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Full Length Research Paper

Interpersonal conflict among Caribbean couples in Jamaica, Guyana and the United States

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While interpersonal relations are an important aspect of people's lives, they are also punctuated by conflict and tension. This study examined relationship conflict among Caribbean couples with an emphasis on experiences and potential determinants. The study is based upon secondary probability data collected in Jamaica, Guyana and the United States. The bivariate results revealed differences in factors associated with conflict among Caribbeans across countries. Multivariate analyses suggest that conflict occurring among partners is complex and contingent on level of relationship satisfaction, closeness to partner, frequency of discontentment and social and cultural backgrounds.

Key words: Relationship conflict, gender roles, social context, Caribbean couples.

INTRODUCTION

Interpersonal relationships are an important aspect of people's lives and play a pivotal role in well-being and quality of life (Proulx et al., 2007; Hawkins and Booth, 2005; Frech and Williams, 2007). Couples in marital and long-term relationships experience a variety of benefits, including personal satisfaction, happiness and better overall health (Frech and Williams, 2007; Hawkins and Booth, 2005; Kurdek, 1991). Popular perceptions hold that successful relationships are relatively conflict-free. This idea is reinforced by images of happy couples interacting positively in relationships devoid of struggle and strife. In reality, conflict is a common occurrence in intimate relationships and an understanding of the role of

conflict in relationships may be essential to understanding the experiences of couples across societies.

Research on the dynamics and determinants of relationship conflict has been limited in several ways. First, studies tend to address relationship conflict as a dimension of intimate partner violence, even though violence and conflict may be conceptually and experientially distinct (Holman and Jarvis, 2003; Lloyd, 1990). Secondly, a larger percentage of studies on relationship conflict and discord have been centered on the North American and European contexts with very little attention to this dynamic in Caribbean countries, differing in socio-political histories, values, norms and social

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arrangements (Few-Demo et al., 2014; Lloyd, 1990). These important factors may be instrumental in the interpretation and management of interpersonal conflict (Cingoz-Ulu and Lalonde, 2007). Using the ecological model, this study sought to understand the complexity and differences of interpersonal relationship conflict among Caribbean couples in Guyana, Jamaica, and the United States using population level data.

Background

Social and cultural orientations may be sources of dispute in relationships because of their influence on roles and expectations within these partnerships. More often, especially during the early stages of relationships, partners strive to negotiate and address expectations that include clearly defined duties and obligations (Pawlowski, 1998; Kurdek, 1991). However, the transition to understanding and embracing these expectations is not always smooth, and couples encounter various changes and inconsistencies that can create conflict in their relationships (Hochschild, 1989). Hochschild (1989) suggests that tension in relationships is partly due to differences in partners' gender ideologies, resulting in contrasting views of individual roles in the home. There may be occasions where issues surrounding women's work and the decision-making process in relationships are at the center of partner disputes. Couples' failure to adequately address specific responsibilities and expectations can be problematic and become the basis for spousal conflict throughout the course of the relationship (West, 2004).

Rabin and Shapira-Berman (1997) observed that tension often increases throughout the course of relationships when couples develop a pattern of decision-making based on traditional role expectations, in which masculine power is assumed and expected. In these instances, tension is most often generated from men (Chevannes, 2001; Chevannes, 2003; Figuerora, 2004). This might be true for male partners who are strongly invested in traditional perspectives on relationships. Individuals who hold such views often promote male exemption from household tasks and the assignment of full domestic responsibility to women. In Caribbean societies, where there tends to be strong adherence to such beliefs, there is widespread observance to male dominance and female submission to male authority that are driven by patriarchal cultural and social norms (Roopnarine, 2013). This may be particularly relevant, for example, among East Indian women in Trinidad (Morgan and Youssef, 2006) and Guyana who make up a large segment of the population (Cummings, 2010; Danna and Shiw Parsad, 1988, 1989). Women within these societies are encouraged to maintain traditional patriarchal norms, which shape an image of them as passive, dutiful and subservient, notwithstanding the fierce resistance of some

women (Morgan and Youssef, 2006). Women's failure to defer to men's authority under these normative expectations is not generally welcome and is a source of tension in relationships, which can escalate and reach severe levels including physical, emotional and financial abuse (Wekker, 2006; Amirthalingam, 2005).

