



Socio-Psychological Impact of Indices of Spousal Incompatibility on Marital Stability Among Couples in Lagos Metropolis, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of spousal incompatibility on marital stability in Lagos metropolis. In carrying out the research, a descriptive survey research design was employed. Cluster sampling method was used to select a sample of 200 respondents from the population of all married women in Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos State. Three research questions and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A researcher-designed questionnaire was the major instrument used in collecting the data which were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient statistical tool. Results showed that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between the educational levels of spouses and marital stability. The findings also suggest that age differences between couples and religion also impacted on marital stability of couples. Based on these findings, it was recommended that youth who intend to marry should seek the informed counsel of a professional marriage counselor to help them in making the right choices and exposing them to the indices of spousal compatibility in marriage.

Key words: Divorce; Spousal compatibility and marriage

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INTRODUCTION

For some time now, various researchers have reported that the rate of divorce in Nigeria is steadily increasing and today more couples divorce than what it used to be some years ago (Maciver, 2004; Carter & McGoldrick, 1998; Lofas & Sova, 1995). With rapid modernization and westernization of societies, those norms, practices and traditional values which initially kept African marriages are now being eroded. There is a big paradigm shift from what used to be obtained in marriages in the time past (Shen, 2008). The mindset, values and expectations with which couples enter into marriages have drastically changed. Today the average Nigerian lady is educated and has views and expectations of what her marital life should offer. The same applies to her male counterpart. Even a young adolescent girl has an impression of what her dream husband should look like and what he should possess. It is common to hear young girls discuss the kind of man they will like to marry. This situation is even made worse with social media portrayal of who an ideal man or woman should be. All these lead young men and women to enter into marriage with wrong notions and expectations of what marriage really is.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

It has been observed that many of today's couples when they were 'supposed lovers' jumped in and jumped out of hetero-social and hetero-sexual relationships without taking cognizance of the idiomatic expression of Feingold (1998) which says 'look before you leap'. This is because they just followed their sentiments on the basis of first attraction either physical or circumstantial. It is quite ingenious to cash in on this because beauty is like a fading flower, as the target ages and grows old, the beauty may wane. So also, human nature is complex; some people engage in self-monitoring whereby they manifest only

desirable behaviors in public. Problem arises when the other side of love manifests simply because the love was not deep-rooted hence they announce that they are not compatible.

It is sad to note that when the couple is invigorated with any transient style of love outside the agape love (like the mania, philia, etc), sooner or later, it dawns on either that he/she is being used and with this, things may fall apart and the centre will not hold again in the process of cohabitation (Makinde, 2007). More disturbing is the fact that while the invigorating love lasted, vital issues like age differentials, educational qualifications, religious affiliations, occupational status, ethnicity and many variables are downplayed as trivialities to remove any obstacle on their way to the altar only to discover that they are really important but that it is too late.

Equally disturbing is the couple's unwillingness to check their blood group, genotype, rhesus factor, family background or create time for studying each other's personality characteristics; what is worse is that some would not even give room for courtship; many biological parents are seldom involved in marriage ceremonies if they raise contrary opinions and ready-made commercial parents/go-betweens are used and paid only to discover each other accidentally; with these, frustration may lead to aggression till thoughts of separation come into their minds. Many couples lack foresight about unpredictable happenstances like childlessness, gender of children, sickness and work-place stress as factors for marital happiness.

The worst case scenario is lack of communication both verbal and non-verbal (including sexual communication) among intact couples to iron out their differences and continue peaceful cohabitation. With this, unnecessary mountains are made out of a mole-hill in which case, adjustable issues like frigidity, anorgasmia, stress, obesity and miscommunication can be handled with the help of professional marital counselors or psychotherapists.

All marriages are expected to last 'till death do us part'. Factors that galvanize couples at the onset should be credible, enduring and should keep them together till old age. This is why this research attempts to sift out those socio-psychological indices that would make a couple compatible till death and impact on their marital stability.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The primary purpose of this study is to examine the relative effects of spousal incompatibility on marital stability in Lagos metropolis. Specifically, the study examined:

- The influence of educational level of the spouses on marital stability.
- The effect spousal age differences have on marital stability.

