a range of challenges for these couples, including increased emotional distance, logistical difficulties, and potential strain on the relationship (Caroll et al., 2020).

Regarding the relationship dynamics and emotional well-being of commuting couples, Caroll et al. (2020) asserted that the physical separation and the need to navigate long-distance

\*Corresponding Author

Olumuyiwa, Bukola Opeyemi\*

Email: [olumuyiwabukolaopeyemi2@gmail.com](mailto:olumuyiwabukolaopeyemi2@gmail.com).

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communication can lead to increased stress, reduced intimacy, and challenges in maintaining emotional closeness. The emotional and logistical demands of commuting can also contribute to feelings of isolation, loneliness, and decreased relationship satisfaction. Additionally, the lack of shared daily experiences and the need to coordinate schedules and responsibilities can strain the couples' ability to maintain a sense of togetherness and connection. On the other hand, some research has highlighted the resilience and adaptive strategies employed by commuting couples to sustain their relationships. Robles *et al.* (2020) asserted that effective communication, trust, and the development of coping mechanisms can help mitigate the challenges of geographical separation and maintain emotional well-being.

Effective communication and the development of trust are crucial factors in sustaining the emotional well-being of commuting couples. The use of various communication channels, such as video calls, text messages, and online platforms, can help bridge the physical distance and foster a sense of emotional closeness (Robles *et al.*, 2020). Okafor, Amali and James (2024) reported that psychosocial factors like communication, intimacy and emotional bonding play prominent role on marital stability of couples. Similarly, Balogun, George and Tirimisiyu (2024) found that married persons with high level of perceived marital quality had higher psychological well-being than those with low level of perceived marital quality and only communication pattern independently predicted psychological well-being

Trust is another critical component that contributes to the emotional well-being of commuting couples. Feelings of insecurity, fear of infidelity, and the inability to monitor their partner's activities can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and relationship dissatisfaction (Gonzalez-Hernandez *et al.*, 2017). The ability to trust their partner's fidelity, commitment, and support can provide a sense of security and stability, even in the face of geographical separation. Couples who have established a strong foundation of trust are more likely to weather the challenges of long-distance relationships and maintain their emotional well-being. Conversely, a lack of trust or the presence of jealousy and suspicion can significantly undermine the emotional well-being of commuting couples. Shah *et al.* (2021) found that trust and marital satisfaction were significantly favorable indicators of intimacy among married couples during the lockdown. Also, Jain (2022) reported that there is a significant positive correlation exists between trust and relationship satisfaction, intimacy and relationship satisfaction, and trust and intimacy. Therefore, a healthy, stable marital relationship contributes positively to emotional well-being by providing emotional support, reducing stress, and increasing feelings of purpose. On the contrary, Adegboyega *et al.* (2025) found that loneliness, occupational stress, and insufficient social support significantly contribute to psychological distress among married individuals living in separate locations

The Attachment Theory proposed by Bowlby (1980) fits into this study. The Theory provides a framework for understanding the emotional bonds and the need for security and intimacy in close relationships, such as those of commuting couples. The theory postulated that individuals develop attachment styles based on their early experiences and that these attachment styles can influence their ability to maintain emotional well-being in the face of physical separation.

The Theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how the attachment styles developed by individuals can shape their experiences and emotional responses within the context of a commuting relationship. According to Bowlby, individuals develop distinct attachment styles (secure, anxious-ambivalent, avoidant, or disorganized) based on their early childhood experiences with their primary caregivers. These attachment styles then serve as templates for how individuals approach and navigate their intimate relationships later in life. By applying the Attachment Theory to the study of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how the partners' attachment styles influence their communication patterns and trust and ultimately, their emotional well-being.

The ideal situation for commuting couples would be one where they are able to maintain a strong emotional connection, high levels of relationship satisfaction, and overall well-being despite the physical separation. In this ideal scenario, commuting couples would have the necessary resources, support systems, and coping strategies to effectively navigate the challenges of their arrangement and sustain a healthy, fulfilling relationship. However, the prevalent situation for many commuting couples, particularly in the study area often paints a different picture. The researcher has observed that there are several challenges that can negatively impact the emotional well-being of commuting couples in the study area. One of the observable problems is the strain that prolonged physical separation can have on the relationship. Lengthy commute times and frequent periods of being apart can contribute to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and a sense of disconnection between partners. This can lead to reduced relationship satisfaction, emotional distress, and difficulties in maintaining emotional intimacy and a shared sense of identity.

The persistence of these challenges may have been the root cause of incidences of divorce which may result in dysfunctional society with emotional destabilized person capable of causing disarray, violence and crime. The physical separation experienced by commuting couples may be perceived as a deviation from these cultural norms, leading to additional challenges, stigma, and a lack of understanding and support from their social networks. Furthermore, the lack of research on the experiences of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area presents a critical knowledge gap. It is against this backdrop of the prevalent challenges and observable problems that the present study aims to explore the relationship dynamics and emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area, Nigeria.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine the influence of relationship dynamics on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

- i. the influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.
- ii. the influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

## Methodology

**Research Design:** The design of this study was a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey research design is a valuable approach for assessing opinions and trends as it reflects the views of genuine cross-section of the population. A descriptive survey research design aims at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or fact about a given population. A descriptive survey was adopted because the study involves the use of structured questionnaire to elicit responses from the commuting couples.

