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A Comparative Gender Study on Influence of Age at Marriage and Marital Trust on Marital Satisfaction

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Abstract

The rate at which couples dissolve marriages or couples separation in Nigeria has become so alarming; thus, necessitating this study that examined the influence of gender, age at marriage, and marital trust on marital satisfaction. 284 males and females participated in this study. Their ages ranged from 18 to 47 years; with a mean age of 28.8, and standard deviation of 6.9.Two instruments were used for data collection, they are:Index of Marital Satisfaction, and Trust Scale. However, data for age at marriage, and gender were collected using the demographic information. The study utilized a factorial, and correlational research design, while independent t-test, and simple linear regression statistics were adopted for analysis. The results of the study indicated that the first hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant difference between those that married earlier, and those that married later on marital satisfaction was accepted att (283) = 4.54, p= .000. Also, the second hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant different between males and females on marital satisfaction was accepted at t (283) = 2.65, p= .009. Furthermore, it was found that the third hypothesis which stated that marital trust will positively and significantly predict marital satisfaction was also accepted at β =.252, t = 4.37, p=000. Since the researchers' found that marital trust predicted marital satisfaction, the researchers' recommended among other, that marriage counsellors should lay emphasis on the need for trust between couples, as well as the importance of avoiding life styles that can endanger the trust they share during marital counselling.

Keywords: Influence, Age, Gender, Marital trust, Marital satisfaction

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Introduction

Marriage institution was made to be a lifelong commitment between two partners; with trust, confidence in each other as among the factors for peaceful coexistence (Mefoh, cited in Kolawole & Abu, 2017). However, marriage institution in recent times has been experiencing a steady increase in failure, and inability to peacefully resolve conflicts. As such, most of the married couples become dissatisfied in their marriage. Thus, accounting for the high rate of marital dissolutions observed among many couples in Nigeria. According to Solivertti, cited in Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2024), over 11% per every 1000 marriages ended up in divorce. This issue of marriage dissolution has become so bad to the extent that some newly married couples separate in less than one year into their union of marriage. Thus, leading to the questions; what is happening and what could be the factor causing the observed high rate of marital dissolution in our society?

Notably, the goal of every married couple is to enjoy marital satisfaction. Hence, the upsurge in marital dissolutions in our society could be ensuing from poor martial satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept; including psychological, socioeconomic and spiritual components; and has been observed to vary from one researcher to another, based on their operational definition. Thus, the criteria for a satisfying marital relationship could differ from one person to another, and could be dependent on one's expectations and perceived sense of fulfillment. For instance, Vaez and Juhari (2017), and Al-Darmaki et al. (2014), highlighted education, socioeconomic status, locality of residence, trust, age, love, commitment, marital communication, conflict, and gender as factors that could be associated with marital satisfaction. Furthermore, Mary and Winifred (2012) stated that age is not just a marker for development and maturity, but also signal differences in life experiences; in terms of financial security, career establishment, and sense of readiness for the task associated with parenting; thus, making one's age at marriage a likely factor in marital satisfaction. The forgoing on the likelihood of age and trust as factors associated with marital satisfaction, necessitated the rationale for examining the likely influence of age at marriage and marital trust, on marital satisfaction; as well as further comparing the gender differences on marital satisfaction.

Age at marriage is conceptualized as the age of either the man or the woman at the time of marriage, and is beyond the marker of maturation and development. But an indicant of one's readiness in managing the responsibilities associated with parenting (Mary & Winifred, 2012). According to U.S. Census Bureau (2004), the ages of first entries into marriage has not been static, but have always been fluctuating over the years. In the 1900s for instance, the observed median age at which men and women marry was 26 years for men, and 22 years for women. Noticeable, the age of first entry into marriage dropped between 1950-1960 to 23 for men and 20 for women. However, a noticeable delay in first entry to marriage has been observed since 1960 till 2003; recording 27 for men and 25 for women (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

Another factor that could impact marital satisfaction is the level of trust shared by married couples. According to Atta et al. (2013) marital trust is as an important factor that account for couples' marital satisfaction. Thus, discrepancies in the level of trust couples' share impacts the level of marital satisfaction they enjoy in their union. Finkenauer et al. (2009) opined that when trust among couples is constantly worked upon, their relationships get stronger, increasing the tendency of sharing intimate thoughts, and feelings. Couch and Jones (1997) asserted that the level or amount of trust shared by married couples' is among the indicants of the level of marital satisfaction they enjoy in their union. While Kelley and Burgoon (1991) stated that any relationship that is without trust is practically meaningless. Thus, it can be stated that trust is the secret ingredient of a healthy relationship that allows the couples to come closer, and develop an intimate relationship (Lazelere & Huston, 1980).

