

# LENGTH OF MARRIAGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN AS DETERMINANTS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG CHRISTIAN COUPLES IN BAPTIST CHURCHES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*The study investigates length of marriage and number of children as determinants of marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria. The study adopts a descriptive survey of the expo-facto type. The multistage sampling technique was utilized to select 42 Baptist Church couples who were selected from three local Baptist churches of the Baptist Conferences in Lagos. The comprehensive marital satisfaction scale  $r = 0.98$  was the research instrument used. Two (2) research questions were raised and answered. The study reveals that there was a significant relationship between length of marriage and marital satisfaction, and also between number of children and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria. Based on these findings, married and would-be-couples are encouraged to give birth to a small size of children they can manage as that would reduce stress associated with parenting.*

**Key words:** Length of marriage, Number of children, Marital satisfaction, Baptist couples.

## **Introduction**

The probability of attaining a happy, satisfying and stable marriage has been reportedly declining (Glenn, 1990). He further submits that the decline in the ideal of marital satisfaction, quality and stability have made persons less able to make the commitments, sacrifices and investment of energy, time, and opportunity that are necessary to make a marriage succeed. The use of leisure time is also associated with marital satisfaction as married couples experience greatest satisfaction spending more time together

including leisure time, although each partner also has his or her own interests and does not feel the need to share every leisure time with his or her spouse (Kotler, 1985). A longitudinal study of marital satisfaction reveals that the major variables leading to marital dissatisfaction include neuroticism on the part of the spouse: wife's lack of emotional closeness with the family of origin, husband's nonconformity to social ideal and differences in desire, frequency of sexual intercourse and differences in levels of

education between spouses which were found to affect marital satisfaction of only those couples who had been married for 20 or more years ( Kelly & Conley, 1987).

Furthermore, studies on marital satisfaction show that children are stressor in marriage. Couples consistently report lower marital satisfaction with the arrival of children (VanLaningham, Johnson & Amato, 2001) and higher marital satisfaction when the children leave the parental home (White & Edwards, 1990). It was found that couples without children or with one child engage in sex more frequently than couples with five or more children. Call, Sprecher and Schwartz, (1995) discover that couples with very young children (aged 0-4) engage in sex less frequently than those with older children (aged 5-18). However, Donnelly (1993) found a positive correlation between number of children and frequency of sex. It is possible that couples with a large number of children could be satisfied in their marriages but the dominant facts from the above are indicative that couples with fewer children experience more marital satisfaction.

Literature abounds with respect to the length of marriage and marital satisfaction among couples. Rabin and Rahav (1995) investigate the similarities and differences between older and younger couples and between couples of different ages and cultures. Data on 25 Israeli and 33 American couples over 65 years of age were compared with data on younger couples from a sample. Results show the older Israeli and American samples to be more similar to each other and different from both the Israeli and American

younger couples. Older couples had significantly lower levels of distress, less desire for change in their marriage and better perceptual accuracy of the changes desired by their partners than younger Israeli and younger Americans. The types of changes desired by the older samples include more desire for social contact with family and friends than do younger couples in both cultures, whose desire is for more of husband's attention to appearances, and less sex-role stereotyped.

In a similar study by Osiki (1995) in which he investigates marital duration, age and childlessness as they affect marital happiness, using a sample size of 300 married undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, who were randomly drawn from the Faculty of Education, Social Sciences, Arts, Agricultural Science, and Medicine, the author found that marital duration of married couples do not have any direct relationship with the level of marital satisfaction to be derived. This means that whether couples are long-married (that is, 11 years and above) or recently married (0 - 10 years), their levels of marital adjustment is significantly the same. Awe (1986) opines that the difference is occasioned by the fact that the first few years are periods of active adaptation to one's spouse. According to Awe (1986) couples usually spend the first few years of their marriage adjusting to their individual differences and other external factors affecting their marriage. The first two to five years are the most critical for couples in marriage since after the first five years of marriage couples begin to tolerate each other and to

understand each other better, especially when children start coming.

