

PERSONAL FACTORS AS CORRELATES OF MARITAL STABILITY AMONG IGBO COUPLES IN IBADAN

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Abstract

Most sub-Saharan African countries including Nigeria, encourage marital stability, however, the rate of marital dissolution keeps increasing. Previous studies have focused majorly on the effects of marital instability on children and society with little attention paid to personal factors as correlates of marital stability (MS) among the Igbos who have very low rate of divorce and whose culture frowns at divorce. This study, therefore, was designed to examine personal factors (commitment to marital vows-CMV, and economy-EC) as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo-State, Nigeria. Social exchange and economic model based theories served as the anchor, while the descriptive survey design was adopted. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted for this study which included: cluster, purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The cluster sampling technique was used to identify various Igbo associations and settlements while the purposive sampling technique was used to select the three urban Local Government Areas namely: Ibadan North, Ibadan North-West and Ibadan North-East. The stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 600 Igbo couples (IC) who were 50 years and above and had been married for at least 20 years. Instruments used were Personal Factors Questionnaire with two sub-scales ($r=0.93$) and marital stability (MS) ($r=0.76$). Quantitative data were analysed using percentages, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression Analysis. Findings showed that commitment to marital vows (CMVs) $r=0.610$ and economy (EC) $r=0.578$ had correlation with marital stability. Furthermore, commitment to marital vow was a more significant predictor of marital stability ($\beta= 0.483$, $t = 3.146$, $p < 0.05$), followed by economy ($\beta = 0.432$, $t = 2.813$, $p < 0.05$) with coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.220$. The study, therefore, recommended among other things, that young couples should remain committed to their marital vows in order to achieve lasting fulfillment in their marriages.

Keywords: personal factors, Commitment to Marital Vows (CMV), Economy (EC) and Marital Stability (MTS)

Introduction

The culture of marriage stability is commonly practiced in many sub-Saharan African countries, including Nigeria over the years. According to Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2014), the South-East region had the least rate of marital dissolution across the six-geopolitical zones in the country. This compliance is in agreement with the 2013 Nigeria Demographic Health Survey which recorded that the median age at first marriage in the South-East was 22.7 for women within the ages of 25-49 (NPC and ICF International, 2014). Although, the pattern of Igbo marriage is structured in networks of extended family system which strengthens marital values, their social and religious acceptability ensures that couples are committed to their marriage vows (Isiugo-Abanihe, 1998; Smith, 2007). The Igbo couples also consider marriage as the basis for their social make-up which helps to bring family units, roots and even the larger society together (Omah, 2019). Marital stability can be defined as a marriage union that lasts up to the time of termination of life either from husband or wife. It is the tendency to continue in marriage relationship despite human and psychological challenges which may emanate as a result of insufficient resources, emotional trauma, family rejection, hatred, barrenness, poverty, illness, loss of job, among others. Ademola (2013) and Omah (2019) in their studies observed that stability of marriage provides a life-long promise of staying together which is suitable for rearing and socializing the next generation. They further revealed that societal norms, values and goals can be sustained when marriages are stable irrespective of all odds.

Besides, it is also believed that the level of satisfaction and stability in marriage is based upon many factors such as mutual love,

respect, similarities of goals, selflessness, tolerance, openness, reconciliation, loyalty and mutuality in sexual satisfaction as well as reciprocally meeting social, economic, emotional, mental and psychological needs (Ogunlade, 2012). Since it is evident that the benefits of marital stability appear to exist among Igbo couples, there is need to examine the correlation between personal factors and marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Personal factors are individual traits, abilities or psychological dispositions that guide and moderate a person's reaction or behaviour towards external situations. Consequently, to substantiate and narrow down this conceptual clarifications, literature has identified that personal factors such as commitment to marital vows and economy are likely to contribute to marital stability. Therefore, this study was out to examine the relationship between personal factors (commitment to marital vows and economy) as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan.

