Factors Influencing Marital Stability

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Abstract *The marital institution is witnessing instability globally. This study investigated factors that influence marital stability as perceived by literate spouses in Yenagoa metropolis of Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The population of this study consist of all literate married couples in Yenagoa metropolis. A total of 600 respondents were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The instrument titled "Factors Influencing Marital Stability Questionnaire" (FIMSQ) was used in collecting the relevant data, with Pearson reliability (r) of 0.78. Mean scores were used to analyze the main research question; Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the t-test statistics were used to test four null hypotheses generated for the study. The findings showed that in order of ranking, social, behavioural, domestic, sexual, religious and financial factors influence marital stability. It further showed that there were no significant differences among the respondents in their perception of factors influencing marital stability based on gender, religion, educational level and length of marriage. Thus, some recommendations were made in line with the findings.*

Key words: marital stability, spouses, factors, influencing, perception

1. Introduction

The first marital union on earth was that of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden ordained by God after which God blessed them with His pronouncement that they will be fruitful, multiply and fill all the earth. No doubt, the family has been the medium through which mankind came into existence. It is through this marital institution that mankind was primarily groomed into adulthood and this became a vicious circle till this present time. Ayodele (2001) defines marriage as the union of a man and his wife in body and soul.

Marital institution has many variables affecting it, including marriage age, spouses educational level, religion, etc (Dada & Idowu 2006). The need for literacy cannot be overemphasized because education is a vital tool in influencing marital stability. However, in Nigeria and many other African countries, literacy percentage is very low. (Jimoh, 1999). Notwithstanding, the purpose for marriage is far more important than the mere legalized sexual relationship among spouses (Agbutuin, 1990). To this end, Yakubu (1998) opined that in marriage, there are lots of stresses, bitterness, failures and successes. Other factors that threaten marital stability include age of marriage, educational level of spouse, religion, income, type of marriage, fertility status, kind of family background of spouses, communication, culture, etc. From the foregoing, a lot of researches on marital instability show that many factors are responsible for the misnomer in marital union. This is the reason why coping skills must be learnt and put into use so that couples can cope with these challenges and maintain a stable marital union.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Marital separation, divorce and remarriage are common phenomena in Nigeria and else where all over the world. One of the factors responsible for these anomalies is lack of children which couples encounter some years after inception of the union (Maciver, 2004). Once the problem of lack of children rears its ugly head, the need to remarry is often felt; especially with pressure from family members, friends and even the larger

society. Sex of children from the union is another factor that causes marital instability. Olayinka (1990) opined that the stability of marriage may be threatened if there are only girls in the family. This is because a higher premium is placed on a male child compared to female ones in Nigeria as a result of culture. However, Ayodele (2001) advised that no one sex is superior to the other, and that both males and females should be given equal educational opportunities. Thus, families who are childless within a few years after marriage experience turbulence manifested in quarrelling, suspicion, unhappiness and even separation and divorce. Against this backdrop, this study attempted to bridge the gap in literature by focusing on factors influencing marital stability as perceived by literate couples in Yenagoa metropolis, Bayelsa State of Nigeria.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate factors influencing marital stability among literate couples in Yenagoa, Bayelsa State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to compare these factors using variables such as gender, religion, educational level and age.

1.3 Research Questions

This study investigated the following questions:
1. What are the major factors that influence marital stability as perceived by literate spouses in Yenagoa metropolis?
2. Is there any difference between male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability?
3. Is there any difference between Christian and non-Christian literate spouses in their perception of factors influencing marital stability?
4. Is there any difference between highly educated and less educated literate spouses in their perception of factors influencing marital stability ?
5. Is there any difference between young and old literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability?

1.4 Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were examined in this study:
1. There is no significant difference between male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors that influences marital stability.
2. There is no significant difference between Christian and non – Christian literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.
3. There is no significant difference between highly and less educated literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability
4. There is no significant difference between young and old literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The descriptive survey design was used for this study. This survey method involves direct contact with a population or sample (Dada & Idowu, 2006). The descriptive survey was considered to be relevant because it is the most favourable for the measurement of perception of individuals.

2.1.1 Participants

All literate spouses in Yenagoa metropolis were the target population. Simple random sampling was used in selecting 600 respondents (300 male and 300 female spouses). Other strata include; religion (414 Christians and 186 non – Christians); educational level (O/L = 92; NCE/Diploma:=154; first degree; =146; Masters and Ph. D: = 208). Length of marriage (Young couples 1-20 years = 290 and old couples 20 & above years; =310)

   The choice of literate couples is hinged on the fact that they are more knowledgeable, hence can understand the contents of the questionnaire better. Again the scope of this study is limited to literate couples because the respondents would be able to understand the impact of the study since most of them have been married for some time and expectedly would favourably react to the items of the questionnaire accurately. The literate couples in the study are those spouses from secondary school level and above.

2.1.2 Instrumentation

A researcher-designed "Factors Influencing Marital Stability Questionnaire" (FIMSQ) was the instrument used in collecting data for the study. It consists of section A and B. Section A is for demographic data of the respondents and section B comprises the items on factors influencing marital stability. Section B further has six sub-sections with four items each for social, financial, religious, sexual, domestic and behavioural factors.

   To determine the validity of the instrument, the questionnaires were subjected to scrutiny by four experts in the department of Guidance and Counselling, and the Department of Educational Management. The experts assessed the instrument for content and face-validity.

   The reliability of the instrument was determined using test re-test method in order to assess the consistency of the instrument after an interval of two weeks. Reliability co-efficient of 0.78 was obtained when Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used. Hence the instrument was found to be suitable for the research.

