

GENDER DIFFERENCE IN MARITAL SATISFACTION OF COUPLES IN RURAL FARMING HOUSEHOLDS OF AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the gender differences in marital satisfaction of couples in rural farming households of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The objectives of the study were to examine the demographic characteristics of married couples in rural farming households in the study area; determine the respondents' levels of marital satisfaction; and ascertain the difference in the levels of marital satisfaction between the male and female respondents. The study relied mainly on primary data collected via questionnaire which were administered to 160 respondents. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings indicated that the mean age of the respondents is 37 years, 62.7% of them are females and majority of them are functionally literate. The study further revealed that majority of the respondents had high level of marital satisfaction; and that a significant statistical difference exists in the levels of marital satisfaction between the male and female respondents.

Keywords: Gender difference, marital, satisfaction, rural, Akwa Ibom.

INTRODUCTION

In most societies, the family is a fundamental institution in which new generations are socialized (Rostami, Ghazinour, Nygren and Richter, 2014). It is perceived as a most important building block to any society. Rabello, Silva Jr and Brito (2014) opined that marriage is the socially approved practice that serves for the conception of the family institution. Marriage is the legal and social union of members, of usually two opposite sex (Maryam and Mahmood, 2014); it is a highly valued social institution in the rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (Asa, 2017).

After marriage, individuals seek a life full of happiness and satisfaction; therefore, more significant than marriage itself is success in marriage and marital satisfaction (Pakravan, Haghayegh, Nshatdoust and Molavi, 2014; Narimani, Porzor, Atadokht and Abbasi; 2015). One of the most important factors and determinants of mental health, emotional stability of couples and successful marriage is marital satisfaction (Zaheri, Dolatian, Shariati, Simbar, Ebadi, Batool and Azghadi, 2016); hence, one of the most important goals of marriage being the need to attain marital satisfaction (Heshmati, Behnampour, Arabameri, Khajavi and Kohan, 2016).

Marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person (Baumeister and Vohs, 2006; Zainab, Nasir, Hashim and Yusuf, 2012). It can be viewed as a sense of happiness, satisfaction and joy experienced by the husband or wife when they consider all aspects of their marriage (Tavakol, Nasrabadi, Moghadam, Salehiniya and Rezaei, 2017). Marital satisfaction can therefore be assessed by the apparent advantage and marriage costs of a person (Maryam and Mahmood, 2014). As the costs increase, the level of satisfaction about the marriage and marriage partner decreases. Alternatively, if the supposed benefits exceed the costs, the level of marriage satisfaction increases.

Marital satisfaction has an impact on an individual's social life and social status (Maryam and Mahmood, 2014). It can affect not only the physical and mental health of both spouses (Holt-Lunstand, Birmingham and Jones, 2008; Le Poire, 2005), but also their children's development, well-being, biological functions, academic performance, social skills and relationships (Cummings and Davis, 2010; Hetherington and Kelly, 2002). Marital satisfaction is also one of the most important indicators of life satisfaction and family performance (Tavakol *et al*, 2017). It is associated with plenty of positive outcomes such as better quality of life, higher general life satisfaction, more happiness, better physical health, and better family well-being (Yucel and Koydemir, 2015). On the other hand, unhappily married individuals often fare worse than divorced, widowed, or single individuals in terms of well-being. A decrease in marital satisfaction not only creates an inappropriate atmosphere in a family but also leads to family instability and divorce (Mirfardi, Edalati and Redzuan, 2010).

Given the importance of satisfying marriages for individuals and societal well-being (Bradbury, Fincham, and Beach, 2000), the factors that contribute to happy marriages have been the focus of a considerable number of research studies. Bayle, Ayalem and Yimere (2017) reported that marital satisfaction is affected by the following factors: level of education, number of children, spousal infidelity, marriage type, leisure spending, interest difference, openness among couples, poverty, economic background, educational background, religious background, ethnic background, age difference, place of birth, religious-discordant marriage, adultery, early marriage, in-laws interference, family size and sexual compatibility. Other factors that have considerable influence on marital satisfaction, according to Tavakol *et al* (2017), are demographic specifications, personality attributes, attachment style, relationship, communication and intimacy, couples' families, forgiveness and sacrifice, religion, emotional intelligence, personal health and sex. Gender represents a further predictor of particular importance for marital satisfaction (Rostami *et al*, 2014). Gender roles have often been used to explain differences in marital quality and perceptions of well-being (Mickelson, Claffey and Williams, 2006). However, there is a lack of scientific investigation on marital satisfaction in Akwa Ibom State that takes gender differences into account. This study therefore aimed at filling this research gap by examining gender difference in marital satisfaction of couples in rural farming households of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study is also germane because of an increasing interest in studies on marital satisfaction in non-Western contexts which can provide valuable data to help clarify cultural similarities and differences (Gold, 2006; Onyishi, Sorokowski, Sorokowska, and Pipitonec, 2012; Madanian, Mohammed and Mansor, 2013). The specific objectives of this study were to:

- i. examine the demographic characteristics of married couples in rural farming households of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria,
- ii. determine the respondents' levels of marital satisfaction, and
- iii. ascertain the differences in the levels of marital satisfaction between the male and female respondents.