Marriage as a union between two persons is established based on commitment. In view of the above assertion, commitment then becomes sacrosanct. This indicates the determination of the couples involved to go extra mile in order to sustain or improve the standard of their marriage relationship for mutual benefit of both. According to Amato (2010), Stanley and Markman (2011), the major factor that determines if a person will stay married or not is the person's level of commitment to that union. Commitment to marital vows is proven by the yearning of the partner to, not only stay in marriage but also to add value to it through sacrifices, investment of one's time, energy, sharing of dreams and thoughts, goals and aspirations that will ensure the welfare of the other partner. Markman (2011) in his study,

revealed the reason why commitment develops. He opined that commitment is “a choice to give up other choices.” This was further corroborated by Amato (2010), who revealed that marriage relationships fail due to the non-chalant attitude of some spouses. However, it is generally perceived that one’s action goes a long way to spell out success or failure in a marital relationship. Marital commitment connotes certain levels of fundamental dimensions that could guarantee marital stability. These are: (a) common and effective elements of marital stability such as loyalty, contentment and affection. It is important to note that these attributes, if properly integrated into marriage relationship, will promote peace and enhance positive marital outcome; (b) moral attitude that shows reality possessed by a partner in order to promote marriage stability. This means the choice of partner to increase compatibility by understanding the tenets of the society in general; (c) restriction of marital values as a result of poor finance, emotional trauma and psychological stress that could destroy or damage a marital union. By implication, couples’ acceptance of marital challenges will contribute to stability.

Johnson, Caughlin and Huston (1999) in their study asserted that commitment could be perceived in different forms. Notwithstanding the expression used to label marital commitment, it is generally seen as an important aspect of marital stability. Commitment as a correlate to marital stability is geared towards promoting and strengthening marriage relationships. It goes on to indicate that without strong dedications, relationships struggle to survive. Couples who are strongly committed in their marital relationship have the tendency to formulate and promote better intervention strategies in time of crisis, improve their

happiness and cope constructively within the sphere of marital relationships. It is, therefore, logical that partners who are more committed to their marital unions are always enthusiastic to do more in order to ensure that their relationship succeeds. Spouses who have strong affinity for the success of their marriage always make positive statements that support an enduring relationship. Nonetheless, husband and wife who do not believe so much in the institution of marriage make negative pronouncements which obviously discredit its value. Thus, individual commitment plays a vital role in marital stability. Commitment consistently measures couples’ personal, moral and structural behaviour. The implication of all the above is for couples to make sound marital choices from the outset. This, therefore, may suggest that there could be a correlation between commitment to marital vows and marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan.

Another important factor that can promote stability in marriage relationship is through favorable economic situation. Economic well-being is tantamount to good health. It can be described as a condition where economic resources are adequate both for the young and old. Looking presently at the global economic crisis that is ravaging the world, it then becomes difficult for couples to function effectively, manage and get things done without challenges. According to Hardie and Lucas, (2010), economic hardship creates depression in marriages which lowers relationship quality, thereby positioning marital relationship at risk of dissolution. Inadequate provisions of both primary and secondary needs for the family affect wives and children deeply, pose dangers that are capable of creating tension and anxiety, promote domestic violence which, if not well managed, could lead to

separation, divorce or spousal death. On the other hand, provisions of fundamental needs strengthen the home front, boost the personality of the couples and enhance positive interactions in the home. These, by implication, promote marital stability. This was corroborated by Goodman (2009); Williams and Cheadle (2015), who revealed that global economic scarcity has created and caused serious gaps in marriages which invariably affect Igbo couples' marital stability. Economic instability may push some couples to become frustrated and emotionally overwhelmed with life. This situation often indicates danger signals to couples, if not properly managed. Manuel, Melissa, Martinson, Bledsoe-Mansori and Bellamy (2012) in their study stated that economic deprivation in families leads to the creation of emotional strain between intimate partners.

The consequences of economic hardship cut across poor material possessions such as poor housing facilities, inability to meet up with one's bills, poor feeding plan, inability to access good medical care, lack of adequate education and inadequate security of lives and properties. All these negatively influence the well-being of couples, thus creating anxiety, anger and depression, (Edin and Kissane, 2010). The consequences of economic hardship and its effects on marital stability were seen in the massive retrenchment of workers globally. The global unemployment rate which increased to 10.2% in the last decade created opportunity for economic challenges for couples (Goodman, 2009). Poor economy encourages inflation which in turn increases the rate of poverty and malnutrition, poor infrastructural facilities, spread of diseases and epidemics, increase in crime rate, political instability and so on. These ugly situations manifest as a result of poor

economic condition which has severe adverse effects on the stability of marital union globally, (Igbo couples inclusive). Nonetheless, the repercussions of these economic challenges in the life of the couples in turn affect the economic status of the family which, invariably lead to increased marital distress, suspicion, anxiety, depression, separation and in extreme cases, divorce and spousal deaths (Conger, Renter and Elder, 2010). They went further in their study to state that financial insecurity prevents couples from the ability to satisfy their parenting responsibilities. It is evident that marriages with poor economic resources most often end in separation or divorce. This was in line with Butterworth, et al (2012) Dooley, Prause and Ham-Rowbottom (2000) and Olesen (2013), who attested in their study that lack of economic opportunities such as employment, food security and adequate medical care, could trigger depression and mental stress in the lives of couples. Poor economic resources have the tendency to generate conflict, distress, disunity and hopelessness between partners. Generally, there is growing concern of children's well-being during economic recession. However, there is an urgent need for the formulation and execution of policies that would mitigate the effects of economic recession in order to prevent family disaster. This paper, therefore, suggests that personal factors (commitment to marital vows and economy) correlate with marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria.

