

Effective Communication, Educational Qualification and Age as Determinants of Marital Satisfaction among Newly Wedded-Couples in a Nigerian University

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Abstract: The current study examined effective communication, education and age as determinants of marital status satisfaction among newly wedded couples in a Nigerian University. A total of 150 (80 males and 70 females) selected from married students and staff of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma participated in the study. Questionnaire comprising the demographic variables, dyadic adjustment scale and communication scale was used to test the hypotheses. There was a main effect of communication on marital satisfaction. Though there was an interaction effect of age and communication on marital satisfaction. There was also no statistical significant differences across the three religion studied. This study provides some trends which could inform further planning and implementation of provision for intervention by identifying areas that needed to be understood before embarking on any intervention program.

Key words: Effective communication, marital satisfaction, wedded couples, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a union between at least one man and one woman. It is a relationship, which also endorses sexual intercourse and sexual commitment between spouses exclusive of other males and females. In various cultures people marry for various reasons. Some marry for the fun of it, while a great number of others marry for economic reasons either to take cover under the protective wings of the proposed rich spouse or to secure a job. Thus, defining the term marriage is not easy one because of the diversities in the systems of marriage throughout the world. It is such that although marriage is known to have some common qualities, it varies from one culture to another yet we all know that marriage is a part of our daily life.

Marriage as a matter of fact can also be defined as a legal term describing certain relationship concerning individuals in order to fulfill three different types of needs: material, sexual and psychological (Saxton, 1992). People's material needs are more completely fulfilled through pairing than by remaining single. Similarly, people's sexual needs are also fulfilled in marriages. Religiously, marriage is defined as a loving intimate relationship between one man and one woman geared towards procreation and parenting companionship and fulfillment of social and economic necessities.

Achieving success however, in the relationship for the benefit of the individuals concerned and the society is an uphill task. Marriage therefore calls for adjustment as the relationship can have either a positive or a negative influence on the physiological well being of the husband and wife. Each marriage has its own growth and conflict patterns. Some marriages satisfy the couples' various material needs, but not their sexual needs or psychological needs. Apart from love, there are other factors that could contribute to a satisfactory marriage. Some of these factors are money, beauty, intelligence, education, family and pedigree, etc. Age is believed to have effect on the level of maturity of the individual in a marriage, particularly during periods of stress, economic difficulties and emotional problems. Hence, the more mature a person is before marriage, the more he/ she is able to adjust well in a marital relationship.

Cuber and Harwfs (1965) devised a classification system to describe the behaviour of married couples. They argued that there are 5 types of marriages, each with a central theme. The central characteristic of each of these life styles serves as a name for the relationship. The first they called the conflict-habituated relationship: In this type of marriage tension and conflict abound, although they are generally controlled. The couples are hostiles to one another but in the presence of visitors they pretend to be polite to one another. Some psychiatrists have

suggested that it is the couples' psychological need to do the battle with one another that keeps the marriage together. The second is devitalized relationship: Those involved in this sort of marriage usually characterized themselves as having been deeply in love with each other during earlier years, but most of their time now is duty time. The test in these marriages is gone, there is little overt conflict and tension and the pair seem lethargic and almost apathetic. The third they call the passive-congenial relationship: Gives little evidence that they had ever hoped for anything different from what they are currently experiencing. These relationships are seen as adequate without much conflict. This mode of marriage allows people to have a considerable amount of personal independence and freedom. Next is the vital relationship: These kinds of couples do things together are proud of their home, love their children. The couples are intensely bound and psychologically together in important life matters. Lastly is the total relationship: The total relationship is like the vital relationship but even more complex. All-important aspect of life are shared virtually, there are few pretenses and few areas of tension.

These 5 types of marriage relationship represent different kinds of adjustment. Not one of these 5 patterns is necessarily good or bad. Thus people in all 5 types will argue that they are content, if not happy. Marriage involves considerably adjustment and each person adjusts in different ways. There is no doubt that the durability and the success of a marriage depends to a large extent on the caliber of the person one chooses as a life partner. At times marriage bonds, which initially were thought to be sailing smoothly, crashed because of some diverse factors.

Studies have shown that effective communication, social-support, education, age and religion have impact on marital satisfaction among married couples. A number of early studies, show that the age at marriage is related to marital happiness (Burgess *et al.*, 1976) they postulated that marriage age under the age of 20 being most hazardous that women who married before age 20 had considerably higher rate of marital disruption than those who married at older ages; they also said that there is a higher marital disruption rates when the age differences are large and when wives are older than their husband. The logic behind this is that age is related to emotional and social maturity.