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The State occupies a total land area of 7,245,935km² and lies between 4⁰33" and 5⁰33" North latitudes and between 7⁰35" and 8⁰25" East longitudes. Akwa Ibom State has an estimated population of 3,920,208 (National Population Commission, 2006), and is wedged between Cross River, Abia and Rivers States of Nigeria. The respondents for this study were selected using the multi-stage sampling procedure. The first stage of the multi-stage sampling procedure. The first stage of the sampling procedure involved the random selection of four local government areas out of the thirty one local government areas in Akwa Ibom State. The second stage involved the purposive selection of forty rural farming households in each of the selected four Local Government Areas. Purposive selection was used at this stage to ensure that only rural farming households were selected since the study was primarily focused on rural farming households in the State. The third, and last, stage of the sampling procedure involved the purposive selection of one married couple in each of the selected farming households at the second stage of the multi-stage sampling procedure. The adoption of purposive selection in the third stage ensured that only married couples were selected for the study. The multi-stage sampling procedure resulted in a sample size of 160 respondents. SPSS version 22.0 was employed to analyze the quantitative data, and different statistical tests were used in line with their assumptions. Descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages and mean as well as an inferential statistic (the independent t-test) were employed for the analysis endeavour. The demographic characteristics of the respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency distribution, percentages and means. The respondents' levels of marital satisfaction were ascertained using the 32-item Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) adopted from the validated Couples Satisfaction Index of Fung and Rogge (2007). The mean of the summated scores of the MSS (92) serves as the cut-off point between low and high levels of marital satisfaction of the respondents. The t-test was used to ascertain the difference in the levels of marital satisfaction between the male and female respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic characteristics of married couples in rural farming households of Akwa Ibom State

The demographic characteristics of the respondents, as shown in Table 1, reveals that their mean age is 37 years and 62.7% of them were females. Majority of the respondents (90.7%) had formal education and 86% of their spouses also had formal education. The result reveals a high level of literacy among married couples in the study area which is synonymous with the finding of Asa (2017) who also reported a high level of literacy among married couples in the rural areas of Akwa Ibom State. Over eighty percent of the respondents (81.3%) earned less than/equal to ₦100,000. 00 monthly which suggests that most of them earn a relatively low level of income. The result agrees with Etim (2006) who reported a low level of income among rural households in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The average household size of the respondents comprised of five persons which is almost similar to the finding of Asa and Nkan (2017) who reported that the average household size of rural dwellers in Akwa Ibom State comprised of six persons. The Table also reveals that Christianity is the predominant religion (97.3%) practised by rural farming households in the study area; that the average years of farming experience of the respondents is sixteen years; and that their average duration of marriage is seventeen years. Asa and Nkan (2017) also reported that the average years of marriage of married couples in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State is seventeen years.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of married couples in rural farming households in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Age	Less than 21 years	11	7.3	37
	21-40 years	91	60.7	
	41-60 years	38	25.3	
	61-80 years	10	6.7	
Sex	Male	56	37.3	
	Female	94	62.7	
Educational status	No formal education	14	9.3	
	Primary education	29	19.3	
	Secondary education	41	27.3	
	Tertiary education	66	44.0	
Monthly income (in Naira)	≤ 100,000.00	122	81.3	
	> 100,000.00	28	18.7	
Household size	1-6 person(s)	113	75.3	5
	7-12 persons	37	24.7	
Religion	Christianity	146	97.3	
	Non-Christianity	4	2.7	
Farming experience	1-20 year(s)	110	73.3	16
	21-40 years	40	26.7	
Duration of marriage	1-20 year(s)	98	65.3	17
	21-40 years	52	34.7	

Note: Naira (N) is the Nigerian currency and 1.00 US Dollar equals to 361.50 Nigerian Naira as at September 24, 2019

Levels of marital satisfaction of married couples in rural farming households of Akwa Ibom State

The summated scores of the Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) was used to ascertain the respondents' levels of marital satisfaction as depicted in Table 2. The Table reveals that 62.7% of the respondents had a high level of marital satisfaction while 37.3% had a low level of marital satisfaction. The result reveals a relatively low level of marital satisfaction among married couples in the study area which could be attributed to the high social value placed on the marriage institution in the rural areas of Akwa Ibom State (Ekong, 2003).

Table 2: Distribution of respondents based on their levels of marital satisfaction

Levels of marital satisfaction	MSS score	Frequency	Percentage
Low	< 92	56	37.3
High	≥ 92	94	62.7
Total		150	100

Difference in levels of marital satisfaction between male and female respondents

The independent t-test analysis result of the difference in levels of marital satisfaction between the male and female respondents is shown in Table 3. The Table reveals that a significant difference exists in the levels of marital satisfaction due to the gender of the respondents at 0.05 level of significance. The finding corroborates Jackson, Miller, Oka and Henry (2014) who reported a statistically significant gender difference in marital satisfaction between wives and husbands. Marryam and Mahmood (2014) also reported that a significant difference exists

on the basis of gender on marital satisfaction in their study on marital satisfaction and social relations among diabetic patients.

Table 3: t-test analysis result of differences in levels of marital satisfaction between male and female respondents

Groups	n	Mean	t cal	Critical t	Decision
Male respondents	56	54.24	2.83	1.97	Significant
Female respondents	94	42.31			

Note: degree of freedom = 148, level of significance = 0.05

CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to assess the gender difference in marital satisfaction of rural farming households in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Three specific objectives were formulated for the study. Results were established using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Result revealed a high level of marital satisfaction among the respondents, even though a significant percentage of the respondents (37.3%) were dissatisfied in their marriages. It is necessary to investigate the factors that help create and increase marital satisfaction among married couples in the study area because of this significant percentage of respondents who were dissatisfied in their marriages. Family counsellors and therapists can also benefit from this result to obtain a deeper perception of the foundations of married life and, eventually to help decrease the rate of divorce in the society. More importantly, result also revealed a significant gender-wise difference in marital satisfaction between married couples in rural areas of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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