
Effect of Socio-Psychological Factors on Marital Stability of Married Persons in Imo State Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study was carried out to establish the effect of socio-psychological factors on marital stability among married persons in Imo state, Nigeria. The study put up four null hypotheses to direct the study. Accordingly, the research adopted an explanatory survey design with a sample of 1050 married persons (600 married men and 450 married women) who were randomly selected from the three main urban centres in Imo state namely Okigwe, Orlu and Owerri. A socio-psychological marital stability factors opinion questionnaire (SOCIO-PSYMARISSTAQ) was constructed and used for data collection. Four null hypotheses (Ho) were formulated and tested with chi-square analysis at 0.05 alpha level of significance. All the null hypotheses were rejected. The main findings show that social belief, in-law's inclusion effect, value orientation of married persons and emotional state are factors that related with marital stability. It was concluded that when negative forces of social belief, in-law's inclusion, value orientation and emotion could shape marital instability. The major recommendation is that socio-psychological factors could reduce marital stability and to avert the negative influence of these socio-psychological factors, couples should be assisted to receive marital guidance and counseling and also government through Women Affairs Ministry to provide family-to-family marriage education programme using means of mass media.

Key words: effect, socio psychological, factors, marital stability and married persons.

Introduction

Marital stability is central in individual and family well-being. The benefits to society and to new generations when strong marriages are formed cannot be over emphasized. However, little is known about the factors that affect or impact on marital stability (Ojukwu, 2014).

When there is marital stability, it makes valuable contribution to any married individual's life. Kocak (2009) has shown that marriage is associated with psychological health, and Bird and Melville, (1994) also revealed that relationship with a partner acts as barrier between individuals and quality of marital life. Again Bir (2006) reported that a positive, satisfactory marital relationship contributes to economic well-being, physical and emotional health; and that it is an important source of instrumental and emotional support for adults. Baumeister and Leary (1995) revealed that marriage produces a sense of belongingness and associated positive emotions in married individuals, and this sense of belongingness is associated with better and well-being in individuals.

According to Olagunju (1998) marriage is the joining together of a man and a woman to become one, either in Court Registry, a Church, Mosque or in a traditional setting. Marriage

is a universal institution with divergence of forms. It is regarded as the nucleus or the pivot of the society with functions that can not be replicated by any other institution.

Marital stability in its classical conception refers to the balancing of self interests and values leading to the formation and maintenance of steadier and consistent behaviours within and between married persons (Aroson, Wilson and Alkert 1997). Married persons, husband and wife are expected to keep reliable companionship through the formation and development of healthier life styles that would prevent their marital engagement from turbulence, distrust and crises (Kelly, 1973; Laurie, 2007; and Obiji, 2015). Marriage stability, is a condition that exists in marriage situation, where two partners live, move and share consistent favourable interest, knowledge, values, emotions and beliefs. In specific terms, when there is no consistent, unity, cooperation and harmony over perceived interest, values, emotions and beliefs, much of the marital attitude formed would be negative, resulting into marital conflict and marital breakdown. Marital stability occurs when married persons stay, work and cooperate consistently together, where as marital instability occurs when married persons could not consistently stay, work and cooperate together (Haralambos, Heald 2011).

There has been increase in the marriage instability in the world (US Census Bureau, 2007; Robert, 2007; Washington Post, 2007; Ogunsami, 2005; Ebeuwa-okoh, 2008 and Ojukwu 2013). As Guttman (1994) has theorized, marital success versus marital failure relates to causal process model that provides a chain of preferences among married persons such as satisfied versus dissatisfied. More often than not, our daily social experiences show that marital failures arise from some certain behaviours or attitudes formed and exhibited by one of the married partners, which is taken as unacceptable by the other. That is to say, it is the negative beliefs, knowledge, attitude and wrong perception that contribute to dissatisfaction and rising up of accusations which result into marital breakdown. Guttman has therefore concluded that dissatisfaction of one partner reflects a negative signal that produced negative message and behavioural tendencies such as apathy, sarcasm, accusations and so on.

