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In-Law Conflict Resolution from Christian and Muslim Religious Perspectives in Oriade, Nigeria

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In-law conflict is a significant but often overlooked cause of marital problems in Nigeria, frequently leading to emotional distress and family breakdowns. Few studies have focused specifically on these disputes or compared how different religious groups manage them. This study addresses that gap by examining in-law conflicts among Christian and Muslim families in Oriade Local Government Area, a region known for its religious diversity. Based on family systems and conflict theory, this research used a qualitative design. Forty participants, 20 Christians and 20 Muslims, were interviewed across seven towns. Thematic analysis revealed shared causes of conflict, including cultural expectations, gender roles, and financial pressures. Cultural expectations, lack of educational exposure, and extended family interference were cited by over 65% of respondents. Domestic role expectations were more prominent among Muslim respondents (75%) than Christians (25%). Amid the conflict, religious leaders were central to conflict resolution in both faiths, with 77.5% of participants highlighting the importance of pastors and imams. However, polygamy was a unique challenge in Muslim households, while Christian families faced more generational tensions. Christian women often coped through silence and prayer, while Muslim women more openly demanded fairness. The study therefore recommends faith-based counselling, religious conflict resolution panels, safe spaces for women, and child-focused family education.

Keywords: *In-law conflict; Marriage; Conflict resolution; Christian and Muslim families*

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INTRODUCTION

In many African societies, including Nigeria, conflict is not necessarily viewed as a threat to social order, but rather as an essential component of human relationships that, when handled constructively, leads to stronger bonds and long-term harmony. Akpan and Etuk provide a critical macro-level analysis of Nigeria's long-standing involvement in peacekeeping and security management in West Africa since the 1970s. Their study situates conflict within a broader structural context, highlighting how Nigeria's commitment to regional peace has been shaped by political responsibility, economic strength, and hegemonic expectations within the sub-region (Akpan and Etuk 2014). However, the authors argue that this extensive engagement has imposed a significant burden on Nigeria's domestic socio-economic conditions, resulting in financial strain, loss of personnel, and neglected internal development challenges.

The common expression 'we disagree to agree' illustrates this cultural understanding that disagreements can be a necessary part of achieving genuine peace. Conflict, therefore, permeates all aspects of life, from politics and religion to leadership and domestic settings, which necessitates robust and grounded mechanisms for resolution. Within the family structure, the marital domain is particularly vulnerable to conflict, not only between spouses but also with extended family members, especially in-laws. In-law interference has been identified as a major source of emotional distress and marital instability among Nigerian couples, particularly within extended family systems that exert strong influence on marital relationships (Adegoke 2010). According to Akinnawo and Adetula, in-law interference is among the top predictors of divorce in Nigerian homes (Akinnawo and Adetula 2006). Similarly, a study by Odukoya and Olatoye (2014) in Ibadan found that in-law conflict was

among seven major predictors accounting for 92.9% of marital breakdown, underscoring the importance of this issue in the broader landscape of marital conflict. In regions such as Ondo State, empirical research by Adebayo and Ogunwale (2021) among couples in Owo and Akure Local Government Areas also highlighted that tensions over decision-making authority, financial obligations, and domestic roles frequently stemmed from the influence of in-laws. These findings demonstrate that in-law relationships, particularly those between spouses and mothers-in-law, can often ignite prolonged periods of silent hostility, emotional manipulation, and even marital dissolution.

In Nigeria's multi-religious context, religion plays a significant role in shaping both the causes and the resolution of family conflict. Christianity and Islam, the two dominant religions, have developed distinctive frameworks and institutional practices for managing disputes. In Muslim families, the Islamic principle of *sulh* (reconciliation) is a key method for conflict resolution. Rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, *sulh* promotes dialogue, equity, and communal intervention, often facilitated by respected clerics or family elders. Shittu and Olorun-oje have shown that *sulh* is not only a religious obligation, but also a culturally embedded mechanism that restores harmony and reinforces social cohesion in Muslim communities (Shittu and Olorun-oje 2019). Conversely, Christian households typically rely on pastoral counselling, scriptural mediation, and formal church-based reconciliation committees. These practices, guided by biblical injunctions on forgiveness, love, and submission, are widely employed across denominations.

According to Adeleye et al., churches that invest in effective family counselling programs report stronger marital outcomes and increased family resilience. In Pentecostal and evangelical settings, conflict resolution sessions are often

integrated into sermons, marriage enrichment seminars, and couples' retreats (Adeleye et al. 2025).

Beyond these internal mechanisms, the religious environment of southwestern Nigeria, particularly in areas such as Oriade Local Government Area of Osun State, provides a compelling setting for this inquiry due to its highly religiously pluralistic composition. The coexistence of Christian and Muslim communities presents a unique opportunity to examine how religious doctrines and cultural values intersect to shape family dynamics. Within these two major religious groups, in-law conflicts are addressed through different mechanisms rooted in spiritual, communal, and traditional values. Christian families may rely on pastoral counselling, scriptural guidance, and church-based mediation committees, while Muslim families often employ *sulh*, a Qur'an-based process of mediation facilitated by Islamic clerics or respected elders. It is therefore based on this background that this study is carried out to provide a comparative analysis of in-law-related conflicts and their resolution mechanisms among Christian and Muslim families in Oriade Local Government Area, Osun State.

Despite a growing awareness of the impact of family conflict on societal stability, in-law conflict remains an under-researched area in both academic and policy discourses in Nigeria. The problem is further compounded by the tendency to generalize marital conflict without disaggregating its specific causes or evaluating the role of religious and cultural influences. Particularly in multi-religious areas like Oriade, there is limited empirical data on how Christian and Muslim families uniquely experience and respond to in-law disputes. Furthermore, while religious institutions play a prominent role in shaping social behavior, their direct influence on family conflict resolution,

especially in intergenerational or in-law disputes, remains insufficiently documented. This leaves a knowledge gap in understanding how religious values, doctrines, and leadership structures influence the resolution of such tensions. Without such insight, efforts at promoting family stability and interfaith harmony may remain superficial and unsustainable. Existing scholarship has examined marital conflict in general terms within Nigeria; however, few studies have focused exclusively on the issue of in-law conflicts, particularly through a comparative religious lens. While Shittu and Olorun-oje emphasized the value of *sulh* in family conflict resolution in Ilorin, and Jimoh (Shittu and Olorun-oje 2019); while Abidemi and Muritala highlighted traditional mechanisms such as community-based arbitration in the Ibolu Kingdom (Abidemi and Muritala 2024). These works have not addressed how Christian and Muslim families specifically manage in-law disputes within a comparative framework. This research thus seeks to fill a critical gap by investigating the types, causes, and resolution mechanisms of in-law conflicts in Christian and Muslim households within Oriade LGA.