- The effect of religious differences of spouses on marital stability.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Three research questions were formulated to guide the study.

- To what extent does educational level of the spouses influence marital stability?
- Do differences in age of spouses influence their marital stability?
- To what extent do religious differences among spouses influence the marital stability in Lagos Metropolis?

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Three corresponding null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

- Differences in educational qualification of couples will not significantly influence the marital stability of spouses
- There is no significant relationship between difference in age and marital stability of spouses
- There is no significant relationship between religious differences of spouses and marital stability

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

One of the many reasons given by scholars for the increasing rate of divorce among couples is spousal incompatibility (Maciver, 2004; Kabala, 2006; Umoh & Adeyemi, 2005; Mital, 2005). Family Health Avenue (2012) defines spousal incompatibility as the inability of married couples to live together in peace and harmony. One of the many mistakes in marriage is to delve into marriage without properly ascertaining if one is compatible with the person he/she intends to marry.

Spousal compatibility has many dimensions and includes compatibility in the area of health, education, age, attitude, personality and sexuality among others. Compatibility in the area of health will involve seeking answers to such questions as: Are the couples compatible in the area of their health? Does the couple's blood group match, do their genotypes match? Does either of them have a terminal disease? Does either of them have a genital disease that could put the life of the other person at risk? Does either of the partners have any congenital disease that could be transferred to the children? Is the man anorgasmic, impotent or sterile? Or does the man have any viral disease that could prevent him from being able to father a child? Does the woman have any form of disease that could prevent her from having children? Is the rhesus factor of the lady compatible with that of the man? All these are some of the questions couples intending to marry should ask and clarify before getting into the marriage.

Another area of compatibility is educational or intellectual compatibility. Mital (2005) and Yagoob (1984) studies have shown that intellectual compatibility can influence the stability of a marriage. In a situation where one of the spouses is highly educated and the other is not educated or has little education, there may be tendencies for friction to arise in that sort of marriage because the couples will be operating at different levels of intellectual experience. The couples may find it hard to exchange ideas and converse meaningfully because each couple will see things from their own experience or perspectives (Mital, 2005; Seraphine, 2010). However, researchers like Shen (2008) also suggests that intellectual compatibility may not always be necessary in marriage and cites cultures where the male is the dominant figure in the society so the men are the ones who are educated while the ladies are trained to take care of the home. In such marriages, the female tend to hold the man who is educated in high esteem and as such she respects the man and such marriages tend to be stable. This kind of scenario is prevalent in some parts of Nigeria, Africa and the world at large.

Another form of compatibility which researchers point out is hinged on attitudes, beliefs and religious inclinations (Seraphine, 2010; Sullivan, 2001; Olson & Olson, 2000). Successful marriages are built when people share the same beliefs, values, attitudes and religious inclinations. The effect of globalization and modernization has now made it that one meets all kinds of people and learns to live with them no matter the value they share or the beliefs they have. Globalization necessitates tolerance of other people's religion, beliefs and value systems. However, at the basic level, compatibility in attitudes, beliefs and religious inclinations still influence marital stability and success. Before a person marries, that person should understand the value system of the person whom he or she intends to marry, what are the beliefs of that person, what is the person's core value, what are those things he or she cannot compromise on? What does the person believe in? All these should be properly understood before the person decides to marry. There have been instances where marriages are dissolved because the partners could not agree on which religious house to attend or which religious practice they should inculcate in their children.

Anthropologists (Shenm, 2008) argue that one of the reasons why there were fewer rates of divorce in the time past was that the effect of globalization as we know it now was not as strong as it is now. These days there is a lot of mixing. In a university for example, there are students from all works of life, students with different beliefs and religious practices. There is a tendency for people to meet and interact and through the interaction marriage occurs. But in those days people lived in a close system, there was not much mingling with outside cultures, people mingled with their relatives, kins and community members, even if people were to go outside the community to

marry it was still within reach. The values and cultures of that community will not so much different from the community the other person was coming from. Eventually when people from this kind of arrangement married, the marriage usually was stable, because both couple shared almost the same beliefs, practices, culture and values.