The results of past studies that have examined the relationship between duration of marriage and marital satisfaction have been inconsistent. Therefore, there is still some debates in literature as to the exact nature of the relationship between duration of marriage and marital quality (Amato & Deboer, 2001). However a well-documented fact about marriage is that marital relationships have a strong tendency to decrease in satisfaction over the first twenty years of the marriage. Most newly married couples report very high satisfaction and any change from that point would probably be in a downward direction (Broderick, 1988). Glenn (1990) estimates that marital satisfaction as indicated by the percentage of people who claim their marriages are "very happy" decreases steadily for at least the first 10 years and may be for 25 years or longer (Glenn, 1990). From the above, the researchers are of the opinion that the number of years couples have spent in marriage could determine the level of satisfaction, but it depends on the two lovers, the levels of their maturity, how assertive they are, using good communication, understanding about self and what marriage actually demands.

Studies also reveal substantially that strong relationship exist between number of children and marital satisfaction as Chan and Halpin (2001) saw that the children's effect might depend on their age and number. Morgan, Diane and Gretchen, (1988) also pointed out that children create a web of obligations and attachment between parents and children, between the

parents themselves, and also between the nuclear family and the wider kinship group. Studies reporting such counter-evidence are in the minority, but they are consistent with research on marital satisfaction which shows that children are stressors in marriage.

Studies show that families with fewer numbers of children tend to provide higher quality home environment (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991; Luster & McAdoo, 1994; Ritcher, Ritcher, Eisemann, & Mau, 1997; Rozumah & Zoozilawati, 2003). For example, Ritcher et al. (1997) found an association between number of children and parental rearing practice, mainly in terms of a reversed relationship between emotional warmth and number of children. Parents will give more supportive and attention to their children when they had lesser number of children (Amato, 1990). Menaghan and Parcel (1991) note that large family size will stretch available resources in the families. Downey (2001) affirms that larger families will have lesser materials for a given income level and parents have lesser time spent on each child.

Hess, (2008) discovers that negative relationship existed between mothers' marital satisfaction and the overall parenting stress which suggest that as a mother's level of marital satisfaction increases her level of parenting stress decreases and visa versa. That negative correlation between mother's and father's marital satisfaction and parenting stress shows that parents who are more satisfied in their marriage are less stressed in their parenting roles or that lower marital satisfaction correlates with higher

parenting stress. From the above submissions on the number of children, it is conspicuously clear that the presence or the absence of child/children can have negative or positive effect on marital relationship of couples, which may reflect on the levels of their marital satisfaction. Though, in African content, the arrival of a child in a home usually brings joy to the parents and members of the extended family, the more children in the family the wider the gap between the couples and more responsibilities on the children. These definitely would have impact on the existing satisfaction between the couples.

This study investigates the influence of length of marriage and number of children on marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria. To this end, two hypotheses were generated at 0.05 level of significance.

### **Hypotheses:**

1. There is no significant relationship between the length of marriage and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

Descriptive survey of the ex-post facto type is adopted in this study since its intent is to investigate the relationship between length of marriage and marital satisfaction as well as number of children

and marital satisfaction among the couples, whereby no variables were manipulated.

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Technique**

The entire couples in all Baptist Churches in Lagos metropolis formed the population of the study. However, since all of them could not be reached, the researchers adopt the multistage sampling technique to select 360 couples for the study. From the three Baptist Conferences in Lagos, four Associations were randomly selected, making a total of twelve Associations. From each of the twelve Associations, three Baptist churches were randomly selected, making a total of 36 churches. From each of the selected churches, ten couples were randomly selected; hence, a total of 360 couples were used for this study. Their ages ranged from 22- 66 years. However, only 300 duly completed questionnaires from the couples were finally used for analysis. Hence, the study utilized 300 couples for the study.