The main objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of in-law-related conflicts and their resolution mechanisms among Christian and Muslim families in Oriade Local Government Area, Osun State. The specific objectives are to identify the major causes and manifestations of in-law conflicts in Christian and Muslim households in Oriade LGA; examine the religiously informed mechanisms employed by both communities in resolving in-law conflicts; compare the similarities and differences between Christian and Muslim approaches to managing in-law disputes; and assess the effectiveness of these resolution strategies and their potential for interfaith learning and community peacebuilding. To achieve

these objectives, the study will be guided by four research questions: What are the primary causes and forms of in-law conflicts in Christian and Muslim families in Oriade LGA? What resolution mechanisms are used within each religious tradition to manage these conflicts? How do Christian and Muslim approaches to in-law conflict resolution differ or align? What lessons can be drawn from the comparative analysis for promoting interfaith harmony and familial stability?

This study is geographically confined to Oriade Local Government Area in Osun State, Nigeria, encompassing communities such as Ipetu-Ijesa, Erin-Ijesa, Owena, Ikeji-Arakeji, Iloko Ijesa, and Iwaraja. These towns were purposively selected due to their religious diversity and the presence of vibrant Christian and Muslim populations. Thematically, the study focuses specifically on in-law-related conflicts within the family setting and excludes other forms of marital conflict not directly involving extended family members. The study concentrates on Christian and Muslim families, thereby excluding households belonging to other faiths or belief systems.

This research, therefore, contributes not only to academic literature but also to practical frameworks for strengthening family resilience. In communities like Oriade, where interfaith coexistence is a reality, understanding how different religious communities navigate domestic tensions can enhance mutual respect and offer sustainable solutions to familial breakdown.

Literature Review

To understand why married couples argue in contexts such as Nigeria and other African countries, it is necessary to look beyond the couples themselves. We also need to understand how living in a society with religions plays a role. As Tasew and Getahun showed in their study in Ethiopia,

arguments between husbands and wives are very common in Africa. These arguments often come from a mix of things: personal feelings, differences between men and women, sex-related issues, and pressures from society, culture, and money. Their research also found that couples try various ways to deal with conflict. Some avoid the problem, others try to find a middle ground, and some even enlist the help of others. This just goes to show how difficult it is to sort out disagreements, as they're affected by both what's going on inside the couple and what's happening outside in their world (Tasew and Getahun 2021). We see these same reasons for arguments, like money worries, not talking properly, and what society expects from men and women, making things worse for couples in Nigeria. In places with many religions, it's worth looking closer at how these reasons for conflict mix with the different religious beliefs to really understand why couples argue.

In line with these findings, previous research carried out in a Chinese context, showed that parenting stress significantly worsens marital satisfaction, with emotional factors like depression mediating conflict, and that paternal empathy could buffer these effects (Dong et al. 2021). Although this study is culturally distinct, it parallels the Ethiopian study in emphasizing emotional and psychological stress as core drivers of marital discord. Likewise, the family systems approach posited by Chiang and Bai elaborates on the bidirectional influence between marital quality and parent-child relationships, suggesting that conflict is a dynamic system rather than isolated incidents (Chiang and Bai 2022). The Family Stress Model further contextualizes economic hardship as a pervasive factor escalating marital and parental distress, particularly relevant in rural Nigerian settings where financial insecurity is prevalent (Family Stress Model 2025).

The Nigerian landscape also presents a similarly complex picture. Similarly, the prevailing trends of marital tensions in contemporary Nigerian society cannot be overlooked. This shows, to an extent, the scholarly interest in the phenomenon of study. No doubt, marital conflict and instability have remained persistent challenges affecting families across Nigeria, influenced by cultural, economic, communicative, and religious factors. Researchers have explored these issues from multiple perspectives, approaching from both the global and localized causes and implications.

A study on newly married couples in Ilorin, Kwara State found that factors such as poor home background, interference by friends, and lack of parenting skills significantly contribute to early marital conflicts (Ogungbemi et al. 2024). The study highlights the importance of premarital counseling and continuous education for couples, echoing the call for proactive interventions in the formative stages of marriage. Similarly, another study in Ilorin Metropolis mentioned that spousal communication plays a crucial role in marital conflict resolution (Adegboyega 2024). Effective communication fosters understanding, while perceptual errors due to poor communication can exacerbate marital disputes. This aligns with earlier studies noting the centrality of mutual respect and open dialogue in achieving marital harmony.

Another study conducted in Rivers State, in the south-southern region of Nigeria highlighted key conflict factors including childlessness, infidelity, failed role expectations, and financial instability. This study also pointed to the psychological consequences of unresolved conflicts, recommending critical intra-marital resolution approaches without excessive third-party involvement (Josiah and Nteh 2022). Within the Hausa ethnic group, a

recent study assessed culturally specific sources of marital instability such as child betrothal, polygyny, in-law interference, and socioeconomic stressors. Their study provided a cultural lens, revealing how traditions and gender roles can exacerbate instability. The authors advocated for education on Islamic marital laws and promoting informed, consensual marriage choices (Aliyu et al 2025).

In Ibadan, Olasehinde and Onodje conducted an empirical study examining marital instability through an economic lens. They rightly observed that age at marriage, number of children, and marriage duration play significant roles in predicting divorce or separation. In fact, their findings suggest that household economics, alongside emotional and cultural factors, can predict stability, reinforcing earlier sociological theories linking financial health and marital success (Olasehinde and Onodje 2023). Iroye further framed marital conflict as not merely a negative occurrence but as an interaction that, when mismanaged, leads to destructive consequences. His work highlights that poorly handled conflicts can erode the marriage structure, leading to domestic violence, separation, or psychological trauma. He recommended ongoing seminars and workshops to equip couples with conflict management skills (Iroye 2021).