Glick (1975) found that husband's education is higher for durable, than to dissolves marriages. This was also indicated in Fulani (1984) research findings that, a wife's attraction varies with her spouse's educational status. These findings of course are linked to variations in other variables such as husband's income or prestige, with

husband relative superiority over his wife and with his ability to maintain a masculine role. If the husband's education is lower than his wife's there is likelihood of a reversal or a shift in male-female power balance, with loss of the husband's attractiveness as her marital partner-hence dissatisfaction may set in their marriage. Education of the partners contributes immensely to marital satisfaction because there is increased in understanding and there is equal level of interest existing in such relationship. People with low incomes or little education are almost likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages (Rennel, 1970) it is easy to see that more educated a person is the more satisfied he is with marriage. It has been observed that the more educated a woman is the higher her annual income and there is an uncomfortable feelings associated with women who earned more than their husband, the husband feels unimportant and often anxious sensing that its marriage it self is threatened. Career-oriented women tend to experience a good deal of distress when trying to combine the up keep of their house, children, husband and they found it difficult reconciling them, hence sometimes neglecting the house and children and paying less attention to the husband, except in some cases where the woman is able to adjust very well.

Stamp and Jeffries postulated that communication characteristics predict communication behaviour and subsequent relationship quality. It has been found that the levels of self-disclosure in satisfying relationship tend to be reciprocal (Cohen and Strassberg, 1983); both men and women report the highest levels of marital satisfaction when mutual self-disclosure is high. In fact it has been found that mutual sharing of interests, beliefs, opinions and the like, is often more important than sex (Stenberg and Grakek, 1984). The perception that a relationship is equitable also enhances marital satisfaction (Hatfield *et al.*, 1984). This perception is important because each partner's willingness to contribute to the relationship is fuelled by the belief that the other will so be the same, in order words the partners develop trust (Clark, 1984). Partners in satisfying marriage trust the other person and are willing to take long-term perspective.

Marital satisfaction is also enhanced when the partners have complementary personality styles. In this sense, opposites do attract. If one person tends to adopt a take charge approach, he or she will interact best with a person who enjoys not having to make decisions and vice versa. Similarly a person who enjoys giving help will interact most comfortably with a partner who enjoyed being helped. Marital satisfaction also depends on the 2 people simply liking each other (Stenberg and Barres, 1987). Compassionate love is less arousing but

psychological more intimate, it is marked by mutual concern for the welfare of each other (Hendrick and Hendrick, 1986). Liking and respecting one's partner may be important in part because of their effect on how a couple handles anger (Berschied *et al.*, 1989). Conflict and anger are a part of marriages, but dealing with them effectively is the hallmark of the most satisfying marriages (Repetti, 1989).

Marital attitudes are probably central to a happy marriage (Fischman, 1985; Laurel and Laurel, 1992). Also, necessary for a successful marriage are conflict resolution skills (Laurel and Laurel, 1992). The following dimensions seem particularly important in stable marriages: aims and goals in life, intelligence and thinking style (Skepticism, unconventionality, range of interests), Social character (gregariousness, dependability, generosity, calmness) coping maneuvers (defensiveness, feeling victimized) and attitude to pleasure (self-indulgent sensuous).

The present study seeks to find out how effective communication, age, religion and education could influence marital satisfaction among newly wedded couples in Nigeria. Thus, this study hypothesized that there would be a significant main and interaction effect of age (old and young) communication (effective and dysfunctional) and education on marital satisfaction of newly wedded couples. Secondly we also hypothesized that married couples that are Christians will report positive marital satisfaction than their Muslim and African traditional religion practitioner counterparts.

Operational definition: In the context of this study, newly wedded couples will refer to male and female students or staff of the Ambrose Alli University that are married for a period of less than 5 years.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: A total of 150 participants (80 males and 70 females) were selected from married students and staff of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma. The participants had been married between one and 5 years. Married couples above 5 years were excluded from the study, as it is believed that the most turbulent years of marriage is the first few years. Of the sample, 109 (72.7%) were Christians, 33 (22%) of the participants practiced African traditional religion, while 8 (5.3%) were Muslim. In terms of their educational background, data revealed that 60 (40%) of the participants were educated and had spouses who were educated, while 90 (60%) had spouse who were not educated.

Measures

Demographic subscale: This tapped information on demographic variables such as age, gender, religion, education and number of years married.

Dyadic adjustment scale (DAS): Marital satisfaction was measured with the DAS developed by Spanier. It is a 32-item instrument that assesses spouses' perception of the cohesion, consensus, satisfaction and affective expression in their marriage; the higher the scores on the DAS, the Higher their marital satisfaction. Coefficient alpha for this study is .86.

Communication scale: This was adapted from Hahlweg *et al.* (1984) problem list. The scale assesses numbers of problem areas in marital relationship for which there are bound to be communication. The scale contains 15 possible areas of relationship conflict for which effective communication is required to solve (e.g., finances, sexuality, social activities, alcohol etc). Each area was rated by each partner using the following categories: 0 = no problem so we do not need to talk about it; 1 = problems but we can discuss it; 3 = problems but we do not discuss it and often quarrel about it. A coefficient alpha of .65 was obtained for this study.

