

# Determinants of Marriage Stability among Married Couples in North-Central Nigeria Implication for Counselling

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## **Abstract**

*The study investigated determinants of marriage stability among married couples in North Central Nigeria. In order to carry out this study, four hypotheses were formulated. An instrument known as “Determinants of Marriage Stability Questionnaire (DOMSQ)” was constructed by the researcher and used to collect information from the field. The instrument had content and facial validity and its reliability coefficient is 0.87. The investigator used eight research assistants to administer nine hundred and ninety copies of the questionnaire on the respondents in Kogi and Benue States. Nine hundred and eighty three copies were retrieved from the respondents indicating 99.3 percent return rate. The researcher collated the information got from the field work and the Z statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings showed that, there was no significant difference between male and female married couples in their identification of childlessness as determinant of marriage stability, there was no significant difference between married couples in the urban and rural areas in their identification of sexual satisfaction as determinant of marriage stability, there was no significant difference between old and young married couples in their identification of cultural background as determinant of marriage stability, there was no significant difference between married couples from Kogi and Benue States in their identification of communication as determinant of marriage stability. One of the recommendations is that couples who are faced with the problem of childlessness should seek medical assistance and also be positive about such outcome.*

## **Keywords**

*determinants, marriage, couples, stability*

## **1. Introduction**

In the book of Genesis, chapter one verse 27 and 28, God established the institution of marriage when he created Adam and gave him, Eve as wife. God said to them, “be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it, have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living

thing that moves on the earth”.

As far as Iriogbe (2015, p. 1) is concerned, marriage is a social union between man and woman who come together as husband and wife. Okorodudu (2010) stated that the two people agree to live together as husband and wife, but this calls for different expectations and hopes, some of which might be fulfilled while others may not.

Some of the purposes of marriage are; procreation, sexual satisfaction and economic cooperation. But in fulfilling these purposes, stability in the marriage may be considered as inevitable. Probably, some of the variables upon which marriage stability may be built are communication, sexual satisfaction, procreation, cultural background and finance.

In this study marital stability is a favourable condition experienced by couples in marriages, which stimulates harmonious resolution of conflict and better understanding of self.

Ojukwu and Obiji (2016, p. 2) have asserted that free communication in marriage is the oil that greases the maintenance affair from being degraded. They noted that where one of the partners in marriage relations has developed a dissatisfaction about the attitude of his/her partner, one negative thing that develops from that, is poor communication. Esere (2002; 2006) asserted that the absence of effective communication is likely to make a marriage crumble. Idowu and Esere (2007) stressed that more than half of failed relationship are due to severe lack of communication between couples.

## **2. Sexual Satisfaction**

Uloho (2016, p. 6) opined that sex and sexuality emanate from a sound mind and have been major factors bedeviling matrimonial homes. He maintained that many are married but have little or no sexual satisfaction. Hamon (2012) asserted that sexuality is an important part of life and an integral aspect of any emotional relationship. He added that the more you invest in your romantic life, the more rewards you will reap. He further stated that marital sex is like oil which is meant to lubricate every other aspect of one's marital life, all or most aspect of one's marital life will tend to move swiftly when this oil is in good condition but when the oil is in bad condition, then the result could be very devastating. Enyi (2002) stated that about 70 percent of all marital problems have their causes firmly rooted in the bedroom and that in a marriage where there is the existence of healthy marital sexual relationship, these marital problems are simply overlooked when they crop up. He asserted that in union where the existence of a healthy marriage sexual relationship has become moribund, these issues are blown out of proportion. Oladapo (2012) stated that sexual satisfaction is a blessing in marriage, claiming that sex ranks top after food in marriage.

## **3. Childlessness**

It appears that one of the foundations upon which stable marriage is built is ability for couples to have children. Ofoegbe (1998) observed that many well celebrated marriages end up in divorce not too long after, due to childlessness or barrenness. Ofoegbe (2002) as cited by Okorodudu (2010) noted that

marriages are contracted to provide basis for love and companionship, bearing of children and fulfillment of couple's expectations. Maciver (2004) opined that when a couple has the problem of barrenness, the husband is usually impatient and goes out looking for children. Continuing, he pointed out that adjustment of couples to marital crises is a lifelong phenomenon and it cuts across race, tribe, religion, educational level, location, socio economic status and age. Maciver asserted that families who are childless within a few years after marriage, experience turbulence manifested in quarrelling, suspicion, unhappiness and even separation and divorce.