Researchers have identified a number of factors associated with lower levels of relationship conflict. Studies conducted in the United States suggest that relationships based on egalitarian principles tend to have higher levels of satisfaction resulting in low marital conflict (Rabin and Shapira-Berman, 1997; Amato et al., 2007). A study conducted among urban Afro-Guyanese found lower marital tension exists among couples who experience higher levels of daily positive interaction such as affirming affectionate or humorous partner exchanges (Cummings, 2007). Fewer incidents of relationship conflict have also been noted among couples with similar religious ideologies, compared to those with dissimilar religious views (Coleman and Straus, 1986).

Considerable research suggests that both religion and economic resources are among the most significant sources of stress in committed relationships and are often central reasons for relationship conflict (Day and Acock, 2013; Conger et al., 1990; Coleman and Straus, 1986; Liker and Elder, 1983). Religious values arguably have been a conduit for prescribed roles, norms, expectations, and conduct in interpersonal relationships. Studies suggest that religion contributes to relationship inequality; in which one partner is more likely to regulate, control or dominate another partner (Day and Acock, 2013; Coleman and Straus, 1986). Relationships based on inequality arise from the fact that most world religions have historically been patriarchal and ideological in nature, and grant authority over family decision-making and control of resources to men. Caribbean nationals tend to identify with a religious practice which usually defines their interpretation of and acceptance of traditional gender roles. Although these principles can help to stabilize relationships, they can also be a source of conflict with deviation of traditional ideologies. The ideological mismatch can create arguments and conflict among partners who have yet to embrace these changes (Day and Acock, 2013). Similarly, studies suggest that economic hardships are major life stressors that often are associated with negative influences on the quality of marital interaction (Chevannes, 2001; Chevannes, 2003; Liker and Elder, 1983; Conger et al., 1990). Research indicates that men who experience economic hardship often respond with hostile behavior that may rupture the positive interaction between intimate couples (Conger et al., 1990). Cummings (2007) further contends that men who are unable to obtain work to support their families often become tense, irritable and explosive.

Although economic difficulties experienced by males can be offset by wives' participation in the labor market, this participation can also affect the happiness of

husbands and result in elevated levels of conflict in the relationship (Amato et al., 2007; Henry-Lee et al., 2000). Husbands' unhappiness may be attributed to cultural expectations of men's role as the breadwinner. Therefore, their inability to live up to these expectations can create insecurity about their authority; and this perceived loss of authority may intensify, especially when they are unable to provide financially. Since it is commonly the norm for men in Caribbean cultures to play the role of financial provider, women working outside the home can become problematic if it affects the self-esteem of their male partners, even though many homes are headed by females. The financial independence women gain from working outside the home may also shift the power dynamic in relationships, thereby calling into question men's control over the household, creating friction in the relationships. While wives' inability to secure income can cause financial strain, being unemployed can also indirectly stabilize their union by curbing frustration, humiliation and resentment that husbands might develop from sharing co-provider roles (Cummings, 2007; Chevannes, 2001; Chevannes, 2003).

Starkey (1996) further contends that the psychological distress derived from economic hardship linked to unemployment can affect the quality of intimate relationships in other ways. For one, quality of relationship is affected when stressors manifest through verbal and non-verbal communication during interactions. Patterns of negative interactions have been linked to increased dissatisfaction among couples (Cingoz-Ulu and Lalonde, 2007; Chow and Ruhl, 2014). Satisfaction in relationships for some couples is often premised on quality of interaction and time spent with each other without conflict.