These contemporary studies confirm earlier conclusions by Eze, who identified infidelity, childlessness, and economic hardship as major triggers of marital instability in Nigeria (Eze 2021). In addition, Amadi and Adebayo emphasized the role of patriarchal norms and traditional values in exacerbating gendered experiences of conflict, especially where women's voices are marginalized in conflict resolution mechanisms (Adebayo 2017; Amadi and Amadi 2014). Elegbede et al. found that couples in Lagos predominantly

rely on validating and avoidant strategies to manage conflict, with educational level and type of marriage influencing outcomes. Their recommendation for local government-supported marital conflict resolution centers emphasizes the need for institutionalized support systems (Elegbede et al. 2024). Similarly, Elom identified poor spousal communication as a significant contributor to conflict among civil servants in Ebonyi State, advocating for counselling programs focused on communication skill enhancement (Elom et al. 2022).

Karunaya asserts that marital conflict is inevitable, often emerging from financial pressures, sexual dissatisfaction, and breaches of trust, irrespective of education or marriage length (Karunaya et al. 2014). This insight complements the Family Stress Model by situating economic hardship as a root cause of psychological distress, further inflaming marital tensions (Family Stress Model 2025; Tolorunleke 2014). However, the model's heavy focus on economic factors may overlook the nuanced influence of cultural and religious variables that are particularly salient in Nigerian interfaith marriages. In addition, Falegan highlights occupational stress, especially among correctional officers and police in Ekiti State, as a significant predictor of marital conflict, suggesting that external professional pressures contribute to domestic instability (Falegan 2024). This external stress factor aligns with findings on socio-cultural and economic drivers, reinforcing the multifaceted nature of marital conflict in African contexts (Tasew and Getahun 2021).

Interestingly, religion, which seems harmless, has, to an extent, also contributed as both a buffer and a source of marital conflict. Some researchers have shown that religion plays a dual role in marital relations in Nigeria, shaping gender roles and expectations that can both stabilize and destabilize marriages. The contrasting

religious doctrines of Christianity and Islam prescribe different marital roles; Christian teachings often emphasize mutual submission and love, whereas Islamic traditions underscore male provision and authority within the family (Marriage in Nigeria 2023). This divergence often results in friction when interfaith couples or their extended families hold rigid expectations.

Griswold rightly points out that religious tensions in Nigeria, particularly in areas like Plateau and Kaduna, often lead to conflict (Griswold 2004). These clashes frequently occur along religious lines. However, amidst these challenges, faith-based women's groups, such as "Zumunta Mata," play a vital role. They offer significant community support that helps to ease marital stress. These groups provide emotional, financial, and spiritual strength (Zumunta Mata 2024). This highlights how religion can actually bring people together and help solve problems, rather than just causing division. While these religious groups offer valuable local support, we don't know enough about how effective they are in rural areas or in communities with mixed faiths. For example, Umubyeyi et al. showed that religious leaders in Congolese migrant communities in South Africa are trusted by their communities to help resolve conflicts (Umubyeyi et al. 2020). This approach seems promising, but it hasn't been properly studied in Nigerian communities that have both Christians and Muslims, especially in rural areas like Oriade LGA. This means there's a clear need for more research in this area.

Of course, it can be argued that community and religious mediation remain central in conflict resolution. In Nigeria, informal mediation by religious authorities and community groups plays a significant role in diffusing marital tension (Elegbede et al. 2024; Zumunta Mata 2024). This community-based approach emphasizes social harmony and collective

responsibility. However, in rural, interfaith environments where Christian and Muslim traditions co-exist, the mediation landscape tends to become more complex. Ossai highlights civic peace-building, shared rituals, and joint governance as mechanisms that help mediate Christian–Muslim marital and in-law tensions in Nigeria, demonstrating that interfaith cooperation can foster marital harmony (Ossai 2024). Similarly, Anyaogu shows that structured interfaith dialogue builds trust and reduces family conflict, though political interference and mistrust sometimes hinder progress (Anyaogu 2025). Janson and Meyer added an interesting dimension through their analysis of Yoruba *Chrislam*, a syncretic practice that softens religious boundaries and reduces inter-religious friction in families (Janson and Meyer 2024).

Yet, despite these promising examples, the resolution mechanisms for in-law conflicts within interfaith marriages, particularly in rural Nigeria, are insufficiently documented. Most existing studies focus on couple-level conflict rather than the extended family dynamics that often exacerbate tensions. It is also noteworthy here to state that marital conflict often extends beyond the conjugal dyad into the wider family system, especially with in-laws. Lawal emphasize that extended family interference is a significant marital stressor that can impact women’s entrepreneurial success, illustrating the broader socio-economic consequences of familial tension (Lawal et al. 2024). In interfaith marriages, these tensions are further complicated by divergent religious and cultural expectations imposed by in-laws, often leading to conflict over tradition, loyalty, and religious conformity. Nwamadi further note that male dominance and economic control, often reinforced by extended family norms, strongly predict marital instability, highlighting the intersection of gender,

power, and family in marital breakdown (Nwamadi et al. 2025).

While Gambo and Nanlop underscore the role of faith-based organizations in mitigating these tensions, the specific mechanisms by which interfaith in-law conflicts are resolved remain underexplored (Gambo and Nanlop 2024). Thus, there is a clear gap in current research regarding the resolution of in-law related conflicts within Christian–Muslim families, particularly in rural contexts such as Oriade LGA, Osun State. Existing literature has extensively examined marital conflict and resolution at the couple level and highlighted religion’s complex role. However, few studies comprehensively address how extended families, especially in interfaith settings, mediate or exacerbate conflict, nor how formal and informal mechanisms adapt to these religious and cultural complexities.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