Hetero-Sexual compatibility is another area that researchers have cited as being capable of creating marital instability (Maciver, 2004; Busby, Carol1 & Willoughby, 2010). Scholars like (Manning & Cohen, 2010; Ogunsola, 2011) have cited the increasing incidence of a practice known as cohabiting where people decide to live together without formally getting married. According to those who practice it; it is a means of assessing if the person they want to marry is sexually compatible with them. According to these researchers, it is called 'trial marriage'. The two people will live together without formalizing marriage and while living together, they try to assess if they can successfully live together before they engage in the eventual marriage ceremony. While they are living together, they assess each other's sexual capabilities to ascertain if they are sexually compatible. Many scholars and religious bodies have condemned this practice as morally wrong and assert that even when couples who have cohabited eventually marry, they still end up divorcing at a higher rate than those who did not cohabit (Ogunsola, 2011; Manning & Cohen, 2010). In a study by Ganagana & Ambakederemo (2006), sexual compatibility was ranked fourth among the factors that lead to marital break-ups among married couples in Port-Harcourt. In a similar study by Umoh & Adeyemi (2005), sexual compatibility was ranked third among undergraduate students in Ilorin as one of the factors that could lead to marital break-up. The first was barrenness; followed by constant illness of any of the partners. This goes to show the importance of this aspect of compatibility.

There is also the issue of personality characteristics; this kind of compatibility assesses the extroversion and introversion of the individuals. Is the person an extravert, likes to talk to and meet people, likes to travel, or is the person an introvert, likes to be on his or her own, does not like the company of people, does not like to talk too much and likes to mind his or her own business. In addition to the above, other labels like the sanguin, the phlegmatic, the melancholic and the choleric are significant personality characteristics such that the theory of 'like poles repel, unlike poles attract can safeguard stability in marriage (Makinde, 2007). These are areas that are important in marriage. One must understand the partner's personality and decide if he or she can cope with such a person before deciding to enter into such marriage. A marriage where one partner feels irritated at the other partner, because of the partner's personality type will not last long. A marriage where it is difficult to plan trips, vacations or outings because each partner cannot agree with the other partner on where the ideal spot should be

will have problems. Personality compatibility also relates to the couples' social compatibility. One's personality will determine the individual's social and interpersonal skills. It determines where the person likes to visit, how the person relates in public and what kind of person the individual likes to talk to. These issues can influence marriage if couples do not resolve them before entering the marriage.

Another form of compatibility which scholars cite but have not fully agreed on is age compatibility (Pathfinder International/Ethiopia 2006, Lowenstein 2005). Some researchers opine that it is not necessary for the couples to be of the same age bracket as long as there is mutual love and understanding between them. Others believe that age compatibility is a necessity in marriage, that both partners should be of the same age bracket, so that there can be meaningful discussions and understanding between them. Other scholars cite maturity as the key factor rather than the physical age of the couples. According to them it is possible for a man to marry a woman who is older in age but young at heart and may not be fully mature to handle the intricacies of marriage. In the time past, the norm was for the man to marry a lady who is quite younger, but with modernization and industrialization, the norm is now shifting, men now marry women who are about their age or older. With the long years it takes for one to finish school, men now get old before they marry, this equally affects the girls (Makinde, 2004).

If one were to compare the times past with the present, one will note that marriages lasted and were usually successful unlike marriages of this present age which tend to break no sooner than they are consummated. One might ask, how did compatibility play a role in the success of the earlier marriages? Most couples of old were not so educated to have made right decisions as to who was compatible or not to them. However, Makinde (2004) underscored parental involvement in the mate-selection process and the preparations into couple-hood proper; this appears as part of the credible factors that enhanced the success of their marriages.

In the distant past, the environment in which the couples lived made them compatible; the experiences they were exposed to were almost the same. The level of education, the people they came in contact with were all similar. The environment of their time encouraged and likely made their marriages more stable than what obtains today. Today, the environment in which we live is totally new, it is a global village. The traditions and values which held marriages together have been eroded. Through technology and ICT facilities, people can now reach out to others from any part of the world and contract marriages; places our forebears never dreamt of going can now be reached.