Research primarily based on data collected in the United States indicates that high levels of sustained conflict are associated with a greater likelihood for explosive arguments and the potential for intimate partner violence (Vives-Cases et al., 2009; Flood and Pease, 2009). Although the association between conflict and violence has been well documented, many relationships characterized by sustained conflict are absent of physical violence (Lloyd, 1990). Previous research asserts that the presence of conflict may more negatively affect women's assessments of marital quality than it does for men (Cingoz-Ulu and Lalonde, 2007). However, because of the potential for violence in relationships, and the substantial consequences associated with intimate partner violence, there is a need for additional understanding of interpersonal relationship conflict among Caribbean couples.

Theoretical orientation

Social ecological theory is a useful framework for understanding how conflict in relationships might be identified and managed differently cross-nationally (Dutton, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Goodwin, 2003)

and within nations (Day and Acock, 2013). In this view, partners operate within multiple cultural and subcultural systems that may have distinct normative expectations, and are uniquely shaped by them. These contexts include the larger social or cultural social groups, the family unit, and individual personality factors. The unique cultural context of Caribbean life may serve to shape the management of tension and conflict in key ways. Caribbean cultures tend to have a collectivist orientation, which is typically characterized by family values, group harmony and sharing resources, as well as working together to solve problems; although arguably there is a formal and sometimes informal acceptance of gender hierarchies. In cultures with strong communal bonds, conflict may not sever ties that often lead to relationship dissatisfaction. While individualistic societies more typical of the United States tend to emphasize self-reliance, independence, detachment and the primacy of personal over in-group goals, relationship conflict may more easily disrupt relational ties and be associated with relationship dissatisfaction. Couples with multiple cultural orientations, in which one or both parties have been influenced by foreign cultural ideals, via education, travel or other subcultural exposure, may have increased experiences of tension and conflict due to misunderstanding of each other's values, beliefs, and ideologies (Sandhya, 2009; Ting-Toomey, 1994; Goode, 1971).

Research questions and hypothesis

This study attempt to address a few questions including: (1) Do rates of interpersonal conflict differ across cultural contexts and orientation? and (2) What are key determinants of interpersonal conflict across cultural groups? Given the differences in cultural and social expectations about relationships across contexts, the study expect to find differences in rates of interpersonal conflict trending higher among couples in the United States. It also anticipates differences in associated factors of interpersonal conflict between those couples within the Caribbean region compared to those in the United States context.

METHODS

Sample

Secondary data that used probability sampling frames collected in Jamaica, Guyana and the United States were analyzed.

Caribbean samples

Samples collected in the Caribbean regions were based on the 2002 population census (Bynoe et al., 2006; Boxill et al., 2006). The sample in Jamaica was drawn from the urban Kingston metropolitan regions, St. Andrew and Portmore. Interviews with

randomly selected adult study participants were conducted in August 2005 and completed in December of that year. A total of 1,218 interviews were completed in Jamaica.

The Guyanese sample covered the greater Georgetown (urban), suburban and rural areas. Questionnaires were provided and collected between July and December 2005. A total of 2,068 interviews were completed in Guyana (Lacey et al., 2016).

United States sample

The US sample was drawn from the National Survey of American Life (NSAL) re-interview. The NSAL is the largest and most comprehensive survey on the US Black population, and the first and only known representative study on Caribbeans residing within the United States (Jackson et al., 2004; Neighbors et al., 2007). Multistage probability sampling techniques were used to generate the sample. Face-to-face interviewing was the main method of data collection, with a smaller portion of interviews conducted by telephone. A subset ($n=663$) of US dwelling Caribbeans interviewed was analyzed for this study.

Predictors

Demographic variables

The socio-demographic variables included gender, age, marital status, education, employment, and income. Age was a continuous measure. *Education level* was categorized by primary or some high school, high school graduate, and college, vocational or technical school. *Employment status* reflected employed, unemployed, and not in the workforce. *Income* was divided into five quintiles: Bottom, second, middle, fourth and highest. The bottom quintile reflected lower income groups and by contrast the higher quintile category comprised individuals within high income groups.