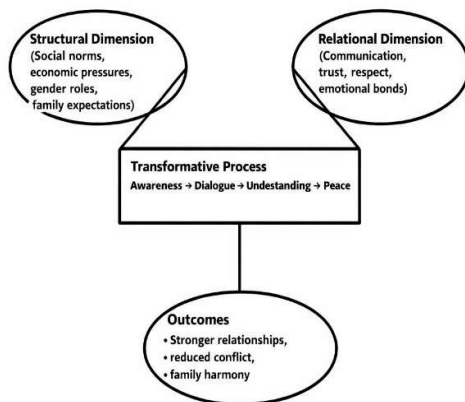
This study adopts the Conflict Transformation Framework, drawing from the theoretical model advanced by John Paul Lederach, as the most suitable lens for analyzing in-law-related disputes. Conflict transformation extends beyond the immediate resolution of disputes to address the deep-rooted relational and structural factors that sustain them. It views conflict not merely as a problem to be solved, but as an opportunity for constructive change in relationships and social systems (Lederach 2003). Within the context of in-law relationships, the structural dimension encompasses entrenched cultural norms, gender role expectations, economic pressures, and the extended family system that often dictates marital interactions. The relational dimension focuses on the patterns of communication, levels of trust, mutual respect, and emotional bonds between parties. These dimensions often

intersect, influencing both the causes and persistence of disputes.

The transformative process involves progressive stages: awareness of the underlying issues, dialogue to foster mutual understanding, and the development of restorative practices that lead to sustainable peace. This approach prioritises preventive strategies such as pre-marital counselling, family education, and cultural sensitisation, as well as restorative strategies like mediation, religious intervention, and community-based reconciliation. The expected outcomes of applying this framework include stronger interpersonal relationships, reduced recurrence of disputes, and the promotion of long-term family harmony. By addressing both structural inequalities and relational tensions, the Conflict Transformation Framework offers a holistic pathway for mitigating in-law related conflicts in culturally diverse settings.

The figure below therefore illustrates the Conflict Transformation Framework adapted from Lederach, highlighting the structural and relational dimensions of in-law disputes, the transformative processes for addressing underlying causes, and the expected outcomes of sustained reconciliation and family harmony.

Figure 1. Conflict Transformation Framework for In Law Relation



Source: Authors' Conceptualization

RESEARCH METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative and comparative research design to explore in-law-related conflicts and resolution strategies among Christians and Muslims in Oriade Local Government Area (LGA), Osun State. Data was gathered from both primary and secondary sources. The secondary source was obtained from books, journals, and internet sources, which informed the literature review. The primary source consisted of in-depth interviews, which were used to capture the lived experiences of individuals within both religious and familial contexts.

Seven purposively selected communities, including Ilesa, Ijebu-Jesa, Ipetu-Ijesa, Erin-Ijesa, Ikeji-Arakeji, Owena, and Iloko-Ijesa, were chosen due to their religious diversity and concentration of both Christian and Muslim populations. The target population included married couples, separated individuals, widows, and widowers who had directly experienced or witnessed in-law-related conflicts. Given the absence of a reliable, comprehensive population record of married or separated individuals in Oriade LGA (beyond limited court records available through the Osun State Judiciary), implementing a probability sampling or structured survey approach was not feasible (Finelib.com, n.d.; Nigerian Queries, n.d.). Instead, the study employed purposive sampling, a widely accepted qualitative method in which “information-rich cases” are deliberately selected for in-depth exploration due to their direct relevance to the phenomenon under study. Forty respondents (20 Christians and 20 Muslims) were chosen based on their gender, religion, marriage experience, and exposure to in-law conflict, providing thematic depth and balanced comparison.

Data was gathered using semi-structured interviews, which allowed for consistency across themes while giving

room for deeper probing. Interviews were conducted in Yoruba and English, depending on participant preference, and each lasted 30–45 minutes. Key topics explored included causes of in-law conflict, gender roles, religious beliefs, family expectations, and conflict resolution methods. With consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed. Thematic analysis and simple percentages were used to interpret the data. In addition, tables and graphs were employed to showcase the patterns and contrasts between Christian and Muslim responses.

To maintain confidentiality and support comparative analysis, participants were anonymized using a structured code combining gender and religious affiliation (e.g., F-C-R1 for Female Christian Respondent 1, or M-M-R3 for Male Muslim Respondent 3). This method aligns with APA 7th edition guidelines, which recommend in-text referencing of qualitative participants without including them in the reference list.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data from forty in-depth interviews (20 Christians, 20 Muslims) across seven purposively selected communities in Oriade Local Government Area (LGA), Osun State, revealed rich narratives of in-law conflict, its drivers, and the strategies employed for resolution. Respondents included married couples, separated individuals, widows, and widowers, allowing for diverse perspectives across gender, denomination, and family roles. Thematic coding generated three broad clusters: causes of in-law conflict, consequences of unresolved disputes, and resolution strategies, enabling a comparative analysis of Christian and Muslim households.

Causes of In-law Conflict

Overbearing Family Interference

Across both Christian and Muslim families, over-involvement of extended relatives was the most cited driver of conflict. Among Christians, 15 respondents (37.5%) reported cases where siblings or parents-in-law manipulated spouses, sometimes leading to suspicion and even violence. For instance, one woman (F-C-R5) recounted her husband being incited by his sisters to physically humiliate her in a bid to “prove” infidelity.

Among Muslims, 70% of respondents emphasized domestic expectations imposed by in-laws. Brides were expected to undertake heavy labor, such as cooking and laundry for large households, regardless of personal capacity or upbringing. As one woman noted, “They believe the way they acted then should be the same way the lady should act” (F-M-R2).

Thus, while both groups experienced family intrusion, Christians highlighted suspicion and mistrust, while Muslims underscored domestic and behavioral expectations.

Religious Differences and Identity

Religious identity emerged differently across the two groups. For Christians, 22.5% of respondents described denominational frictions (e.g., Catholic vs Pentecostal prayer styles), leading to accusations of spiritual inferiority (M-C-R1). This finding mirrors broader research that intra-denominational differences often create family friction within Nigerian Christianity (Olajide 2020).

Among Muslims, 35% cited interfaith tension, especially pressure on non-Muslim spouses to convert, despite Qur’anic prohibitions against compulsion (Qur’an 2:256). This shows that while Christians grapple with intra-faith “micro-divergences,” Muslims face more interfaith-

related identity conflicts. Empirical studies confirm that interfaith marriages in Nigeria frequently become sites of contestation over conversion, often straining family relations (Adebayo 2017).