The several marriage failures in Nigeria, especially in Imo state could be related to the formation and exhibition of negative beliefs and self perception directed between partners to each other. (Obiji, 2015). It is seen that where one of the partners in martial relations had developed a dissatisfaction about attitude of his/her partner, one strong, but negative consequence arising from such dissatisfaction is poor communication and low social interaction. Free communication in marriage is the oil that greases the maintenance affair from being degraded. Some other factors that correlate with martial instability may include in-law's interference, sickness and diseases, habit, fear, anxiety, alcoholic, economic hardship, poverty, emotional maturity, husband or wife extra marital affairs, perception social beliefs spouse values etc. just to mention a few (Haralambos and Heald 2011; Guttman 1994; Wayas, 2010; and Umo 2008; Ojukwu, 2013). These factors arise from within the married persons or maybe externally attributed but whether a negative behaviour of a couple or two of the couples are internally or externally attributed, such factors individually and collectively interact to constitute socio-psychological marriage risk factors. As Dohrenwend (1993) put it, each life experience has either a destructive or constructive effect on the individuals who are directly or indirectly associated with it. This line of reasoning was again highlighted by Wright (2005), when he affirmed that man is living in psychological and social environments, in which slightest thought, emotion and sensation and desires may cause unexpected consequences.

In marital relationship, couples may be confronted by consequences of their own fear, emotion, cultural practices, anxiety, perception, beliefs and actions. (Ross, 2007). Wrong actions by one partner for example, are inimical to the happiness of the other partner. Actions and wrong perceptions are twin inimical factors that release fear and anxiety. As Isangideghi (2011) stated, no one can be said to be psychologically healthy when he is engulfed in fear

and anxiety. In modern society, especially in Igboland where westernization and enculturation are fast taking deep root in people's way of living, some person's social beliefs, values, ideas and practices are in contrast and pose a big threat to the survival of marriage. This is more so, as people's beliefs, values, ideas and practices are moving away from the traditional to western oriented beliefs, values, ideas and practices (Isangidighi, 2011). Despite its peculiarity and universality, in modern societies, marriage is on the decline. Some claim that modernization has eroded the marriage institution dangerously and negatively. This has resulted in shrunken; irresistible and increasing inability for the marriage institution to provide for the well-being of husband and wife. Other external forces have also encroached on the existence of marriage. Recently, scholars and researchers are skeptical about survival of marriage institution in view of the diverse challenges facing marriages that threaten its existence (Ojukwu, 2014). Thus, intermingling of cultural ideas, values and practices is a major threat to marital stabilization. In this regard and in this study emphasis is on social beliefs, in-laws intrusion, married persons values and psychological emotion of married persons were highlighted for study with the view of establishing their effects on the marital stability or married persons in Imo State.

Statement of the Problem

The problems of marital life present emotional disorganization. It is widely evident that marriage as a cultural process of reproduction, and sharing of companionship, no longer survives the test of time. There are several forms of psycho-social distresses or factors which married persons face. These psychological variables that negatively influence marital relationship are major predictors of marital instability and its consequent marital affairs failure. Marital instability does not blow good wind towards either the husband or towards the wife and children. For example, children from abused marriages are likely to engage in juvenile delinquency in the society. They are often seen engaging as drug trafficking and tarring addicts, school dropout, hawkers, robbers, prostitutes and a legion of other social problems. This unhealthy affair is not expected to be meted to young children in the society. This is because, in every society such as Imo state, children are pride of the human race, hence God's free gift to man. Children are also deemed to be the future leaders of tomorrow in every facets of life such as in politics, religion, education, economy and industry.

One major way to examine the problems of children in the society is to identify factors that are directly linked to marital instability. It is therefore reasoned that if the socio-psychological factors that constitute a menace to the having and promoting of consistent marriage life are not adequately identified and addressed, then the present and the future of our society are fraught with social decay. It would therefore increase the rate at which individual join armed robbery, prostitution, drug trafficking and other anti social activities. Similarly, if the root causes of socio-psychological factors to marital instability are not solved, it would negatively influence peace and deprive our various communities and eventually the state, the ethics and moral standard to build credible homes and harmonious families. Also in spite of the enormous research that may have been addressed to the topic, truly scientific evidence about effect of socio-psychological factors on marital stability has been so little and limited. To explore these issues among others are the problems of this study. The study is therefore carried out to throw more light in this respect and see how socio-psychological factors could proffer solutions to stable marriages or how they have contributed to unstable marriages.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to find the effect of socio-psychological factors on marital stability among married persons in Imo state, Nigeria. Accordingly, the following sub-objectives were developed from the main objective to direct the study:

- (i) To determine the relationship between married persons social belief and their marital stability.
- (ii) To investigate the influence of in-laws intrusion in marital affairs in married persons marital stability.
- (iii) To ascertain the relationship between psycho-emotional state of married persons on their marital stability.
- (iv) To establish the relationship between marital value orientation and marital stability among married persons in Imo state.