Religiosity

Religious conviction was gauged by participants' response to, "How religious would you say you are?" Response options ranged from "very religious" to "not at all."

Satisfaction in relationship

Relationship satisfaction was assessed by the question: "How satisfied are you with your relationship/marriage?" Response options ranged from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied."

Help with chores

Assistance with chores was addressed by asking participants, "How much does your (spouse/partner) help with regular chores such as shopping, cleaning or yard work?" Response options ranged from "a great deal" to "not at all."

Closeness in relationship

Closeness to partner comprised two measures: "How close do you feel to your spouse/partner?" and "Overall, how well do you and your spouse get along together?" Together these measures had an internal consistency ranging from 0.76 to 0.78 across samples. Both variables were examined individually, and summed for higher-

level (multivariate) analysis due to limited cases within individual variables.

Arguments with partner

Frequency of arguments in relationship was determined by the question, "How much does your (spouse/partner) argue with you?" Possible answers ranged from "a great deal" to "not at all."

Dependent variable

Conflict in relationship

Interpersonal relationship conflict was examined with the question: "In general, how much conflict or tension do you feel there is between you and your spouse/partner?" Measured on a Likert scale, responses included: A great deal, some, a little, or not at all. Married and partnered individuals were the focus of analysis for this study.

Analytic strategy

Bivariate analysis (*t*-test) and multivariate logistic regressions were the analytic procedures used to address the research aims. Predictors (e.g., satisfaction, get along, closeness, arguments) were reversed coded for analysis. Higher scores were given greater endorsement. The dependent variable was coded to reflect conflict (e.g., a great deal, some, a little) = 1 versus no conflict (not at all) = 0. The significance at the 0.05 alpha level was set. All analyses were conducted using SPSS version 22. Sampling weights were applied to all analyses involving the Jamaican and Guyanese cross-sections. Due to the underlying complex samples, all statistical analyses involving the US Caribbeans accounted for the complex multistage clustered design of the NSAL sample, unequal probabilities of selection, nonresponse, and post-stratification to calculate weighted, nationally representative population estimates and standard errors. In the datasets from Jamaica and Guyana, post stratification weights based upon census estimates of age and gender were also applied.

FINDINGS

Sample characteristics

Guyanese participants were on average slightly older than their Jamaican and US Caribbean counterparts ($m = 40.5$ vs. $m = 38.9$ vs. $m = 38.0$). Females were the majority across samples (Guyana 51% vs. Jamaica 69.5% vs. US Caribbeans 61.4%) (Table 1). In Guyana (34.2%) fewer participants were married compared to Jamaicans (56.6%) and US Caribbeans (49.1%). The education level of participants across samples also differed with more than half (54.0%) of Guyanese participants obtaining a primary or some high school education, around a half (49.8%) of Jamaicans graduating from high school, and more than a third (43.3%) of US Caribbeans obtaining a college education. While participants in general were employed across samples, lower rates were observed among

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

Characteristics	Caribbean samples		
	Guyana (2005)	Jamaica (2005)	US Caribbeans (2003)
Percentage (except for age)			
Mean age	40.5	38.9	38.0
Gender			
Male	48.2	30.5	38.6
Female	51.8	69.5	61.4
Marital status			
Married	34.2	20.3	26.8
Partnered	16.0	13.2	6.3
Sep-div-widow	18.6	9.9	17.8
Never married	31.2	56.6	49.1
Education level			
Primary/some high school	54.0	28.3	28.9
High school graduate	29.7	49.8	27.7
College-vocation-technical	16.3	21.9	43.3
Employment status			
Employed	53.7	44.1	58.4
Unemployed	10.8	28.6	3.9
Not in the labor force	35.5	27.4	37.7
Equivalised income			
Bottom quintile	14.0	21.1	17.1
Second quintile	30.0	24.3	19.2
Middle quintile	23.4	1.6	19.8
Fourth quintile	22.4	42.4	29.1
Highest quintile	10.2	10.7	14.8
Relationship conflict			
A great deal	7.6	5.6	6.3
Some	24.6	13.2	13.1
A little	49.0	34.3	35.7
Not at all	16.6	46.9	44.8
[N]	2068	1218	663

Valid percentages are reported.