Several studies have been done on the causes and consequences of marital instability (Ademola, 2013) with emphasis on its effects in the family, (Maciver and Dimpka, 2012) focusing on the danger of marital instability in the family and larger society. Other studies have determined the divorce

rates in different regions globally (US Census Bureau, (2012). However, little attention has been paid to examining the personal factors as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. In essence, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is dearth of studies on such key issues as personal factors (commitment to marital vows and economy) as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. These, therefore, aroused the curiosity of the researchers to examine the extent to which personal factors correlate with marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Thus, personal factors as correlates of marital stability provide useful information on commitment as an important ingredient of stability; adequate economic resources for family well-being as well as personal, moral and structural attitudes of couples in a stable marriage relationship.

Theoretical perspectives:

Psychologists, demographers, and other scholars describe marital stability from different theoretical perspectives. Popular perspectives include the social exchange theory (Levinger, 1976) and economic model based on Becker's theory of marriage (Becker, Landes and Micheal, 1977). These two theories explain the benefits of staying and remaining in a marriage relationship despite numerous human challenges rather than separation or divorce as an alternative. The exchange theory explains stability as an element of marital relationship based on incentives and cost which drive relationship quality. The incentives are seen as positive values while the costs represent the negative values that impede relationship quality. Harmonizing the values will promote stability. The economic model evaluates the rationality to remain in marriage based on expected utility. This goes to indicate that

availability of adequate economic resources is paramount for stable relationship. The theory implies that couples are more committed to their marital relationships when they are able to solve their common economic problems.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to examine the extent to which personal factors, commitment to marital vows and economy correlate with marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, while the specific objectives are:

1. To examine the extent to which personal factors such as commitment to marital vows and economy predict marital stability among Igbo couples.
2. To determine the relationship between personal factors and marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

1. To what extent do personal factors such as commitment to marital vows and economy contribute to marital stability?
2. To what extent do personal factors; commitment to marital vows and economy correlate with marital stability?

Scope of the Study

The study examined personal factors as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan. The study, therefore, focused on Igbo couples who were 50 years and above and had been married for 20 years and above. The study was further restricted to three urban local government areas (Ibadan North, Ibadan North-West, and Ibadan North-East) where the Igbos are majorly found. The population used in this study was obtained from 22 town union

associations and two market traders associations in these three local government areas.

Significance of the Study

The study investigated personal factors as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Accurate implementation of the study and findings obtained would be useful to stakeholders in marriage institutions in giving advice to new and intending couples. The findings would also be beneficial to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in carrying out sensitization and advocacy programmes in order to provide support to couples with marital challenges. Consequently, identifying the vital roles commitment and economy play in marital relationship will create awareness on the issue of marriage sustainability. The findings would also assist the government in formulation of good economic policy that would create jobs and alleviate the suffering of the masses.

Methodology

The research design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey design. The choice of design was considered appropriate because the independent variables had been in existence and could not be manipulated by the researchers to cause a change in the dependent variable. The population of the study consisted of Igbo couples who were fifty (50) years and above, married for a minimum of twenty (20) years and were resident in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. The couples were indigenes of four eastern states (Imo, Abia, Enugu and Ebonyi) who were members of the 22 town union associations and two market traders associations located in three urban Local Government areas in Ibadan namely: Ibadan North, Ibadan North-West and Ibadan North-East. Multi-stage sampling procedure were adopted which

include cluster, purposive, stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The cluster sampling technique was used to identify various Igbo associations and settlements while the purposive sampling technique was used to select the three Urban Local Government Areas namely: Ibadan North, Ibadan North-West and Ibadan North-East. Using stratified and simple random sample, the actual sample size of 600 Igbo couples was drawn from the population using a snow-ball method. The research instrument for data collection was structured questionnaire rated on a four (4) point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, strongly disagree and disagree and contains twenty questionnaire variables relating to personal factors variables. Validation of the instrument was based on peer-review system as well as subjecting it to face-to-face and constructive criticism of experts in areas of marriage stability and psychometrics evaluation.