### **Research Instrument**

The Comprehensive Marital Satisfaction Scale (CMSS), developed by Blum and Mehrabian (1999), was adopted for this study. The CMSS has content validity because items of the scale constitute clear descriptions of the many varied aspects of satisfaction in a marital situation. The instrument is divided into two sections. Section 'A' is the demographical data while section 'B' has forty three (43) items lumped together. The forty three items address general aspects of marital satisfaction. The original authors reported a large scale

study of the instrument. A strong reliability and validity of the instrument yielding an internal consistency (reliability) coefficient of 0.94 and satisfactory test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.83 over a six week interval were obtained. However, re-validation of Comprehensive Marital Satisfaction Scale on twenty (20) couples from intact homes in Ibadan (not part of the proposed population) yielded a reliability coefficient of  $r=0.98$ , using Cronbach alpha method, indicating that the instrument is reliable and can be used on Nigerian populace. Therefore, the instrument (CMSS) is good for use in this study.

#### **Procedure for research**

The researchers approached all the concerned churches explaining the rationale behind the study to them, and promising them a marriage seminar at their conferences levels after the exercise. All the churches agreed. Intact couples in each of the churches balloted for space. At the end, only ten couples were selected from each of the churches. The participants responded to Comprehensive Marital Satisfaction Scale (CMSS), which

means that each couple has two questionnaires which they responded to independently, and the questionnaires were collected from them immediately. This exercise was carried out within six weeks. However, during the analysis of the collected data, the researchers found that a total of sixty questionnaires were not appropriately filled. Therefore, the researchers made use of 300 couples for the study.

#### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from each couple were collapsed together and an average found to determine the score of each couple. The collected data was then analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

#### **Result**

Hypothesis 1 stated that there is no significant relationship between the length of marriage and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria. The result is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: The correlation summary table showing relationship between length of marriage and marital satisfaction**

| Variables            | N   | Mean   | SD     | R    | DF  | Sig  | P    | Remark |
|----------------------|-----|--------|--------|------|-----|------|------|--------|
| Marital satisfaction | 300 | 48.100 | 25.675 | .879 | 298 | .000 | <.05 | S      |
| Length of marriage   | 300 | 27.780 | 18.212 |      |     |      |      |        |

Table 1 shows that there is a significant relationship between length of marriage and marital satisfaction ( $r = .879$ ,  $Df = 298$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 2 states that there is no significant relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Baptist churches in Lagos state, Nigeria. The result is presented in table 2.

**Table2: The correlation summary table showing relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction**

| Variables            | N   | Mean    | SD       | R    | Df  | Sig  | P    | Remarks |
|----------------------|-----|---------|----------|------|-----|------|------|---------|
| Marital satisfaction | 300 | 48.1000 | 25.67582 | .856 | 298 | .000 | <.05 | S       |
| Number of children   | 300 | 25.4600 | 16.83428 |      |     |      |      |         |

Table 2 shows that there is significant relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction ( $r = .856$ ,  $Df = 298$ ,  $P < .05$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected.

## Discussion

### Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis tested in this study states that there is no significant relationship between the length of marriage and marital satisfaction of the participants. The hypothesis was not accepted because the result in table 1 shows that length of marriage has significant relationship with marital satisfaction among the participants. The fact that could be deduced from the outcome of the finding is that marital satisfaction declines with length of marriage. Couples are always in serious relationship at the early stage of marriage, and this relationship begins to decline as the couple advances in age and length of marriage.

The outcome of this finding corroborates the earlier findings of Gottman (1995) and Holman and Li

(1997) whose studies reveal that romance was the most important ingredient in newlywed relationship and was kept alive by frequent interactions, spending time together, and openly disclosing one's thoughts and feeling, build one another's self-esteem, fulfill emotional needs, and building a satisfying and enduring relationship. In the same vein, Broderick (1988) finds and affirms that most newly couples report very high satisfaction and any change from that point would probably be in a downward direction. The fact that couples are different suggests the manifestation of their differences on the long run. The findings of Awe (1986) corroborate that the difference is occasioned by the fact that the first few years are periods of active adaptation to one's spouse. That couples usually spend

the first few years of their marriage adjusting to their individual differences and other external factors affecting marriage. He further opines that the first two to five years are the most critical for couples in marriage since after the first five years of marriage couples begin to tolerate each other and to understand each other better, especially when children start coming. The reason that could be identified in support of those who were in short length of marriage could be that they are yet to really know one another as their love may still be blind. They have less financial commitments as some of their children were in nursery primary schools with less financial responsibilities compared with the children of their counterparts with long length of marriage who display low level of satisfaction, were saddled with more financial responsibilities to their children in secondary and tertiary institutions.