Jamaicans (44.1%). The income of participants, however, was different across populations with less than a third (30%) of Guyanese participants with incomes within the second quintile category, less than half (42.4%) of Jamaicans in the fourth quintile category, and just over a quarter (29.1%) of US Caribbean participants are more represented within the fourth quintile category. In general, a larger percentage of Guyanese (81.2%) experienced some variation of conflict in their relationship compared to their Jamaican (53.1%) and US Caribbean counterparts (55.1%).

Bivariate analysis

Illustrated in Table 2, there were similarities in response

patterns across countries between gender and associated factors of relationship conflict. Across nations, higher mean scores, indicating greater endorsement, were generally found for males compared to females on these associated factors, although differences in significance were observed. In Guyana specifically, significantly different mean scores were found between men and women with regard to: Helping with chores (men = 3.22 vs. women = 2.95; $p < 0.001$); satisfaction in their relationship (men = 3.65 vs. women = 3.50; $p < 0.001$); getting along with their spouse (men = 3.59 vs. women = 3.45; $p < 0.001$); and closeness to their partner (men = 3.66 vs. women = 3.60; $p < 0.001$). In the United States, differences were only observed for the category "helping with chores" (men = 3.40 vs. female = 2.55; $p < 0.01$). Differences were not found in Jamaica along gender

Table 2. Gender and conflict.

Characteristics	Guyana			Jamaica			U.S. Caribbean		
	Male	Female	<i>P</i>	Male	Female	<i>p</i>	Male	Female	<i>p</i>
Help with chores	3.22	2.95	0.000	3.13	3.08	0.338	3.40	2.55	0.002
Satisfaction in relationship	3.65	3.50	0.000	3.47	3.37	0.104	3.45	3.13	0.081
Get along with spouse	3.59	3.45	0.000	3.52	3.42	0.070	3.62	3.74	0.463
Closeness to partner	3.66	3.60	0.000	3.57	3.51	0.130	3.71	3.68	0.861
Argument with partner	2.23	2.24	0.820	2.17	2.13	0.567	1.97	1.79	0.474

lines surrounding the associated factors of relationship conflict.

Multivariate results

Similarities in predictive factors of relationship conflict were found among Caribbean residents but not for Caribbeans residing in the United States (Table 3). Satisfaction in relationship, closeness to partner, and arguments with their partner was all predictive of relationship conflict among Guyanese and Jamaican respondents. Specifically, lower odds of relationship conflict were found for both Guyanese (AOR = 0.690, $p < 0.05$) and Jamaicans (AOR = 0.691, $p < 0.05$) who were satisfied with their relationships, when other factors were controlled. Similarly, Guyanese (AOR = 0.549, $p < 0.001$) and Jamaican participants (AOR = 0.693, $p < 0.05$) who exhibited closeness to their mating partner had lower odds for relationship conflict. Conversely, the odds of relationship conflict increased among Guyanese (AOR = 3.05, $p < 0.001$) and Jamaican (AOR = 2.51, $p < 0.01$) couples when there were consistent arguments in the relationship.

Differences in socio-demographic factors were also found to affect relationship conflict. While age was significantly associated with a decrease in relationship conflict among Guyanese, this was the opposite for Jamaican and US Caribbean participants. The findings showed lower odds (AOR = .981, $p < .001$) of relationship conflict among older Guyanese. Income was also predictive of relationship conflict among US Caribbeans.