Given these prevailing circumstances, where the world has become a global village and smaller; people from different parts of the world can now mingle and interact

with one another. The importance of spousal compatibility and its influence on marital stability becomes necessary for (investigated) investigation or to be investigated.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design using simple random sampling technique to select Eti-Osa Local Government Area of Lagos state, Nigeria as the study locale. The sample consisted of 100 married intact couples (100 males and 100 females) selected through cluster sampling. Each major street within the council development area served as a cluster. Ten clusters were identified and from each, ten married men and their spouses were selected utilizing systematic sampling procedure. However, in selecting the participants, two criteria were considered: The respondent must be married and currently living with spouse.

A 20-item researcher designed questionnaire titled Couples Marital Compatibility Questionnaire (CMCQ) was used to elicit responses from the participants. The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A sought the biographic data (age, gender, religion, duration of marriage and highest educational qualification) of the respondents while Section B contained items used to garner data on couples' perception of marital issues. The item response format was a four-point Likert scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree which were scored 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively for positive items while the negative items were scored in reverse order. The researchers personally administered the questionnaire to the participants in their various homes.

The content and face validity of the data collection instrument were determined by expert opinion while its reliability was empirically ascertained by the test retest procedure using an eight week time lag which yielded a coefficient of 0.83. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to analyze the hypotheses generated.

RESULTS

Table 1
Demographic Data of the Respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
< 25 years	18	9.0
25 – 35 years	101	50.5
36 – 45 years	49	24.5
< 45 years	32	16.0
Total	200	100.0
Religion		
Christian	119	59.5
Muslim	69	34.5
Traditional Religion	12	6.0
Total	200	100.0

To be continued

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Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Tribe		
Yoruba	91	45.5
Igbo	67	33.5
Hausa	5	2.5
Other	37	18.5
Total	200	100.0
Educational qualification		
Primary education	23	11.5
Secondary education	62	31.0
ND/NCE/HND	9	4.5
First degree	79	39.5
Second degree	27	13.5
Total	200	100.0

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents used for the study. With regards to the age of the respondents, only 9% of the respondents were below

25 years; respondents that were above 45 years formed 16% of the sample, followed by those between 36-45 years who constituted about 24% of the sample while those within the 25-35 years age bracket formed the bulk (50.5%) of the sample used in the study.

Table 1 also shows that in terms of religious affiliation Christians constituted 59.5% as against 35.4% that were Muslims and 6% traditional worshipers. With regards to tribe or ethnicity of the respondents, the Yoruba and Igbo were predominant with 45.5% and 33.5% respectively while other tribes (Hausa, Edo, Efik, and other minorities) formed only about 21% of the sample. With regards to educational qualifications of the respondents, 11.5% had only primary education, 31.0% (secondary education), and 4.5% were ND/NCE/HND holders while 39.5% and 13.5% were first degree and Masters degrees holders respectively.

Table 2
Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Educational Level of the Spouse and Marital Stability

Variable	Mean	SD	n	Df	r-cal	r-crit
Educational level	3.13	0.26	200			
Marital stability	9.68	2.45	200	198	0.32	0.195

Significant at 0.05, df = 198

The result from Table 2 shows a significant correlation between education level of spouse and marital stability in Eti-osa Local Government Area of Lagos State. This

was based on the result of the analysis which shows a calculated r-value of 0.32 as against a theoretical value of 0.195 at 0.05 alpha level.

Table 3
Relationship Between Religious Differences of Spouse and Marital Stability

Variable	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	Df	r-cal	r-crit
Religious differences	200	6.58	1.63			
Marital stability	200	9.68	2.45	198	-0.42	0.195

Significant at 0.05, df = 198

From the results presented in Table 3, it was evident that the calculated r-value of 0.42 is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 given degrees of freedom 198

at 0.05 level of significance This shows that there is a significant negative relationship between religious differences of couples and marital stability.

Table 4
Relationship Between Differences in Age and Marital Stability of Spouses

Variable	n	$\bar{x}$	sd	Df	r-cal	r-crit
Differences in age	200	11.20	4.36			
Marital stability	200	9.68	2.45	198	-0.68	0.195

Significant at 0.05, df = 198

The table shows that r-calculated of -0.68 is greater than r-critical of 0.195 given 198 degrees of freedom 198 at 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is a significant negative relationship between difference in age and marital stability of couples.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Marital Compatibility is a state in which couples live in harmonious relationship without conflict or disunity (definitions. com 2012; family health avenue 2012).