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. All the null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between social beliefs of married persons and their marital stability.

H₀₂: In-laws inclusion in marital affairs of married persons has no significant relationship with their marital stability.

H₀₃: Marital value orientation of married persons has no significant relationship with their marital stability.

H₄: There is no significant relationship between Psycho-emotional state of married persons and their marital stability.

METHOD

The design of the study was a descriptive survey employing ex-post facto. This is because the researchers did not manipulate any variable of interest. The researchers simply investigated the effect of psycho-social factors on the married person's marital stability. The study population comprised of 1050 married persons made up of 600 men and 450 married women selected from the three political zones of Imo State namely, Orlu, Owerri and Okigwe using a combination of quota and simple random sampling techniques.

The instrument for data collection was self constructed questionnaire entitled "Socio-psychological marital stability factors opinion questionnaire" (SOCIO-PSY MARTISTAQ). The instrument contained 16 items structured on a four point Likert type of Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly disagree. The researcher's choice of questionnaire for data collection was to provide opportunity for large scale sampling of good number of representative as subject with less financial cost. The instrument was made up of three sections namely; section A: with demographic characteristics of subjects used in the study while section B: was composed of questions on the sociological factors and section C comprised items on psychological factors and marital stability.

The content validity of the instrument was ascertained by subjecting the instrument to the scrutiny of three test experts in psychology, measurement and evaluation and guidance and counseling of Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The experts judged the appropriateness, comprehensiveness and clarity of items in the questionnaire. Their criticisms and opinions contributed to the strengthening the face and context validity of the instrument. To determine the reliability of the instrument, it was administered on 45 married persons 15 each from Orlu, Owerri and Okigwe zones that were not part of the final study. A two week test-retest reliability method was carried out on the sample. The scores obtained were correlated using Pear-sons Product Moment Coefficient. Correlation coefficient of $r = .86$ was obtained thus indicating that the instrument was adequate for the study. The internal consistency was established using Cronbach alpha technique which yielded .88.

After administration of the questionnaire and collection of data, the raw scores were summed up and the analyses on them in respect to each of the null hypothesis were presented and analyzed based on 0.05 alpha level of significance. The hypothesis testing was done using chi-square analysis (X^2) since the variables were measured nominally, and the results are presented below:

RESULTS

Hypothesis I

There is no significant relationship between Social beliefs of married persons and their marital stability.

Chi-square analysis (X^2) was used to test the relationship between social belief of married persons and their marital stability. The result of the analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1: Summary result of chi-square analysis on the opinion of married men and women on relationship between social belief and marital stability.

Spouse identity	Opinion of subjects (Across items 1, 2, & 3)			N	Xcal	d.f.	X ² crit
	Yes	No					
Married men	1244	556	600		47.714	1	384
Married women	850	200	450				
Total	2,094	756	1050				

$P < 0.05$, $X^2_{crit} = 3.84 < X^2_{cal} = 47.714$

Given that $X^2_{cal} = 47.714 > X^2_{crit} = 3.84$, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between social beliefs of married persons and their marital stability is rejected and its alternative accepted. This means that opinion expressed on social belief is a determinant of marital stability of married persons in Imo State.

Hypothesis II

In-laws intrusion in marital affairs of married persons has no significant relationship with their marital stability.

To test the veracity of this hypothesis a Chi-square analysis (X^2) way used to test the relationship between in-law's intrusion in marital affairs and marital stability of married persons. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Summary of chi-square analysis on the opinion of married men and women on relationship between inlaw's intrusion and marital stability.

Spouse identity	Opinion of subjects (Across items 1, 2, & 3)				N	Xcal	d.f.	X ² crit
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree				

Married men	844	400	250	306	600	178.63	3	7.82
Married Women	368	482	102	98	450			
Total	1212	882	352	404	1050			

$$P < 0.05, X^2_{\text{critical}} = 7.82 < X^2_{\text{cal}} = 178.63$$

Table 2 shows that the calculated X^2 value of 178.63 exceeds the critical X^2 value of 7.82; given 3 degree of freedom at 0.05 alpha levels. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between in-laws intrusion in marital affairs and marital stability. By this result the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is rejected. This means that the extent of marital instability or marital stability could be assessed from in-laws interference effect into married person's affairs.