Notably, bottom quintile (AOR = 11.28, $p < 0.05$), second quintile (AOR = 6.29, $p < 0.05$) and the highest quintile (AOR = 7.50, $p < 0.05$) had increasing odds of relationship conflict. Guyanese participants within the higher income category (e.g., fourth quintile) had increased marginally significant odds of relationship conflict (AOR = 1.55, $p = 0.062$). No association with income was found among Jamaican participants. Gender, however, was associated with relationship conflict among this population (Jamaicans); the odds (AOR = 1.49, $p < 0.05$) of relationship conflict significantly increased among women.

DISCUSSION

An examination of relationship conflict among Caribbeans across three national geographic locations revealed increased rates of relationship conflict among Guyanese couples compared to couples in Jamaica and the United States. Also evident from the study females had lower ratings on factors associated with relationship conflict compared to their male counterparts. This was more true among Guyanese participants which may reflect cultural traits and traditional ethics unique to this sub population. These differences create concerns about perceptions that both men and women may hold about close relationships, which can ultimately affect relationship quality and dynamics that may be a source of tension and disputes.

Multiple factors were predictive of relationship conflict that speaks to evolution of collaborative or competitive behaviors among partners. In the Caribbean region, satisfaction in relationship, closeness to partner, and arguments in relationship were associated with relationship conflict. The opposite was found among Caribbeans in the United States, which may be attributed to changes in attitude and expectations about relationship after migrating or with length of time in an environment that is more supportive of egalitarian principles over traditional (gendered hierarchical) norms. Even though Guyanese families specifically may gravitate towards maintaining dual income households, which results in females spending more time outside the home, cultural changes regarding gender socialization may have not kept pace. Many families are still constructed along traditional gendered socialization roles. This gendered division of labor dimension remains strong and partners are likely to be satisfied in a relationship when operating within the confines of their accepted respective gender domains.

“Family leadership” styles, maternal or paternal or balanced between parents, as well as allocated/shared responsibilities to family members were also evident within our findings. For example, the inverse relationship between age and relationship conflict found among Guyanese may represent the demands of child rearing and other commitments in the earlier stages of the relationship; consequently, preventing couples from having the opportunity to focus on building intimacy and

Table 3. Logistic regression predicting relationship conflict.

Characteristics	Guyana Exp(B) CI	Jamaica Exp(B) CI	US Caribbean Exp(B) CI
Age	0.982(.972-.992)***	0.995(0.982-1.01)	0.997(.975-1.02)
Gender			
Male	1	1	1
Female	1.05(0.781-1.40)	1.49 (1.02-2.19)*	1.44(0.436-4.75)
Income			
Bottom quintile	1	1	1
Second quintile	1.42(0.922-2.19)	1.44(.816-2.54)	11.28(1.36-93.79)*
Middle quintile	1.48(0.930-2.36)	.738(.172-3.16)	6.29(1.20-33.10)*
Fourth quintile	1.55(0.979-2.45)	1.24(.636-2.42)	3.72(0.816-17.00)
Highest quintile	1.38(0.797-2.40)	1.58(.710-3.52)	7.50(1.56-35.96)*
Employment status			
Employed	1	1	1
Unemployed	1.13(0.699-1.84)	.820(.481-1.40)	0.786(0.024-25.42)
Not in labor force	.827(0.597-1.15)	.787(.506-1.22)	0.341(0.054-2.15)
Education			
Primary/some high school	1	1	1
High school graduates	1.10(0.795-1.53)	1.07(0.599-1.91)	3.66(0.361-37.07)
College/vocational/technical	1.25(0.820-1.87)	1.37(0.701-2.68)	5.01(0.613-40.96)
Religiosity	1.33(0.718-2.45)	1.11(0.323-3.82)	1.64(0.688-3.90)
Help with chores	0.986(0.809-1.20)	1.02(0.872-1.20)	0.710(0.430-1.17)
Satisfaction in relationship	0.690(.504-0.945)*	.691(0.499-.958)*	1.90(0.902-4.00)
Closeness to partner	0.549(0.451-0.669)***	.699(0.568-.845)***	0.950(0.569-1.59)
Argue with you	3.05(2.50-3.72)***	2.51(2.01-3.12)***	0.192(0.086-0.428)