Cultural and Respect-Related Expectations

Cultural obligations surfaced strongly. Among Christians, about 25% of respondents reported ethnic misunderstandings: e.g., Yoruba wives criticized in Igbo households for not kneeling (F-C-R2).

Muslim respondents (55%) stressed Yoruba-specific expectations of respect—kneeling, greeting rituals, and deference to even younger in-laws. While both groups struggled with cultural respect, Christians framed it in terms of inter-ethnic tensions, while Muslims described conflicts between cultural norms and Islamic injunctions of mutual kindness (Qur'an 4:19). These patterns reflect ethnographic studies of Yoruba marriage systems, which highlight kneeling and prostration as culturally significant acts of respect that can generate inter-ethnic tension (Olanrewaju 2018).

Generational Gaps

Both groups reported intergenerational clashes. Among Christians (20%) and Muslims (25%), younger couples prioritized privacy and boundaries, which elders interpreted as withdrawal. One chaplain (M-C-R3) explained: “This generation believes everyone should have their privacy. But to in-laws, this looks like disrespect.” Similar findings have been reported elsewhere, noting how younger couples’ preference for nuclear independence increasingly clashes with communal family traditions (Olowu 2017).

Economic Responsibilities

Economic strain was a shared source of conflict. Among Christians, 30% of

respondents described disputes over supporting widowed mothers-in-law. One husband initially resisted remittance but later reframed it as a moral duty (M-C-R5).

Among Muslims, 50% identified financial tension, especially in polygamous households where resources were contested. Economic pressure, therefore, intersected with gender roles, cultural duty, and religious teaching across both groups.

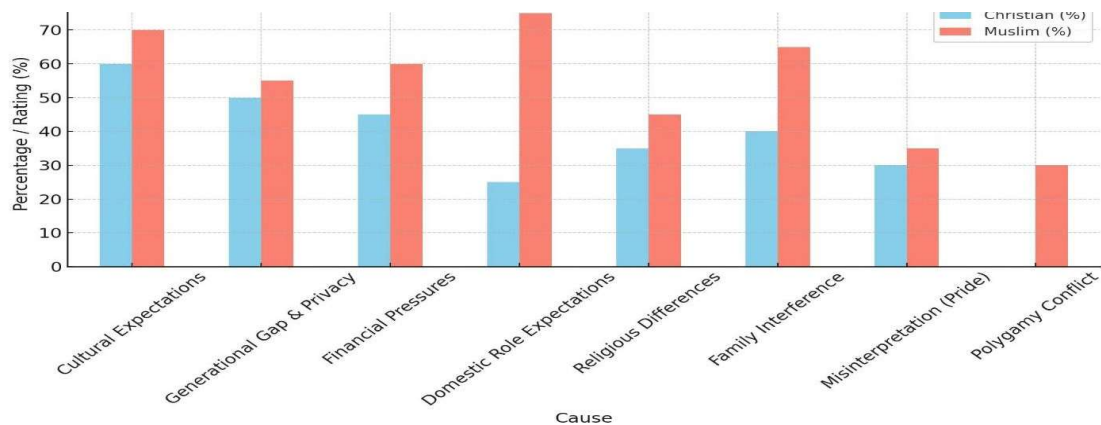
Polygamy and Rivalry (Muslim-specific)

A theme unique to Muslims was rivalry among co-wives. 45% of Muslim respondents described jealousy, educational disparities, and logistical strain. Although Islam permits polygamy, Qur'an 4:3 emphasizes fairness—an ideal many admitted struggling to uphold.

External Influence and Gossip

Finally, outsiders were a common catalyst. Among Christians, rumours within church or community networks escalated tensions (F-C-R3). Among Muslims, 50% referred to Qur'anic warnings against gossip (Qur'an 49:6) yet admitted interference persisted. Both groups illustrated the destructive role of misinformation, despite strong religious cautions against it.

Figure 2. Causes of In-law Conflict among Christians and Muslims in Oriade LGA



Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Consequences of In-law Conflict

Unresolved in-law disputes in Oriade LGA had far-reaching effects beyond immediate quarrels. From the interviews, at least 70% of respondents (28 out of 40) identified negative consequences ranging from broken marriages to child neglect and psychological strain.

Marital Breakdown and Divorce

Several respondents reported that in-law conflicts escalated into permanent separation. Among Christians, 5 respondents (25%) narrated personal or observed cases of marital collapse, while among Muslims, 4 respondents (20%) did the same. In one case, a Christian woman’s (F-C-R7) financial independence was framed by her in-laws as arrogance, fueling manipulation, violence, and eventual divorce. Similarly, Muslim respondents noted that some polygamous unions fractured when rivalries became unbearable. These findings are consistent with broader Nigerian studies showing that family interference is a key indirect driver of marital instability (Balogun and Yusuff 2021).

Child Displacement and Emotional Trauma

A striking outcome across both groups was the misuse of children as pawns

in adult disputes. In Christian contexts, one woman (F-C-R5) explained how children were redistributed after her friend’s marriage collapsed: *“The family shared the children so the husband wouldn’t feel the wife’s absence.”* Another child was reportedly sent to work as a housemaid. Muslim fathers likewise recalled children asking probing questions such as, *“Daddy, are you and mummy still angry?”* (M-M-R13), highlighting the emotional toll of conflict. Empirical evidence confirms that marital conflict frequently translates into child neglect, behavioral problems, and exploitation in Nigeria (Adepoju and Ayodele 2019).

Emotional and Psychological Strain

The emotional climate within families was often toxic. More than half (52.5%) of respondents described experiences of humiliation, mistrust, or estrangement. Christian women spoke of insults during church services (F-C-R3), while Muslim wives described constant criticism over greetings or household chores (F-M-R1). Such experiences echo earlier studies where unresolved family conflict was linked to low self-esteem, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal among women (Alabi 2017).

Gendered Burdens on Women

Women disproportionately absorbed the cost of conflict. Christian women described enduring insults in silence, choosing prayer and submission as strategies (F-C-R4). Muslim women recounted being overburdened with domestic duties or criticized for failing to perform cultural rituals (F-M-R2). These gendered expectations underline that women are positioned as primary carriers of reconciliation duties, often at personal cost. Scholars note that patriarchal structures in Nigerian families often place the “duty of peace” on women, even when they are victims of the conflict (Makinde 2018).