Thereafter, the instrument was pilot-tested using test-re-test reliability method and the results obtained from the test-re-test and Cronbach alpha reliability statistics showed a co-efficient score of 0.93. Marital Stability Questionnaire (MQS) was self-constructed questionnaire, designed on the 4-points Likert scale format of strongly agree (4), agree (3), strongly disagree (2) and disagree (1). Validation of the instrument was based on peer-review system as well as subjecting it to face-to-face and constructive criticism of experts in the areas of marriage stability and psychometrics evaluation. Thereafter, the instrument was pilot-tested, using test-re-test reliability method among population with similar characteristics in Oyo State. The results obtained from the tests using Cronbach alpha reliability index showed a co-efficient score of 0.76. The data collected through quantitative information was

collated and analysed through the use of descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, correlation matrix and multiple regression analysis. For instance, the demographic characteristics of Igbo couples

were analysed using percentages. Multiple Regression Analysis and Correlation Matrix (PPMC) were used to analyse the data collected in respect of research questions 1 and 2

Results

Research Questions 1

To what extent do personal factors, (commitment to marital vows and economy) contribute to marital stability among Igbo couples?

Table 1 Multiple Regression Analysis showing relative contribution of personal factors to marital stability among Igbo couples

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized coefficient		T	Sig
	B	Standard Error	B	Rank		
Constant	14.846	5.081				
CMV	.830	.264	.483	1st	3.146	.003
EC	.328	.117	.432	2nd	2.813	.007

R = .469, *R*² = .220, Adjusted *R*² = .183, Std. Error of the Estimate = .524; Dependent variable: Marital stability

Source: Field survey: 2017

The regression model reveals the relationship of each of the predictors in the marital stability among Igbo couples. Since the regression weight indicates the relative contribution of each of the predictors, the result in Table 1 shows that commitment to marital vows is a more significant predictor of marital stability ($\beta = 0.483$, $t = 3.146$, $p < 0.05$) followed by economy ($\beta = 0.432$, $t = 2.813$, $p < 0.05$) with coefficient of determination of $R^2 = 0.220$ which means that any variation accounted for by 22.0% variation in a combination of the predictor

variables. Consequently, commitment to marital vows and economy are significant joint predictors of marital stability among Igbo couples. This could be represented, using the prediction equation (Model) below:
 Marital Stability = $\mathbf{a} + \beta_1\mathbf{X}_1 + \beta_2\mathbf{X}_2$
 Marital Stability = $\mathbf{14.846} + 0.483\mathbf{X}_1 + 0.432\mathbf{X}_2$
 Where: $\mathbf{a}$ = constant, $\mathbf{X}_1$ = Commitment to marital vows (CMVs) and $\mathbf{X}_2$ = Economy (EC)

Research Question 2

To what extent do personal factors (commitment to marital vows and economy) correlate with marital stability?

Table 2 (PPMC) Correlation Matrix between two personal factors (Commitment to marriage vow and Economy), and Marital Stability (N=600)

Variable	Marital Stability	Commitment to marital vows	Economy
Marital Stability	1		
Commitment to marital vow	.610**	1	
Economy	.578**	.480**	1
Mean	61.43	13.63	15.54
Standard Deviation	2.94	1.93	3.03

** *Significant at .05,*

Source: Field survey: 2017

The correlation matrix result in Table 2 shows correlation coefficients between the two Independent variables (Commitment to marital vows and Economy) and marital stability. The result in the table shows that commitment to marital vows among Igbo couples is mostly correlated with marital stability with correlation coefficient ($r = 0.610$). This showed that commitment to marital vows is perceived as the dominant of independent variable and is significantly, positively correlated with marital stability while economy lesser coefficient ($r = 0.578$) was also significant and positively correlated with marital stability among Igbo couples. Hence, marital stability among Igbo couples is associated with the two independent variables.