### **Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction of the participants was also rejected. The result in table 2 shows that there is significant relationship between number of children and marital satisfaction. This means that marital satisfaction of participants with few children and those with much number of children differ significantly. Hence, hypothesis two was rejected.

The outcome of this finding confirms the findings of existing studies. For instance, Chan and Halpin (2001) who examine effect of number of children on

marital satisfaction found that the children effect might depend on their age and number. The finding also agrees with that of Stevens et al (2001) who discover that there is a relationship between number of children, particularly preschool children and marital satisfaction. Similarly, Menaghan et al (1991), Luster and McAdoo (1994), and Ritcher et-al (1997) discover that families with fewer numbers of children tend to provide higher quality home environments. The participants with fewer numbers of children could express satisfaction than their counterparts with larger number of children because child bearing and rearing are too demanding. The finding of Richer et al (1997) who investigate the association between number of children and parental rearing practice found an association between number of children and parental rearing practice. This is buttressed by Amato (1990), Menaghan et al (1991) who found that parents give more supportive and attention to their children when they have lesser number of children because large family size will stretch available resources in the families. The core explanation in support of couple with larger number of children with low level of satisfaction is not farfetched. Menaghan et al (1991), Kurdek (1999) found that higher-order births also create new demands on parent's time and economic resources which, in turn, affect the couple relationship and that couples with a greater number of children are shown to experience a steeper decline in marital satisfaction.

## **Conclusion**

This study reveals that length of marriage reduces marital satisfaction of the couples, and also, families with high number of children experience low marital satisfaction compared with their counterparts with few number of children. Hence, the need for counselling programmes for couples who have married for a long time to always keep their marital vows and renew their love on constant basis to sustain their union. Also, potential couples and newly wedded couples should make themselves available for counseling in order to experience adequate marital satisfaction. The expected reduction in the number of children and enhanced marital satisfaction would serve as eye opener to people in authority that married couples with large size contribute to some anti-social problems in the society. Hence, the need for population controls.

## **Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study have huge multi-dimensional implications for marriage counselors, married couples, and singles, counselling psychologists, social welfare, government and all the stake holders. This is due to the fact that as the family members increase in number, the larger family is prone to violence because they experience greater stress associated with the necessity to provide for several children. Hence, less marital satisfaction is expressed. This consequently means that to ensure marital satisfaction, proper parenting, morally sound children and a peaceful society, married couples should be encouraged to make a purposeful

decision of meeting a marriage counsellor for their marriage appraisal.

Furthermore, another implication of this study for the whole world is that as marriage increases in years, marital satisfaction has high tendency of decreasing. Hence, the need for improvement of marital satisfaction among couples. Adequate counselling programmes would make it easy for the government to accomplish her goal, control the numerous emergence of various anti-social, moral decadence and successfully tame the scourge of bribery and corruption without much sweat because every child is a product of a marriage.

## **Recommendations**

The results from this study call for urgent attention by all professionals, marriage counselors, religious leaders, married partners, potential couples, government and entire the society. The reason for this is apparent as it has discovered and established the certainty of length of marriage and number of children against marital satisfaction. This study reveals that families with higher number of children experience low marital satisfaction compared with their counterparts with few number of children. Hence, counselling programmes must be made compulsory for potential couples and newly wedded couples in order to experience marital satisfaction and consequent reduction in societal anti-social problems associated with children from large family size. This would also help in conscious population control.

It is also recommended that couples, old and young, should make

themselves available for periodic marriage seminars, couples retreat and any family enrichment programmes available as these would enhance their marital relationships.

Furthermore, a manageable number of children, like 0-3 children is recommended for married couples who have not given birth to more than three children and potential couples. This may reduce stress associated with parenting and as a result enhance marital satisfaction. Also, a continuous enlightenment programme by the media houses on the evil effect of giving birth to many children is recommended.

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