Communal and Spiritual Disruption

Finally, conflict damaged wider communal and spiritual bonds. In churches, unresolved disputes could affect participation in worship and erode trust in fellowship. Muslim respondents noted that gossip and interference contradicted Qur’anic injunctions (Qur’an 49:6), creating dissonance between professed values and lived realities. This reveals how family conflict undermines the credibility of religious communities as spaces of peace.

As shown in Figure 3, both Christians and Muslims share several core in-law conflict challenges such as generational tension, economic burdens, and family interference.

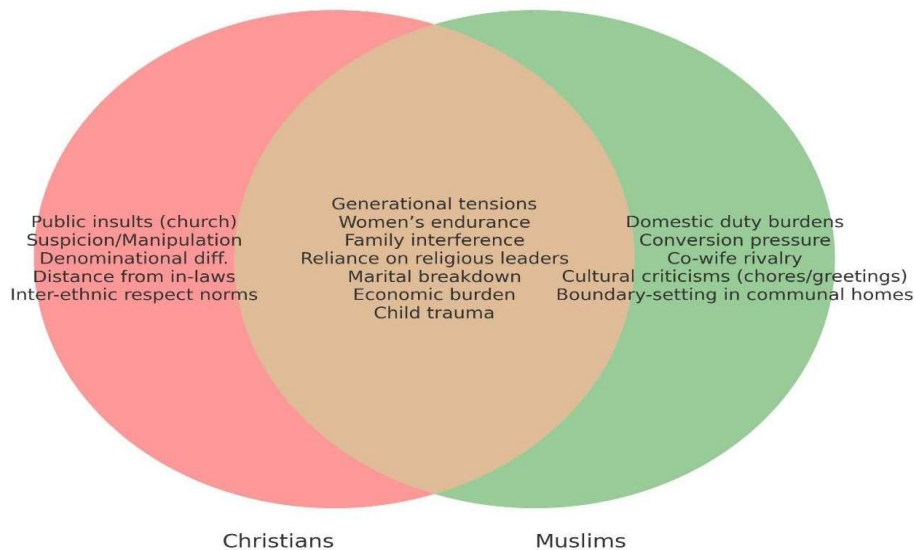
Strategies for Resolving In-law Conflict

Resolution strategies among Christians and Muslims in Oriade LGA reflected a fusion of religious authority, cultural wisdom, and personal transformation.

Religious and Communal Mediation

The role of the church emerged as central to resolution mechanisms in Christian homes. Pastors and elders, respected as “church government,” were frequently called upon to mediate. As one respondent explained, “*They won’t say no to the pastor... we leverage on that*” (M-C-R6). In complex cases, both church and family elders were involved, creating a hybrid resolution framework that combined spiritual authority with cultural legitimacy (M-C-R7). Similarly, among Muslims, imams were often invited to mediate conflicts. Respondents described how imams reminded couples of patience and mercy by referencing Qur’anic injunctions,

Figure 3. Shared vs Unique In-law Conflict Challenges (Christians and Muslims)



thereby reinforcing reconciliation over separation (F-M-R9). This aligns with wider evidence that religious leaders in Nigeria serve as trusted mediators in family disputes, using both moral authority and communal influence to enforce peace (Olajubu and Falola 2020).

Personal Transformation and Moral Introspection

Not all conflicts required third-party intervention. Several respondents described resolution through personal reflection and empathy. One Christian husband (M-C-R5) reframed his opposition to his wife's remittances to her widowed mother, reasoning: "What if it were my mother?" This moral awakening restored peace in the home. Similarly, another respondent (M-C-R8) shifted his stance after recognizing his wife's sacrifices, demonstrating that reconciliation can emerge through ethical reasoning and emotional maturity.

Women's Agency and Spiritual Endurance

Female respondents frequently described using patience, silence, and prayer as tools of endurance. As one Christian woman put it: "What I used was submission, patience, and prayer" (F-C-R4). Though costly, these strategies eventually softened hostilities and restored peace. Muslim women likewise highlighted the virtue of *ṣabr* (patience), drawing strength from Qur'anic teachings and Hadith. This reliance on women's resilience reflects broader findings that women in Nigeria often bear the disproportionate responsibility of preserving family peace, frequently through spiritual endurance and self-sacrifice (Okeke 2019).

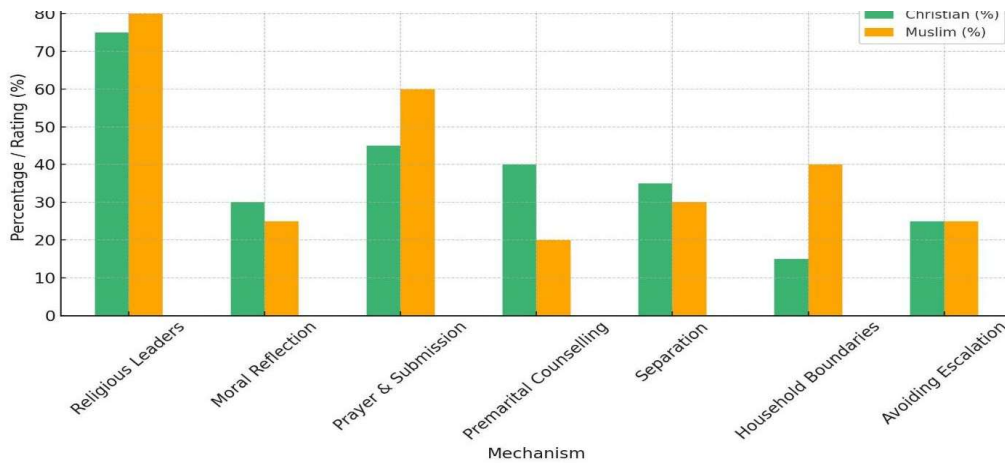
Structural and Preventive Approaches

Beyond reactive strategies, some respondents emphasized preventive measures such as premarital counselling that includes cultural literacy. A female

respondent (F-C-R8) recommended that young people study the traditions of their prospective in-laws, while another (F-C-R6) suggested couples live apart from in-laws during the first years of marriage. Such strategies balance honor for elders with the need for marital privacy, resonating with both biblical teachings (Genesis 2:24) and Islamic concepts of family autonomy.