Discussion of Findings

The result in Table 1 revealed that commitment to marital vows and economy contributed to marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Every society has a culture that is unique and such culture contains the norms and values that are different from others. In other words, Igbo couples in Ibadan sustained the culture

of marriage stability despite living outside their own geographical zone. The Igbos, mostly Christians, frown at separation and divorce. In the past, much attention was paid to the vows made by couples but recent happenings in the society have put a gap on the moral attitude of some couples bringing to bare the commitment they agreed on. The alarming rise in the rate of marriage dissolution in human life promotes a huge amount of set-back, not only in marriage institutions, but in families and the larger society. The above assertions corroborated with the views of Stanley and Markman, (2011) who revealed that commitment connotes the determination of a partner to improve the standard of his or her relationship for the mutual benefits of the individuals. According to them, couples must make sacrifice, invest their time, energy, thoughts, dreams and goals to ensure the well-fare of the other partner. Amato (2010), in his study opined that more improvement and sensitization in the area of commitment are required from marriage counselors to experiment on how commitment to marital vows can promote stability. The willingness to have a

successful and satisfactory marriage can be achieved by diligent and truthful commitment of the partners to make their marriage work. Stanley and Markman (2011) further argued that commitment to marital vows can only survive when ethical behaviour possessed by couples in order to promote marriage is principally adhered to. The fundamental necessity of adequate economic resources in marriage cannot be over emphasized. This was captured in the study of Williams and Cheadle (2015), who attested that economic challenges have severe adverse effects on the stability of marital unions globally. They went further to suggest that hardship which emanates as a result of economic recession is associated with high inflation rates, retrenchment of workers, increased rate of unemployment, folding up of some firms and industries, withdrawal of investors and high poverty rate which invariably, will lead to depression, anxiety and emotional stress in families. Manuel et-al; (2012) in their study believed the above assertion by stating that intimate relationship between couples reduces when there is instability and scarcity of economic resources.

Partners who experience hardship in their marital relationship rarely share mutual understanding, love, dreams and aspirations together. This implies high risk of marital instability as couples spend most of their time fighting, arguing, quarrelling, withdrawing from each other and in most cases, resort to violence which, if not properly settled, could lead to either separation, divorce, or spousal death. This also affirms the study of Olesen et-al; (2013) who asserted that inadequate economic power creates tension and stress in marriages which negatively impact in marital relationship outcome. The correlation matrix result in Table 2 showed correlation

coefficients between the two personal factor variables (commitment to marriage vows and economy) and marital stability among Igbo couples. The result in the table showed that marital stability among Igbo couples is mostly correlated with commitment to marital vows with correlation coefficient ($r=0.610$) and economy ($r=0.578$). Hence, marital stability is correlated with commitment to marital vows and economy. This is in line with the views of Stanley and Markman (2011), who attested that strong personal commitment with good moral behaviour encourages marital relationship. They went further to argue that commitment is the willingness and determination which partners put in their relationship to make it work. Amato (2010) suggested that further experiments should be encouraged on the foundational aspect of commitment. It is evident, therefore, that couples who are strongly committed to their marital vows enjoy marital fulfillment.

Williams and Cheadle (2015), in their study revealed that economic well-being encourages marital relationship. Hence, economy correlates with marital stability. This was also in line with Olesen et al; (2013) who opined that poor economic situation leads to depression and mental stress to couples. This suggests that economic hardship influences depressive symptoms as a response to the condition created by inadequate goods and services. Poor economy or economic downturn may lead some couples to become frustrated and emotionally overwhelmed. They argued that inadequate provision of essential needs for wives and children either because of ignorance or poor economic means can truncate the home and is capable of creating chaos, domestic conflict and marital challenges. Therefore, commitment to marital vows and economy, positively and

significantly correlate with marital relationship. This establishes the position of the two theories used in the study.

Conclusion

The study revealed personal factors as correlates of marital stability among Igbo couples in Ibadan, Oyo State of Nigeria. Although stable marriages are very important for peaceful society, growth and development, commitment to marital vows and economy are relevant personal factors that couples should not overlook in their relationship. The study also indicated that commitment to marital vows and economy are germane to marital success. Evidence from the extant and previous studies showed that marital stability was driven by personal factors (commitment to marital vows and economy). Nevertheless, it can be concluded that adequate combination of the two personal factor variables should be considered and given proper attention in the pursuit of marital stability. The study also revealed that marital stability needs support from different marriage stakeholders such as guidance counselor, religious leaders, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), social workers, psychologists, Ministry of Youth and Women Affairs to collaborate and make our society a better place.

Recommendations

In agreement with the objectives and findings of the study, these recommendations become necessary. There is need for stakeholders in marriage institutions to re-examine the marriage vows in a way that intending couples will understand the principles and keep to the terms. As the global communities experience economic downturn or recession, the facts remain that scarcity of human and family needs will rise; therefore, couples should apply their strength and willingness to make marriage stable. Special attention should be

paid to new and intending couples who are starting together to make sure they adhere to their marriage vows in order to fulfill and enjoy their relationship. The government should come up with economic policies that would adequately reduce poverty, unemployment and strengthen the stability of the home or family.

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