Hypothesis III

Marital value orientation of married persons has no significant relationship with their marital stability.

To test this null hypothesis, a chi-square test analysis was conducted and the result is presented in table 3.

Table 3: Summary of chi-square analysis on the relationship between value orientation and marital stability.

Spouse identity	Opinion of subjects (Across items 1, 2, & 3)					N	Xcal	d.f.	X ² crit
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree					
Married men	705	539	156	400	600				
Married women	370	480	106	94	450	75.363	3	7.72	
Total	1075	1019	262	494	1050				

$$P < 0.05, X^2_{\text{critical}} = 7.72 < X^2_{\text{cal}} = 75.63$$

Result in table 3 above show that the calculated X^2 value of 75.363 is greater than critical X^2 value of 7.72 at 3 degrees of freedom given under 0.05 alpha level of significance. This indicates that there is a significant relationship between married person's value orientation and marital stability. By this result the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is rejected. This means that marital stability would be interpreted from the nature of value orientation formed among married persons over things, issues and experiences. This implies that natures of value orientation of married persons are linked with their marital stability. This could be so since positive value shared consistently among married persons could lead them to disintegrate, or live in disputation and emotional crisis.

Hypothesis IV

There is no significant relationship between psycho-emotional state of married persons and their marital stability.

This hypothesis was tested using Chi-square analysis. The result of the analysis is presented in table 4.

Table 4: Summary result of chi-square analysis on relationship between psycho-emotional state of married persons and their marital stability.

Spouse identity	Opinion of subjects (Across items 1, 2, & 3)				N	Xcal	d.f.	X ² crit
	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree				
Married men	654	550	295	301	600	24.49	3	7.82
Married women	368	382	188	112	450			
Total	1022	932	483	413				

$$P < 0.05, X^2_{\text{critical}} = 24.49 > X^2_{\text{cal}} = 7.82$$

Table 4 shows that the calculated X² value of 24.49 is greater than critical value of 7.82 given 3 degree of freedom at 0.05 alpha levels. This indicates that a significant association exists between psycho-emotional state of married persons and their marital stability. By this result, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is rejected. This means that the nature of a married persons psycho-emotional condition over experience, events and issues confronting his or her family may stir up negative emotion such as anxiety, worries, fears and so on which may likely stir up or ginger up feelings for quitting a married relationship.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to find out the effect of socio-psychological factors on marital stability of married persons in Imo State. Results revealed that there is a significant relationship between social beliefs of married persons and their marital stability.

This means that the degree of marital instability occurrence in the society among married persons in Imo state is significantly related to social beliefs. Social beliefs are part of ideas which modify attitude and is therefore a motivating force for positive or negative behaviour towards things, objects, persons and ideas. This would confirm Guttman (1994), theory that partner's negative message about each other and to their experiences, causes a shift in perception and resulting in unfavourable beliefs about marital partners. A belief held by one partner against the other partner's action if strong enough may contribute to forces that weaken marital stability. A negative belief about adultery for instances by the wife against the husband breaks the bond of unity and marital cooperation. More often than not married persons have different beliefs about everything surrounding marriage, as individuals have marital pictures and ideas of what they want. As Haralambos (2007) puts it, religious beliefs provide ultimate answer which cannot be questioned by those who believe.

Other findings revealed that there is a significant relationship between in-law's intrusion in marital affairs and marital stability of married persons. This means that the extent of marital instability or marital stability could be assessed from in-law's interference effect into married person's affairs. This result lends credence to the findings of Bryant et al 2001. According to Bryant et.al, in-law's are very powerful actors towards marital success or

marital failure. In-laws exert powerful position or negative influence on marital stability. In-laws collect information about happenings in the new home set up by their children and try to influence decisions to their advantage and position they take. This state of affairs may not be cherished by the man (husband) or by the woman (wife) leading to marital dissatisfaction and marital instability. Therefore, most married persons found mutual affection only when their standard values, wishes and interest tally with those of their mother, or father in-laws. This finding also supports the findings of Timer and Veroff (2000) who found that low level of conflict with in-laws predicts a high level of marital happiness.