Procedure: Only married couples participated in the study. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to 150 staffs and students in various locations within Ambrose Alli University campus, in their rooms, offices, in the canteens and in the classroom. The aim of the study was explained to them and their sincere cooperation and responses were solicited for and they were assured the confidentiality of their responses. Some of the respondents filed out the questionnaires immediately, while some took them home and returned them at a later date.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis which postulated that there would be no significant main and interaction effect of age (young and old), communication (effective and dysfunctional) and education, on marital satisfaction of newly wedded couples was tested using 2×2×2 analysis of variance. This is because three independent variables were involved all occurring in 2 levels. More also, it was used because it allows for the observation of both the main and the interaction influences of the 3 independent variables (age, communication and education) on the dependent variable (marital satisfaction among newly wedded couples).

Table 1: 2×2 analysis of variance showing the main and interaction effect of education, age and communication on marital satisfaction among newly wedded couples

Source	SS	Df	Ms	F	Sig.
Intercept	121800.192	1	121800.192	590.279	0.000
Education	5790.769	1	193.026	0.935	0.571NS
Age	37.428	1	37.428	1.160	0.271NS
Communication	173.122	1	173.122	7.234	0.000*
Educ Vs Age.	136.217	1	136.217	1.269	0.212NS
Educ Vs Comm.	43.071	1	43.071	0.324	0.730NS
Age Vs Comm.	98.564	1	98.564	1.694	0.044*
Educ Vs Age Vs Comm.	1264.543	2	1264.543	2.543	0.030*
Error	7222.014	35	206.343		
Total	327931.000	149			
Corrected total	36385.873	148			

NS = Not Significant at 0.05, * = Significant at 0.05

Table 2: One-way ANOVA showing the difference in religion as it affects positive marital satisfaction

Variable	Sum of squares	df	Mean of square	F-value	Sig.
Between groups	524.236	2	262.118	1.074	0.344ns
Within groups	35861.637	147	243.957		
Total	36385.873	149			

Based on the data above in Table 1, it can be concluded that there was no main effect of education and age on marital satisfaction. There was however, a main effect of communication [F (7.234), p<0.05]. There was also a statistical significant interaction effect of education, age and communication on marital satisfaction of newly wedded couples [F (2.543), p<0.05].

The second hypothesis, which hypothesized that married couples that are Christians will report positive marital satisfaction than their Muslim and African Religion counterparts was tested using One-way Analysis of Variance (One-way ANOVA). The result is presented in Table 2.

Based on the data in Table 2, it can be concluded that there is no statistical significance differences across the three religious groups used for the study [F (1.074), P ns].

DISCUSSION

Effective communication was found to have a main effect on marital satisfaction of newly wedded couples. This result supported previous findings in emphasizing the importance of communication in marital satisfaction among couples. Relationship that is not built on trust has been found to collapse only a few days or weeks after marriage. Cohen and Strassberg (1983) found that both men and women report the highest levels of marital satisfaction when mutual self-disclosure is high. Stamp and Jeffries postulated that communication characteristics predict communication behaviour and subsequent

relationship quality. Both men and women are said to report the highest levels of marital satisfaction when mutual self-disclosure is high. In fact it has been found that mutual sharing of interests, beliefs, opinions and the like, is often more important than sex (Sternberg and Grajek, 1984). Also, Hatfield *et al.* (1984) found that the perception that a relationship is equitable also enhances marital satisfaction. This perception is important because each partner's willingness to contribute to the relationship is fuelled by the belief that the other will also do the same in other words the partners develop trust (Clark, 1984). Partners in satisfying marriage trust the other person and are willing to take long-term perspective.

It was surprising to note that education and age did not have any main effect on marital satisfaction. However there was a joint effect of education, age and communication on marital satisfaction. This result was not surprising as most of the women reported having husbands who has more education than themselves. Despite that some of the women who participated in the study reported having the same educational qualification with their husbands and a few of them reported having higher qualification than their husbands. Thus, the marital satisfaction that couples in this sample enjoy may be a function of the fact that their husbands have higher educational qualifications than themselves. This therefore supported the finding of Glick (1975) who found that when husband's education is higher than that of their wives, it leads to stability in marriages and hardly can dissolution of marriage be anticipated.

The second hypothesis, which predicted that couples that are Christians would report positive marital satisfaction than Muslim and African traditional religion practitioners, was not supported. This was another surprising finding, as it was expected that couples that are Christians would report positive marital satisfaction than Muslim and African traditional religion practitioners. The reason being that Christianity emphasizes monogamy (one man and one wife), as against the Islamic faith that allows a man to marry up to 4 wives. The same is the case for African Traditional Religion that permits a man to marry more than one wife. Ordinarily, one would have expected couples (most especially women) of the Islamic and African Traditional Religion faith to exhibit dissatisfaction with their marriage given the backdrop of the fact that by the practice of their religion, they are constrained to share their husbands with other women. This finding therefore, simply points out to the fact that irrespective of the couples' religious beliefs, religion cannot really determine the level of marital satisfaction of the couples.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided some interesting results; one of such is that religion was found not to have little or no impact on marital satisfaction of newly wedded couples. This study has provided some trend in understanding factors that predisposes marital satisfaction of newly wedded couples. It has also provided some trends, which could inform further planning and implementation of provision for intervention program, by identifying areas that needed to be understood before embarking on any intervention program

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