2.1.3 Scoring Procedure

The instrument was scored using the four-point Likert scale so as to assess respondents' degree of agreement to the items. The items with positive direction were scored thus. SA= (4). A= (3); D= (2) SD= (1). Items with negative direction were reversed thus; SA= (1); A= (2); D= (3); SD= (4).

   The highest score for any respondent in the instrument is 96; (4x24). And the lowest is 24; (1x24). The range is 72 (96-24), thus the mid-point is 36; making the cut-off point to be 96 and 36; ie maximum score minus the mid-point of the range 24+36 = 60. This means that respondents who scored 60 to 96 were considered to have higher perception of factors influencing marital stability, while those with 60 and below have lower perception. In order to summarize the results, the items were grouped and rank order was employed using the mean scores of the major factors (social, financial, religious, sexual, domestic and behavioural).

2.1.4 Method Of Data Analysis

The t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistics were used to test the hypotheses.

3. Results

Research Question One: What are the major factors that influence marital stability as perceived by literate spouses in Yenagoa metropolis?

Table 1. Summary Table Showing Factors Influencing Marital Stability by Mean Score and Ranking

S/N	Factors	Mean score	Ranking
1	Social	14.79	1st
2	Behavioural	14.77	2nd
3	Domestic	14.73	3rd
4	Sexual	14.67	4th
5	Religious	14.65	5th
6	Financial	14.15	6th

Table 1 shows that factors influencing marital stability are: social factors such as respect and submission by wife to husband, effective communication which was ranked as the highest factor (14.79). This was followed by behavioural factors; such as adherence to consensus, endurance, etc by both spouses (14.77); domestic factors include delicious/timely cooking of meals, care for one another etc (14.73); sexual factors include; regular sexual intercourse, petting, kisses, etc (14.67); religious factors include morning devotion, fear of God in doing things etc (14.65). Lastly, financial factors which include adequate provision by husband of food, shelter, clothing, etc (14.15).

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference between male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Table 2. **T-test comparing male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors influencing marital stability**

Gender	No	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	Cal.t-value	Crit.t-value
Male	300	86.97	5.48			
Female	300	86.81	5.07	289	0.23 (NS)	1.96

P >0.05; Df 289; NS= Not significant

It is evident from Table 2 that there is no significant difference between male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability. The calculated t-value (0.23) is less than the critical t-value of 1.96. Thus, hypothesis one was accepted.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference between Christian and non-Christian literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Table 3. T-test Comparing Christian and Non-Christian Literate Spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Religion	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	Cal.t value	Crit.t-value
Christian	414	87.89	5.20			
Non-Christian	186	87.41	5.51	298	0.87(NS)	1.96

P >0.05; Df 298; NS= Not significant

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.87 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96, showing that there is no significant difference between Christian and Non-Christian literate spouses in their perception of factors influencing marital stability. Thus, hypothesis two was accepted.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference between highly educated and less educated literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on respondents' perception of factors that influence marital stability by basis of educational level.

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Means Square	Cal. F -value	Crit.F-value
Between groups	129.8671	3	45.1011		
Within Groups	8131.2116	295	27.4302	1.5981 (NS)	2.57
Total	8261.0787	298			

P >0.05; Df 3; NS= Not significant

Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference among literate couples on factors influencing marital stability. The calculated F- value of 1.5981 is less than the critical F-value of 2.57. Hence, hypothesis three was accepted.

Hypothesis Four: There is no significant difference between Young and Old literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Table 5. T-test analysis comparing young and old literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Length of Marriage	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Df	Cal.t-value	Crit.t-value
1-20years	290	89.0111	4.7100			
20 years & above	310	88.2210	5.6433	289 (NS)	- 0.69	1.96

P >0.05; Df 289; NS= Not significant

Table 5 shows that the calculated t-value of -0.69 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This indicates that there is no significant difference between young and old literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability. Thus, the hypothesis was accepted.

4. Discussion of Findings

The findings from Table 1 shows that three main factors influence marital stability; viz: social (14.79), behavioural (14.77) and domestic (14.73). Respondents equally considered sexual (14.67), religious (14.65) and financial (14.15) factors as influencing marital stability because their mean scores are also high. The result of these findings corroborate that of Dada and Idowu (2006) in which similar factors were upheld as affecting marital stability. In testing the first null hypothesis, result shows no significant difference between male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability. The findings of Agbamu and Odewumi (2001) is also in consonance with these findings.

In the second null hypothesis between Christian and non-Christian literate spouses, it shows that the respondents perceived the factors in the same light. This means that they were not significantly different. Jegede (1991) compared Christians and Muslims in respondents' perception of factors influencing marital stability in a similar study with the variable of communication" and reported similar result.

In terms of the respondents' educational level, the third null hypothesis also shows that they were not significantly different in their perception. A study carried out by Olayinka (1990) also corroborates this finding. So also is the study of Dada and Idowu (2006) who used similar variables. On the basis of length of marriage in the fourth hypothesis, it was evidently clear that the longer the spouses stayed in marriage, the more favourably they adjust in marriage. Ogidan (1991), in his study also found out that though marriage in Nigeria is besieged by a lot of constraints like divorce and separation, the longer the spouses stayed together, the more stable their marriage becomes.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

It has been seen from this study that in a descending order, social, behavioural, domestic, sexual, religious and financial factors foster stability in marriage. Therefore, the government and marriage counsellors should help to maintain marital stability among couples through seminars, workshops etc. The government should provide an enabling environment for couples to improve their living standards as a means of ensuring stability of marriage. For the counsellors, lectures, workshops, etc should be organised for married couples to enhance marital stability and to teach them some skills in maintaining good marital relationships. Also, pre-marital counselling should be regularly organised for youths on techniques of enhancing marital stability before going into this God – ordained institution of marriage.

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