Indices of marital compatibility are enormous most of which are responsible for the higher divorce rate in our society today thus this study was conceived to investigate the relative effect of spousal incompatibility on marital stability among couples in Lagos metropolis.

Findings from hypothesis one shows that there is a significant relationship between the educational level of the spouse and marital stability in Lagos. This finding is line with findings of Brandson (1990) and Tilson and Larsen (2000) who observed that spouse' educational status could influence couples' marital stability. This result

was corroborated by Isiugo- Abanihe (1998) who showed that there is a positive relationship between women higher education and the rate of divorce in the Nigerian society. In the past, the Nigerian society witnessed a lower divorce rate because of lower educational status of women in those days. Women were trained to be submissive to the will of their husband; however, the story is no longer the same because of the emphasis on the education of women, some of whom today value their career more than their family. There are more women with higher degrees and the consequences of this are seen in the number of separation and divorce in the society. This is because a highly educated woman tends to be less dependent on her husband, she is empowered, she is not desperate unlike the uneducated woman who sees her husband as lord and as such will usually go the extra mile to make her marriage work. The uneducated woman is not empowered as the educated woman and she may not have the means to effectively cater for herself if she leaves her husband's home unlike the educated woman.

Findings from hypothesis two revealed that there is a significant negative relationship between spousal age differences and marital stability. This suggests that marital stability may be threatened if the differences in age between spouses is large. This result negates the findings of Beck and Powell (2005) and Denisuik (2005) who posit that differences in age are not a significant factor influencing marital stability of couples as long as the couples understood themselves. Traditional wisdom holds that most women prefer older men while most men prefer younger women; however modern practice shows that the age gaps between husbands and wives in most marriages today are closing. Looking at today's couple, one would observe that the age difference between husband and wife is almost close or non-existent. Unlike what used to be obtained in the time past where the husbands used to be far older than the wives. As the society transforms and old ways make room for new ways, one would observe that while previously it was a fashionable thing for a woman to marry a man who is far older than her, the story is different today and this change may have influenced the high rate of marital instability in the Nigerian society. Adedokun (1998) has shown that women who marry men who are their age mate stood a greater risk of failing in their marriage than the women who married men far older than them. The reason for this could be traced to the effect of modernization in Africa; women now go to school and reach the height of their educational endeavour. Men meet women who are about their age bracket in higher institutions even in the secondary school.

Findings of hypothesis three also show that religious differences significantly affect marital stability. In other words, holding different religious beliefs and/or belonging to different religious affiliations may ginger marital instability. This finding supports the findings of Strauss (2006) that religious affiliation influences marital stability

because couples from different religious backgrounds may have a high tendency of experiencing friction in their marriage because of different belief systems particularly if any of them is fanatical.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Since marital success is dependent love and compatibility, the study recommends the following:

- African culture and values should be rejuvenated and integrated into the school curriculum particularly at the secondary and higher education levels in Nigeria.
- Youths who intend to get married should seek the counsel of a professional marriage counsellor, to assist them make the right decision and enlighten them about the indices and importance of spousal compatibility in marriage.
- Classes, seminars and workshops can be organized by different NGOs, government functionaries and religious bodies to teach young people the importance of spousal compatibility before and in marriage and disseminate adjustmental coping mechanisms for couples experiencing apparent incompatibility in their marriages.
- Couples should always be reminded through the media about their marital vows of 'till death do us part' so they must never plan to call it quits, rather, they must dialogue to complement one another and annihilate the causes of incompatibility in their marriage.

CONCLUSION

Marriage is an important act which many people want to experience in their lifetime. Compatibility plays a significant role in the kind of marriage any one could get. It determines a person's future health both physically, emotionally and socially; it can determine whether the person will live a happy life or a miserable one. There is therefore need for adequate consideration and planning before going into it. Most people want to get it right the first time; they do not want to go through the pain of an unstable marriage. Spousal compatibility is one of the means through which people assess the potential for success of their relationship. Through spousal compatibility, people assess whether the person they want to marry or not share the same characteristics with them,

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