**Area of the Study:** The study was conducted in Uyo Local Government Area. Uyo Local Government Area is situated in the southern region of Nigeria, within the Akwa Ibom State. The city of Uyo is the capital of Akwa Ibom State and is located at the coordinates 5°02'N 7°55'E, covering an area of approximately 196 square kilometers. It is bordered by Nsit Ibom LGA to the north, Itu LGA to the east, Ibesikpo Asutan LGA to the south, and Uyo LGA to the west. According to the latest census data, Uyo LGA has a population of over 500,000 residents (National Population Commission, 2022). The population is ethnically diverse, with the majority being from the Ibibio ethnic group, who are the indigenous people of Akwa Ibom State. Uyo LGA is the economic and administrative center of Akwa Ibom State, serving as a hub for various economic activities, including commerce, trade, and the service industry. Couples live in the study area who are engaged in commuting relationship, which is what necessitated the research work in the area.

**Population of the Study:** The target population for this study was 18,191,439 married couples in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State (National Population Commission 2025). The exact number of commuting couples in Uyo is not documented; therefore, the population of married couples is used as the study base since commuting couples are a subset of married couples. This agrees with the assertion of Creswell and Creswell (2018) who noted that in a population studies when the subpopulation lacks documented figures, it is methodologically acceptable to adopt larger, well documented group as reference population. Therefore by using the total population of married couples in Uyo as the base, the study ensures that sampling frame is broad enough to include commuting couples while maintaining representativeness.

**Sample and Sampling Technique:** The sample of 80 commuting couples was selected for the study. The study utilized a non-probability sampling approach, specifically a combination of snowball and purposive sampling techniques, to select the participants. Snowball sampling was employed as the primary method to identify the commuting couples being a subset of married couples. The researchers initially leveraged the existing social networks of the commuting couples to expand the sample. Purposive sampling was then be used to ensure that the final sample reflects the diversity of the commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

**Instrumentation:** The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Relationship Dynamics and Emotional Wellbeing of Commuting Couples Questionnaire

(RDEWCCQ)". The questionnaire was made up of two sections namely section one and section two. Section one solicited for information on personnel data of the respondents, while section two comprised of questionnaire items structured into four sub areas, each addressing a particular research objective. Section B of the instrument had a total of 20 items used a four-point rating scale of response options and was scored on the basis of this code as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) – 4points, Agree (A) - 3points, Disagree (D) - 2points and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1point. Respondents were required to choose options that suit their opinion. The same version of the instrument was administered to both on-line and off-line participants.

**Validation and Reliability of the Instrument:** The instrument was subjected to face validation by three lecturers; one from the Department of Home Economics, Faculty of Agriculture, and one from the Department of Business Education, and the other one from the Department of Family Sociology, University of Uyo. The experts were given a copy each of the questionnaire and were requested to react to the questionnaire items by identifying ambiguous statements or wrongly structured statements. The experts' corrections and suggestions will be incorporated into the final instrument development. The reliability of the instrument was achieved using inter-item reliability method. This was carried out by administering the instrument once to 10 commuting couples who were not part of the main study and computing for reliability coefficient using Cronbach Alpha statistics which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86. This indicated that the instrument had high internal consistency and was suitable for the study.

**Method of Data Collection:** The questionnaire developed for data collection was administered to the respondents through on-line and off-line contact. For the on-line administration the researcher created a WhatsApp group and invited persons that met the inclusion criteria for the study. The researcher assured the online respondents that their responses will be treated with high level of confidentiality and data obtained will be strictly used for academic purpose. The persons added to the group were allowed to willingly participate in the study. Thereafter, the researcher shared the questionnaire response sheet to the 28 on-line participants through a using Google link and solicited for their responses.

For the off-line administration, the researcher used the services of two research assistants who were students from the Department of Home Economic Education to assist in distributing 52 copies of questionnaires. The research assistants were briefed by the researcher on how to administer and collect questionnaire. These research assistants helped to administer and collect questionnaires from the respondents for the researcher.

**Method of Data Analysis:** The data collected for the study was analyzed using simple linear regression analysis to answer research questions and test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of probability.

## Results

### Research Question 1

What is the influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area?