Further findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between married persons' value orientations and marital stability. This means that, marital stability could be interpreted from the nature of value orientation formed among married persons over things, issues and experiences. It is found that when a couple holds an opposite beliefs contrary to the other about a particular value, it may motivate forces for disintegrating earlier marital affairs. The present result supports the findings of Haralambos and Heald (2011) that psychological behaviour of a person is largely a response to shared norms and values. Thus, Fletcher (2011) and Hart (2008) had found that value attached to marriage could cause marital breakdown.

Value relates to the extent of worth or usefulness attached to a thing or an event such as marriage. Differences in valuation of positive function of marriage among married persons could lead to marital breakdown. Hart (2008) had remarked that any useful explanation of marital instability must consider variables which were linked to value attached to marriage. In the contemporary world for instance where a shift in value for companionship is extending to man-to-man marriage, separation and lone parenting, individuals no longer hold marital responsibility as very valuable. From this point of view, psychological behavior is largely a response to shared norms and values (Haralambos and Heald, 2011). However, Fletisher (2011) has argued that rise in marital instability was associated with increase in the rate at which persons value marriage. That is as people value marriage, people's expectance rises and demands more from a given marriage. The inability to obtain over estimated/expected value from marital life causes frustration, anxiety and desire to end a relationship that began in the past. Thus the higher the valuation of marriage, the lower the breakdown.

Findings on the relationship between psycho-emotional state and marital stability indicated that a significant association exists between psycho-emotional state of married persons and their marital stability. This means that the nature of a married person's emotional condition over experience, events, and issues confronting his or her family may stir up negative emotion such as anxiety, worries, fears and so on and may ginger up feelings for quitting a married relationship. This result supports Isangedighi (2011) who found that negative emotion developed about certain experiences bring out conflict at marriage, David and Defrain (2003) had remarked that to maintain a marital life span, community need to establish healthy atmosphere for its members.

Psychological emotion of married persons influences attitude and behaviour of married persons to be in stable marital life or not to be in marital relationship. This could arise where in-laws, relatives and even the married persons have not cultivated healthy atmosphere for enjoyment of marital life. In recognition that stressed and troubled marriages could encourage negative emotion such as fear, anxiety and worries. David and Defrain (2003) have emphasized that to maintain marriage life span, community need to cultivate ways to establish a healthy atmosphere for all its members. Negative feed backs in families encourage fear, and other negative emotions that destabilize marriage. A negative feed back could come to either the wife or the husband for example is engaged in extra-marital affair or has indulged in chronic alcoholic, drug neddler, arm robbery and so on. The dysfunctional marriages often develop from latent and manifest emotional factors that were built around actions and inactions of either of the married persons thus producing negative emotions and negative

feedback for the family. Negative emotions developed about certain experiences bring about conflict and tension within and eventual dislocation of thought process (Isangidighi,2011).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study from each of the four null hypotheses, it is therefore concluded that socio-psychological factors such as social belief, in-law's intrusion effect, value orientation and emotion generated marital stability and or instability. If one would not want marital instability to occur, he or she should work to avert negative aspects arising from social beliefs, in-laws' intrusion effect, value and emotion from acting against the unity and harmony in marital life. This is because; marital failure is the opposite tendency that sets in, when each of these socio-psychological factors is wrongly used in marital affairs. Therefore in assessing the incidence and prevalence of marital stability among married persons in Imo state, social belief, in-laws' intrusion effect, value orientation and psychological emotion are significant factors.

Recommendations

In view of the results of the study, the following recommendations were made:

- (i) Marital guidance and counseling programmes should be organized at village levels to assist married persons cope with socio psychological factors to foster marital stability.
- (ii) Married persons having emotional and value conflicts should be advised to seek medical sociologist, clinical psychologists and social psychologist for help.
- (iii) Communities in Imo state should mount awareness campaign to concertize married persons against the social and psychological factors that reduce marital stability.
- (iv) Government and its agencies such as Ministry of Women Affairs should live up to the social responsibility expectations by providing family-to-family marriage education programme through mass media (radio, television and newspaper). When these are implement the high rate of marital instability in our society will be highly reduced.

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