#### **4. Cultural Background**

Iriogbe (2015) asserted that the cultural background of the couples is a very strong determinant of marriage stability. He stressed that in Nigeria, cultural background and affiliation of couples could determine how they relate to each other, find solutions to common marital issues which when handled early and appropriately will minimize distress in the family. He added that couples who hail from same cultural background and possibly speak the same dialect will blend better due to similarities in ways of approaching family matters. Adeniyi (2009) reiterated that in some cultures and traditions, women are treated next to servants or slaves, stating that such culture does not permit women to make any input when family matters are being discussed.

#### **5. Finance**

Shahina (2009) stated that one of the most common points of contention in marriage is money. He maintained that eighty percent (80%) of marital conflicts are about money. Onoyase (2013) stated that a woman may decide to break her marriage when she discovers that the man cannot meet-up financially. From observation, when a man is unable to meet up with his financial obligation in a marriage (due to unemployment or illness), he not only loses his status as the head, he also has no say in vital decisions made in the marriage and this may bring a feeling of inferiority which can seriously hamper marital stability.

Maciver and Dimpa (2012) carried out a study on the factors influencing marital stability in Bayelsa State, Nigeria with a sample of 600 respondents (300 male and 300 female spouses). Other strata used were religion, educational level, age and length of marriage. They found out that there is no significant difference between male and female literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability, there is no significant difference between Christians and non-Christians literate spouses in their perception of factors influencing marital stability, there is no significant difference among literate couples on factors influencing marital stability, and finally there is no significant difference between young and old literate spouses in their perception of factors that influence marital stability.

Ojukwu and Obiji (2016) investigated effect of socio-psychological factors on marital stability of married persons in Imo State, Nigeria. The sample size was 1050 married persons and the results revealed that social belief was a determinant factor of marital stability of married persons in Imo State,

in-laws interference was a factor of instability among married couples, value orientation was found to be a factor of marital instability and finally, psycho-emotional condition of married persons (such as events and issues confronting their family) may stir up negative emotions (such as anxiety, worries, fears and so on) which may likely stir up or ginger feelings for quitting a marriage relationship.

Arowolo (2014) carried out a study of marital stability among married couples in Ise-Orun Local Government Area of Ekiti State. One of the findings indicated that there was significant relationship between marital stability and the level of communication among married couples. There was also significant relationship between the couples' sexual satisfaction and their marital stability.

## 6. Operational Definition of Terms

**Urban:** In this study, urban areas refer to towns with modern amenities like electricity, pipe borne water, motorable roads and post office.

**Rural:** In this investigation, rural areas refer to villages without facilities like electricity, pipe borne water, accessible roads and post office.

**Old Couples:** These refer to married persons whose marriages are over ten years.

**Young Couples:** Refers to married couples whose marriages are between 0-9 years old.

## 7. Marriage Stability

This is a situation in marriage where couples experience healthy marital relationship, built upon effective communication that foster amicable resolution of conflicts such as sex, procreation, finance and cultural background.

## 8. Statement of the Problem

It has become a common knowledge in Nigeria today and other parts of the world that some married couples do not live to celebrate the first anniversary of their marriages. This is because such marriages breakdown before it is one year old. The reason behind this ugly situation may include lack of trust on the part of the couples due to poor communication, childlessness, lack of sexual satisfaction and financial stress. When a marriage is plagued with these issues, couples "endure" and not enjoy their marriages and this may culminate in the total collapse of such marriages. The problem of the study put in question form is: what are the determinants of marriage stability among married couples in North-Central Nigeria?

### 8.1 Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this paper is to investigate the determinants of marriage stability among married couples.

Specifically, the study focused on the difference between male and female married couples in their identification of childlessness as a determinant of marriage stability, difference between married couples in urban and rural areas in their identification of sexual satisfaction as a determinant of

marriage stability; difference between old and young married couples in their identification of cultural background as a determinant of marriage stability and difference between married couples from Kogi and Benue States in their identification of communication as a determinant of marriage stability.

### *8.2 Hypotheses*

The researcher formulated the following hypotheses to guide the study:

- 1) There is no significant difference between male and female married couples in their identification of childlessness as determinant of marriage stability.
- 2) There is no significant difference between married couples in urban and rural areas in their identification of sexual satisfaction as determinant of marriage stability.
- 3) There is no significant difference between old and young married couples in their identification of cultural background as determinant of marriage stability.
- 4) There is no significant difference between married couples in Kogi and Benue States in their identification of communication a determinants of marriage stability.