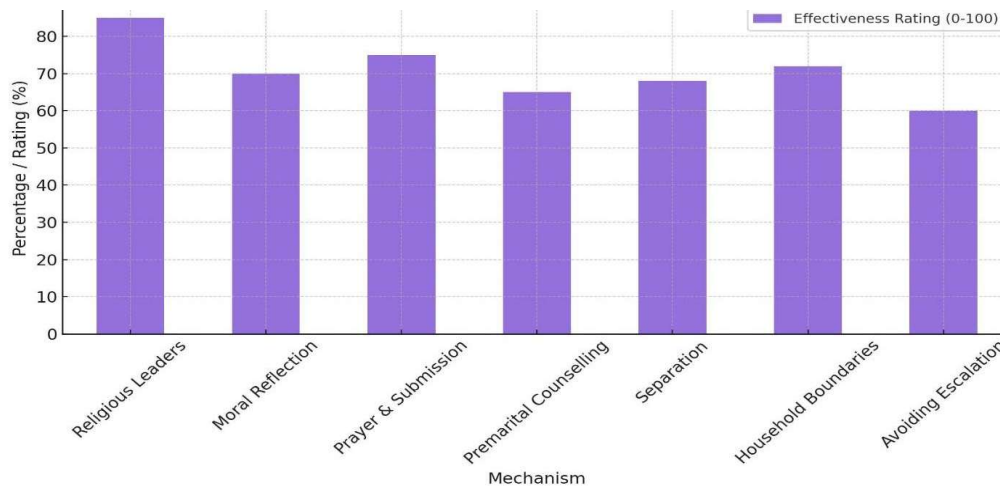
The effectiveness of the conflict resolution mechanisms used by Christian and Muslim families in Oriade is evident in their strong foundation in religious authority and cultural acceptance. Christian methods, which focus on emotional healing through pastoral counselling, biblical teachings, and patient endurance, are effective in promoting reconciliation and personal transformation over time. In contrast, Muslim approaches such as the practice of *sulh* provide a structured and justice-driven process that resolves disputes through respected community and religious figures. Both systems have shown success in reducing tension and preserving family unity, especially when spiritual leaders are actively involved in the mediation process. Their shared emphasis on protecting the welfare of children further demonstrates that, despite doctrinal differences, these religious frameworks can play a meaningful role in addressing and managing in-law conflicts.

Figure 4. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Among Christians and Muslims in Oriade LGA



Source: Authors' Conceptualization

Figure 5. Perceived Effectiveness of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms



Source: Authors' Conceptualization

Comparative Analysis

The study's analysis of 40 interviews (20 Christians, 20 Muslims) revealed that in-law conflicts are pervasive across both groups, though the sources, interpretations, and resolution pathways vary. While certain triggers such as financial disputes and overbearing family interference, are widely shared, the religious and cultural frameworks through which these conflicts are understood diverge in meaningful ways. Thematic coding generated six overlapping domains: family interference, religious

differences, cultural expectations, generational gaps, economic responsibilities, and external influence.

Both Christian and Muslim respondents identified overbearing in-law involvement as the most disruptive force. Among Christians, 15 respondents (37.5%) described cases where siblings or parents-in-law actively manipulated perceptions of a spouse. For instance, one Christian woman (F-C-R5) recounted how her husband's sisters convinced him that her financial success was arrogance, eventually leading to

violence and marital breakdown. Among Muslims, a similar pattern emerged: 70% of respondents referenced heavy domestic and behavioral expectations imposed on brides by extended families. These findings suggest that across both traditions, extended family intrusion is central to marital instability, though Christians emphasized suspicion and mistrust, while Muslims highlighted household labor and obedience.

Religion shaped conflict differently across the two groups. For Christians, intra-denominational differences (e.g., Catholic vs. Pentecostal practices) were noted by 22.5% of respondents as triggers of misunderstanding (M-C-R1). Muslims, however, more frequently cited interfaith tensions: 35% of Muslim participants reported cases where Christian spouses were pressured to convert, despite Qur'anic injunctions against compulsion (Qur'an 2:256). Thus, while Christian households struggled with "micro-divergences" within Christianity, Muslim households grappled with interfaith identity and tolerance, particularly under family pressure.

Cultural obligations around respect appeared across both groups, but with distinct emphases. Christian respondents (25%) stressed inter-ethnic misunderstandings, such as Yoruba wives being criticized in Igbo households for not kneeling to elders (F-C-R2). Among Muslims, respect was framed within Yoruba tradition itself: 55% of respondents emphasized kneeling, greetings, and deference to younger in-laws as obligations. In both cases, cultural literacy and generational negotiation emerged as critical fault lines, but the Christian narratives centred on ethnic difference, while Muslim accounts reflected tensions between cultural custom and Islamic principle.

Generational differences were reported by both groups (20% among Christians; 25% among Muslims). Younger

couples, especially Gen Z, were said to prioritized privacy and boundaries, often clashing with elders' communal expectations. A Christian chaplain (M-C-R3) lamented that "privacy looks like disrespect" to older in-laws. Similarly, Muslim respondents described friction when younger wives resisted "traditional" forms of respect. These findings highlight a shared intergenerational tension, reflecting broader social shifts towards individualism.

Financial disputes surfaced strongly in both groups. Among Christians, 30% of respondents highlighted tensions over remittances to widowed mothers-in-law. One Christian husband (M-C-R4) opposed regular support, while another (M-C-R5) reframed it as a moral duty, echoing Christian and Yoruba wisdom about reciprocity in ageing. Among Muslims, 50% of respondents similarly reported economic pressures, often linked to the burden of supporting extended families or balancing resources in polygamous households. Across both groups, economic stressors consistently intersected with cultural and religious ideals, shaping how spouses negotiated obligations.

A theme unique to Muslim respondents was the destabilizing effect of polygamy. Forty-five percent (45%) of participants recounted rivalry among co-wives, particularly when differences in education or background existed. As one husband lamented, "There is no way the man can split himself into three or into four to satisfy those wives" (F-M-R6). Although sanctioned by Islam, respondents acknowledged that polygamy often fails to achieve the equity prescribed in Qur'an 4:3, leading to envy and competition. This factor did not emerge among Christians, whose marital structures remained largely monogamous.