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke R^2 Guyana = 0.337***; Nagelkerke R^2 Jamaica = 0.307***; Nagelkerke R^2 USCaribbean = 0.441***.

personal commitment. Although these responsibilities are expected to decline over time, it is not uncommon for individuals to develop better coping and interpersonal conflict resolution strategies with maturity and length of time in the relationship. This trend was especially unique to the Guyanese sampled population.

The findings also illuminate economic independence whereby income further influenced relationship conflict among US Caribbeans and partially among Guyanese. This was reflective across various income categories among US Caribbean couples and is very difficult to explain. Meeting financial needs and expectations may be a source of stress among couples within this context, potentially creating conflict in the relationship. Yet, the marginal association found between higher income and relationship conflict among Guyanese may result from material demands that if not met, could produce frustration and subsequent discontent in the relationship. Increased financial and spending power may come with a sense of entitlement that is grounds for conflict when

other critical needs are not met. Often, relationships may begin to suffer when the drive to obtain material acquisitions takes precedence and the relationship focus becomes less important.

While other socio-economic factors did not significantly influence conflict among Jamaican couples, gender was a factor. Being female was associated with reported conflict in relationships among Jamaicans. One possible explanation for this outcome may be related to the gradual deviation from traditional values, as well as greater independence among women in this country, which can be a source of tension and disputes among partners who are unwilling to adjust to contemporary norms.

Conclusion

This study is unique in that it features a comparison between two Caribbean developing countries (Guyana and Jamaica), and a developed country (United States)

to understand conflict in intimate relationships within the Caribbean Diaspora and across cultural contexts. Bivariate and multivariate analyses revealed important differences and insights into key determinants of interpersonal conflict among Caribbean couple. While this study contributes significantly to our understanding of relationship conflict within the Caribbean and across cultural settings, it is not without limitations.

Among the limitations of this study is the use of cross-sectional data that do not permit exploring change in patterns of behavior over time as well as social and political factors that may influence relationship conflict. Second, samples were only collected in the greater Kingston area, an urban setting, and may not be generalized to other areas of the country, despite the fact that a larger percentage of the Jamaican population resided in this region at the time of data collection. Third, the study did not address individuals in visiting relationships, non-committed sexual relationships, and how the parameters of their relationship affects the manner in which conflict is manifested or understood. Finally, the study did not adjust for other important factors (e.g., length of time in relationship, race or ethnicity, generation status) that may influence relationship conflict. Even with the challenges noted above, this is one of the few studies to conduct cross-cultural analysis of relationship conflict among Caribbeans residing in three different geographical locations. While providing a better understanding of relationship dynamics and possible influences of conflict, this study recognizes the cultural differences and similarities that exist among couples across societies. The study also signals the need for the availability of resources geared to addressing conflict management and resolution at the institutional and societal levels to assist couples with inter-relational conflict for the purpose of improving interactions and social relations. Since intimate relationships are generally formed early in life, especially within the Caribbean context, it would be beneficial to institute programs that address conflict management in educational systems through curriculums to better equip young individuals entering partnerships with the knowledge and skills to cultivate healthy interpersonal relationships. This may help to reduce incidents of interpersonal violence among couples, especially in Caribbean regions where there are higher than normal rates (Lefranc et al., 2008). It is important to include information in the curriculum noting that conflict is a normal aspect of social relationships that can be utilized positively and can be a useful source of growth and change for maintaining balance, effective communication, elements of how to compromise, and ways of responding to partners needs as they evolve. It may also be useful in helping to establish and re-establish roles and responsibilities as careers change, families grow and partners get older. Teaching individuals' skills to enhance communication and manage conflict in a non-violent and productive manner is a key strategy for intervention and prevention.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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