## **9. Research Procedure and Methodology**

The study is a survey and adopted Ex-Post Facto design. Egbule and Okobia (2012, p. 28) asserted that survey studies are very valuable and advantageous because they have wide range of scope, a great deal of information as well as representative samples which permit inferences and generalization to the entire population. The population of the study consisted of all married couples in North Central Nigeria. The random sampling technique was used to select two states from the North Central Nigeria, that is, Kogi and Benue that participated in the study.

The investigator used purposive sampling method to select nine hundred and ninety married couples. Egbule and Okobia (2012, p. 128) maintained that purposive sampling method allows the researcher to obtain a sample that appears to him to be representative of the population under study.

The investigator made use of an instrument known as “Determinants of Marital Stability Questionnaire (DOMSQ)” to collect information from the respondents. The instrument is a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), 4 points, Agree (A), 3 points, Disagree (D), 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD), 1 point. The instrument had facial and content validity and a reliability coefficient of 0.87. Eight research assistants were used to administer nine hundred and ninety copies of the questionnaire to the respondents in Kogi and Benue States of North Central Nigeria. Nine hundred and eighty three copies were retrieved and showed about 99.3 percent return rate. The data were collated and the z statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

## **10. Findings**

### **Hypothesis One**

There is no significant difference between male and female married couples in their identification of childlessness as determinant of marriage stability.

**Table 1. Z-Test Analysis of the Difference between Male and Female Married Couples in Their Identification of Childlessness as Determinant of Marriage Stability**

Variables	N	Df	Mean	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Male married couples	459	981	53.1	12.4	0.72	1.96	Accepted
Female married couples	524		56.3	14.2			

Source: Fieldwork.

Table one shows a calculated z-value of 0.72 and critical z value of 1.96. Since calculated z-value of 0.72 is lower than critical z-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference between male and female married couples in their identification of childlessness as determinant of marriage stability is accepted. This shows that the gender of the respondents is not an issue in the finding. This is because male and female married couples alike have maintained that childlessness can affect the stability of marriages.

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between married couples in the urban and rural areas in their identification of sexual satisfaction as determinant of marriage stability.

**Table 2. Z-Test Analysis of the Difference between Married Couples in the Urban and Rural Areas in Their Identification of Sexual Satisfaction as Determinant of Marriage Stability**

Variables	N	Df	Mean	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Urban married couples	528	981	54.8	13.5	1.05	1.96	Accepted
Female married couples	455		53.9	12.7			

Source: Fieldwork.

A glance at table two indicates a calculated z-value of 1.05 while the critical z-value is 1.96. The critical z-value of 1.96 is higher than the calculated z-value of 1.05 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the hypothesis which says that, there is no significant difference between married couples in the urban and rural areas in their identification of sexual satisfaction as determinant of marriage stability is accepted. The finding of this investigation has shown that the location of the respondents did not affect their view of sexual satisfaction as a determinant of marriage stability.

### Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between old and young married couples in their identification of cultural background as determinant of marriage stability.

**Table 3. Z-Test Analysis of the Difference between Old and Young Married Couples in Their Identification of Cultural Background as Determinant of Marriage Stability**

Variables	N	Df	Mean	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Old married couples	558	981	55	13.4	1.31	1.96	Accepted
Young married couples	425		53.8	13.6			

Source: Fieldwork.

Table 3 indicates a calculated z value of 1.31 while critical z value is 1.96. Since critical z value of 1.96 is higher than the calculated z value of 1.31 at 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis that, “there is no significant difference between old and young married couples” in their identification of cultural background as determinants of marriage stability is accepted. The finding has shown that, “the age of the married couples has not created any barrier in their opinion about cultural background as determinant of marriage stability”.

#### Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference between married couples in Kogi and Benue States in their identification of communication as determinant of marriage stability.

**Table 4. Z-Test Analysis of the Difference between Married Couples in Kogi and Benue States in Their Identification of Communication as Determinant of Marriage Stability**

Variables	N	Df	Mean	SD	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Married couples in Kogi State	586	981	54.2	13.5	0.39	1.96	Accepted
Married couples in Benue State	397		53.8	13.4			

Source: Fieldwork.

The finding on table four shows a calculated z value of 0.39 and critical z value of 1.96. Since calculated z value of 0.39 is lower than the critical z value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis which says that “there is no significant difference between married couples from Kogi and Benue States in their identification of communication as determinant of marriage stability is accepted”. The investigator thought the issue of the state where respondents come from, would make a difference but that has not happened. Again, Kogi state is predominantly Muslims and Benue State is predominantly Christians but, this has not created any difference in the responses of the respondents since all of them affirm communication as determinant of marriage stability.