**Table 1: Linear Regression showing influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area n = 80**

| Variables                  | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | % prediction |
|----------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| Communication Pattern      | .588* | .346           | 34.6         |
| <b>Emotional Wellbeing</b> |       |                |              |

(Source: Field Survey, 2025)

Table 1 shows the influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. The result in Table 1 shows the value of the regression coefficient (R) and its corresponding R<sup>2</sup> of .588 and .346 respectively. The value of R<sup>2</sup> of .346 indicates that communication pattern has contributed 34.6% on the variation in emotional wellbeing of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. This implies that communication pattern has

positive influence on the emotional wellbeing of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

**Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis showing significant influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area**

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F     | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| Regression | 1.452          | 1  | 1.452       | 14.24 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 7.959          | 78 | .102        |       |                   |
| Total      | 9.411          | 79 |             |       |                   |

The computed F-value of (14.24) has the probability level of 0.00 which is less than the significant level of 0.05. This is interpreted to be significant at the degree of freedom of 1 and 78. The probability value of .000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area

was rejected. Hence, there is a significant influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

**Research Question 2**

What is the influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area?

**Table 3: Linear Regression showing influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area n = 80**

| Variables                  | R     | R <sup>2</sup> | % prediction |
|----------------------------|-------|----------------|--------------|
| Trust                      | .816* | .663           | 66.3         |
| <b>Emotional Wellbeing</b> |       |                |              |

(Source: Field Survey, 2025)

Table 3 shows the influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. The result in Table 3 shows the value of the regression coefficient (R) and its corresponding R<sup>2</sup> of .816 and .663 respectively. The value of R<sup>2</sup> of .663 indicates that trust has contributed 66.3% on the variation in emotional wellbeing of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. This implies that trust has positive

influence on the emotional wellbeing of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

**Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

**Table 4: Summary of Regression Analysis showing significant influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area**

| Model      | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F     | Sig.              |
|------------|----------------|----|-------------|-------|-------------------|
| Regression | 1.915          | 1  | 1.915       | 20.82 | .000 <sup>b</sup> |
| Residual   | 7.167          | 78 | .092        |       |                   |
| Total      | 9.082          | 79 |             |       |                   |

The computed F-value of (20.82) has the probability level of 0.00 which is less than the significant level of 0.05. This is interpreted to be significant at the degree of freedom of 1 and 78. The probability value of .000 is less than the significance level of 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area was rejected. Hence, there is a significant influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area.

## Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study showed that communication pattern contributed 34.6% on the variation in emotional wellbeing of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area thus, highly influenced the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. It was also observed that there was a significant influence of communication pattern on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. The finding may be due to the fact that most commuting couples in the study area communicates to each other openly about their feelings as well as makes effort to have regular scheduled communication through video calls and phone calls. These qualitative communication pattern provide partners with emotional support, help manage conflict and maintain sense of closeness even when they are physically apart. This finding suggests that commuting couples who engage in more effective communication patterns, characterized by open, empathetic, and supportive exchanges, tend to experience higher levels of emotional well-being and overall relationship satisfaction.

The finding corroborates the finding of Okafor et al. (2024) found that psychosocial factors like communication, intimacy and emotional bonding play prominent role on marital stability of couples in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State. It also affirms the findings of Balogun, *et al.* (2024) who reported that married persons with high level of perceived marital quality had higher psychological well-being than those with low level of perceived marital quality and only communication pattern independently predicted psychological well-being. Meanwhile, cost of communication among commuting couple could hamper maintaining effective resulting in emotional stress.

Finding showed that trust contributed 66.3% on the variation in emotional wellbeing of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area thus, trust highly influence the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. Finding further revealed that there was a significant influence of trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area. The finding points to the fact that most commuting couples in Uyo have a high level of trust in their relationship and are better equipped to navigate the unique challenges and stressors associated with geographical separation. This helped reduce relationship conflicts and foster a more

harmonious and emotionally stable environment. Also, the high level of trust observed among commuting couples in Uyo likely triggers the emotional feeling of closeness and connectedness, which can contribute to higher levels of emotional well-being and overall relationship satisfaction.

The finding is in agreement with the findings of *Shah et al.* (2021) who found that trust and marital satisfaction were significantly favorable indicators of intimacy among married couples during the lockdown. Finding contradicts Adegboyega et al. (2025) who found that loneliness, occupational stress, and insufficient social support significantly contribute to psychological distress among married individuals living in separate locations. This may result is distrust among commuting couples.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study have demonstrated the positive and significant influence of communication patterns and trust on the emotional well-being of commuting couples. Effective communication and high levels of trust were all found to be crucial determinants of the emotional well-being of the participants. These results underscore the critical importance of addressing the unique challenges faced by commuting couples and the need for targeted interventions and support systems to enhance the quality of their relationships and overall psychological health. By prioritizing the development and maintenance of healthy relationship dynamics, commuting couples can foster a sense of emotional security, resilience, and fulfillment, despite the geographical distance that separates them.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to support the relationship dynamics and emotional well-being of commuting couples in Uyo Local Government Area:

- i. State government through relevant agencies should establish specialized counseling and support services within the community that cater to the specific needs of commuting couples. These services should focus on enhancing communication skills, building trust, developing effective conflict management, and strengthening commitment within the relationship.
- ii. Ministry of Education should integrate relationship education programs into the curriculum of local educational institutions, including schools and universities. These programs should equip individuals with the knowledge and skills on how to build trust in relationship which is necessary to navigate long-distance relationships, manage the associated challenges, and foster healthy relationship dynamics.

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