Interestingly, both groups underscored the role of outsiders i.e friends, neighbors, and relatives in escalating

disputes. Among Christians, this often took the form of rumors within church or community networks (F-C-R3). Among Muslims, fifty percent (50%) of respondents explicitly referenced Qur’anic warnings against gossip and unverified news (Qur’an 49:6), yet admitted that interference still shaped outcomes. The theme illustrates a shared vulnerability to misinformation and third-party intrusion, despite religious injunctions to caution.

The comparative findings suggest that in-law conflict among Christians and Muslims in Oriade reflects both universal family dynamics and religion-specific tensions. Universal issues such as family interference, financial stress, and generational gaps cut across both groups. Religion-specific tensions include intra-denominational rivalries among Christians and interfaith/polygamy-related disputes among Muslims. Importantly, while both traditions contain theological resources that could mitigate conflict (e.g., Christian teachings on mutual love; Islamic injunctions on kindness and fairness), these ideals are often overshadowed by cultural traditions, social expectations, and external influences.

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of In-law Conflict in Christian and Muslim Families in Oriade LGA

S/N	Themes	Christian Households	Muslim Households
1.	Overbearing Family Interference	37.5% cited manipulation by siblings or parents-in-law, often fuelling suspicion and mistrust (F-C-R5).	70% cited heavy domestic labour expectations imposed on brides (F-M-R2).
2	Religious Differences	Intra-denominational frictions (Catholic vs Pentecostal), 22.5% (M-C-R1).	Interfaith pressure to convert, 35% of respondents; Qur’an 2:256 forbids compulsion.
3	Cultural Expectations	Inter-ethnic clashes (e.g., Yoruba wives in Igbo homes criticised for not	Yoruba respect rituals (kneeling, greetings) imposed even on younger in-

S/N	Themes	Christian Households	Muslim Households
		kneeling) (F-C-R2).	laws (M-M-R3).
4	Generational Gaps	20% reported younger couples preferring privacy, elders saw as disrespect (M-C-R3).	25% reported younger wives resisting traditional respect practices.
5	Economic Strain	30% cited conflict over remittances to mothers-in-law; reframed as moral duty (M-C-R5).	50% reported tension in resource distribution, especially in polygamous households.
6	Polygamy	Absent; Christian norm is monogamy.	45% reported jealousy and rivalry among co-wives; fairness under Qur’an 4:3 often unmet (F-M-R6).
7	External Influence/Gossip	Church/community rumours escalate disputes (F-C-R3).	50% cited gossip, despite Qur’an 49:6 cautioning against false reports.
8	Resolution Mechanisms	Pastoral mediation, prayer, inner transformation, patience, forgiveness (1 Cor 13; Gal 6:2).	Imam-led mediation, justice-based reconciliation, emphasis on <i>sabr</i> (patience) and <i>adl</i> (justice).
9	Women’s Roles	Endurance through submission, prayer, silence (F-C-R4).	Agency through patience (<i>sabr</i>), but also assertiveness in demanding fairness or separation (F-M-R10).
10	Impact on Children	Redistribution of children after divorce; exposure to child labour (F-C-R5).	Children express emotional trauma (“Daddy, are you and mummy still angry?”) (M-M-R13).

The distribution of responses shows notable religious differences (see Table 1).

Christian and Muslim families in Oriade experience complex in-law conflicts, though the sources differ. In Christian households, conflicts often arise from family interference, such as manipulation by siblings or parents-in-law, cultural and denominational clashes, economic

pressures, generational differences, and external influences like church gossip. In Muslim households, conflicts are linked to heavy domestic expectations on brides, interfaith pressures, cultural and religious rituals, and polygamy, with gossip further exacerbating tensions. Children in both communities are particularly vulnerable, experiencing emotional trauma, redistribution after divorce, or involvement in domestic labor. Conflict resolution strategies also vary according to religious and cultural contexts: Christian families rely on pastoral mediation, prayer, patience, and forgiveness, while Muslim families emphasize imam-led mediation, justice (adl), and patience (sabr). Women cope differently in each context, with Christian women often practicing endurance and silence, while Muslim women combine patience with assertiveness to seek fairness or separation if needed. Overall, in-law conflicts in Oriade are shaped by religious, cultural, economic, and generational factors, highlighting the need for context-sensitive resolution strategies that include mediation, intergenerational education, and gender awareness to reduce tensions and protect children

CONCLUSION

This study reveals that while Christian and Muslim families in Oriade LGA share common experiences of in-law conflict stemming from analogous cultural, generational, and economic pressures, their approaches to conflict resolution are distinctly shaped by their respective religious frameworks. Christian households often lean towards individual transformation and emotional accommodation, drawing upon principles of love and humility, whereas Muslim families tend to favor institutional mediation and the preservation of communal stability, grounded in Islamic tenets of justice and order. These divergent strategies

notwithstanding, both traditions ultimately strive for the fundamental goals of peace, familial stability, and the overall well-being of the household, employing culturally and religiously resonant pathways to address in-law disputes.

Based on the above findings, this study proposes five recommendations. *First*, localize faith-based premarital education by establishing community-based faith and family counselling hubs within churches and mosques. These hubs shall deliver tailored premarital sessions that blend scriptural instruction with hands-on modules on cultural competence, gender roles, and extended family dynamics, while deploying mobile counselling units in partnership with LGA religious affairs and health offices. *Secondly*, institutionalize Faith-Elder Conflict Panels (F-ECPs) within Religious Centers, comprising trained pastors or imams, respected family elders, and neutral marriage mentors, functioning as standing localized councils for handling marital and in-law disputes. *Third*, integrate emotional literacy and conflict management into weekly faith programs. Sessions should include role-playing, conflict role deconstruction, and spiritual reframing of disagreements. *Fourth*, establish in-law mediation desks and safe spaces for women within churches and Islamic centers which allow women, especially new brides, to report hostility, seek counsel, or request intervention from religious mentors. *Finally*, integrate child-welfare messaging into sermons and community meetings.

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