## 11. Discussion

One of the findings of this investigation is that there is no significant difference between male and female married couples in their identification of childlessness as determinant of marriage stability. Both

sexes have consented that childlessness can mar marital stability. This may be so because in Africa (in general) and Nigeria (in particular), children are highly valued, regarded as special gifts from God and seen as “ingredients” that make a marriage “spicy”.

This finding gives credence to Maciver’s assertion of 2004 that, when a couple has the problem of barrenness, the husband is usually impatient and goes out looking for children. The present finding also agrees with Ofoegbe (1998) when he stated that many well celebrated marriages end up in divorce not too long after marriage due to childlessness or barrenness.

Another finding of the investigation is that there is no significant difference between married couples in the urban and rural areas in their identification of sexual satisfaction as determinant of marriage stability. Irrespective of location, respondents agreed that sexual satisfaction is a factor in marital stability. The plausible reason for this finding is that sex is very vital in a marriage, it is what seems to lubricate other parts of the reunion.

This finding supports Arowolo’s investigation of (2014) which revealed that there is significant relationship between couples sexual satisfaction and their marital stability. His finding gives credence to Hamon (2012) assertion that sexuality is an important part of life and an integral aspect of any emotional relationship. He stated that the more you invest in your romantic life, the more rewards you will reap. Haman opined that sex is like oil which is meant to lubricate every other aspect of one’s marital life, all or most aspect of one’s marital life will tend to move swiftly when the oil is in good condition but when the oil is in bad condition, then the result could be very devastating.

The research has also found out that there is no significant difference between old and young married couples in their identification of cultural background as determinant of marriage stability. This may be due to the fact that in inter-tribal marriages, couples (young or old) make extra efforts to imbibe the culture of their spouses and if this cannot be attained, the marital stability may be in jeopardy. This finding gives credence to Iriogbe (2015) when he stated that the cultural background of the couples is a very strong determinant of marriage stability. He asserted that in Nigeria, cultural background and affiliation of couple could determine how they relate to each other, find solutions to common marital issues which when handled early and appropriately, will minimize distress in the family.

Finally, the study found out that, there is no significant difference between married couples from Kogi and Benue States in their identification of communication as determinant of marriage stability. This finding gives credence to Ojukwu and Obiji (2016) when they maintained that free communication in marriage is the oil that greases the maintenance affair from being degraded. They stressed that where one of the partners in marriage relation has developed a dissatisfaction about the attitude of his or her partner, one negative thing that develops from that, is poor communication. This finding equally supports Esere (2007) who stressed that more than half of failed relationships are due to severe lack of communication between couples.



## 12. Conclusion

The conclusion that may be drawn as a result of the findings is that some of the pillars for marriage stability are effective communication between marriage couples, strong sexual satisfaction of married partners, ability of married couples to have children and common cultural background of the married couples. Their absence in a marriage could spell doom and probably lead to divorce.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) In marriages, where, children delay in coming, couples should seek medical assistance and also be positive about such outcomes instead of engaging in negative and illogical thinking.
- 2) Families of couples faced with the problem of childlessness should be supportive and not indulge in behaviours that could threaten the stability of such marriages.
- 3) Married partners should strive towards achieving sexual satisfaction as this may foster marital stability. They should realize that sex is an obligation in marriage and should not deny themselves of it.
- 4) Parents and significant others in the lives of youths should advise them on the need to get married to people of common cultural background since it may promote the speaking of same dialect and bring about similarities to the way they approach family matters.

## Counselling Implications

Some of the counseling implications are as follows:

- 1) Marriage counsellors are to organize seminars for married persons (couples) to make them realize the importance of sex in a marriage, the consequences of denying a partner of his/her sexual rights and techniques of enhancing sexual satisfaction.
- 2) On a regular basis, marriage counsellors should organize seminars and workshops for couples to create in them the awareness of the role of communication in marriage as well as the skills of effective communication.
- 3) There is need for counsellors to organize pre-marital counseling for would-be couples to acquaint them about courtship, sex education and marriage responsibility before marriage.
- 4) Different zones of each State Chapter of the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) are to organize seminars, workshops and conferences for married members of the public on factors that can hamper marital stability such as sex, communication, childlessness and cultural background.
- 5) The Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should encourage more of her members to set-up counselling clinics in different parts of the country so that couples with marital problems could avail themselves of such opportunity.
- 6) Marriage counsellors are to counsel couples in inter-tribal marriages so as to tolerate the cultural differences of their spouses (in terms of dressing, dialect and food) and enjoy harmonious relationship.

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