Gender as an important factor in marital satisfaction is define according to WHO (2024) as one's characteristics of being a woman or man, boy, or girl, and it is socially constructed. This social construct includes the norms, roles, and behavioural expectations, expected of each gender, and

could account for the disparities observed in gender differences on marital satisfaction; ensuring from the constant pressure in meeting up with the social expectation; which differs across culture. Several scholars asserted their positions on gender disparities on marital satisfaction, resulting from their empirical observations. For instance, Connides (2001) opined that women experience less marital satisfaction than men. According to Whiteman et al. (2007), women's level of marital satisfaction is lesser than that of men. Furthermore, Amato et al. (2007) stated that there is difference between male and female on marital satisfaction. However, Atkinson (1987) argued that the disparities observed among gender differences on marital satisfaction is the resultant of the differences in participants that participated in the study, methods adopted in the studies, and the measurement techniques utilized in most of the studies. More so, the observation of Jackson (2014) indicated that there is no gender difference on marital satisfaction. Hence, necessitating the need to examine the influence of factors such as age at marriage and marital trust on marital satisfaction and as well as to comparatively examine the differences between male and female on marital satisfaction so as to add more evidence on gender implications on marital satisfaction.

Statement of the Problem

Successful marriage is an intrinsic part of our contemporary conception of a meaningful and rich life. Thus, marital happiness is the largest contributor to overall happiness for married individuals, and is strongly associated with physical and psychological wellbeing (Dabone, 2014). As such, unhealthy relationships that lack marital happiness mostly ends in divorce, due to the fact that they don't fulfill the happy, long lasting, and meaningful criteria for a rich life. Thus, could account for the observed increase in divorce in our society. For instance, findings in some scholarly works; such as Abamara et al. (2018), and that of Samson (2021) on marital satisfaction and divorce indicated an increasing trend in divorce among Nigeria couples. Thus, making current divorce trend a societal problem; resulting from poor marital satisfaction. Inasmuch as Jose and Alfons (2007), Atta et al., (2013), Dabone (2014), Asif and Saim (2018), Aneetha et al. (2019), Arora and Shetgovekar (2021), and Samson (2021) investigated age, and trust, in associating to marital satisfaction, none to the best of the researchers' knowledge assessed the influence of age at entry of marriage and marital trust, on marital satisfaction among dwellers within the south eastern Nigeria. Hence, the need for this study that examined the influence of age at marriage, and marital trust, on marital satisfaction among married couples in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. Furthermore, this present study aimed at comparing the gender differences on marital satisfaction. So as to fill the observed gap in knowledge, as well as add novel empirical evidence in the bank of knowledge, in respect to the study variables.

Theoretical Framework/Empirical Review

The Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction

Marital goal is a core element in the dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction by Li and Fung (2011). The theory argues that whether marital goals, especially, the prioritized ones, are achieved in marriage, is the most essential determinant of marital satisfaction. To be more specific, the four

key elements of dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction are that. 1, people have multiple goals that they want to achieve in their marriage. 2, the priority of different marital goals changes dynamically across adulthood. So to say, prioritized goals and the desire for such achievement is age determined. By implication, age determines an individual's set goals in marriage. 3, whether the prioritized marital goals in a certain developmental stage are met impacts marital satisfaction. 4, other factors can also affect marital satisfaction by either changing the priority of different marital goals or by facilitating the achievement of the prioritized marital goals. Hence, the level of trust an individual has on their partner's ability to help him or her achieves their set goal will invariably determine the level of the individual's satisfaction in the marital. Also, as cultural expectations on each gender differs, such differences in expectations could be a source of stress that indirectly impact gender set goals and expectations in marriage; thus, influencing marital satisfaction.

Some studies have established an association between age and marital satisfaction; studies like: Jose and Alfons (2007), Nwoke and Oparaocha (2012), Dabone (2014), and Samson (2021); that investigated an association between age and marital satisfaction. In their findings, Jose and Alfons (2007) found among others, that a relationship existed between age, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. More so, Dabone (2014), and Samson (2021), found an association between age and marital satisfaction. However, Nwoke and Oparaocha (2012) found that age is not a predictor of marital satisfaction. An association between trust and marital satisfaction was reported in the studies of Atta et al. (2013), Asif and Saim (2018), and Aneetha et al. (2019). Their findings indicated that marital trust is a predictor of marital satisfaction. Furthermore, Fowers (1991), and Jackson et al. (2014) in their studies found that gender impacts marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis

1. There will be a significant different between male and female on marital satisfaction
2. There will be a significant difference between those that married earlier and those who married later on marital satisfaction.
3. Marital trust will positive and significantly predict marital satisfaction.

Method

Study Design

This research is a survey study that adopted a factorial, and correlational research design to examine the association between age at marriage, trust, and marital satisfaction; as well as comparatively investigate the impact of gender on marital satisfaction. Furthermore, simple linear regression, and independent t-test were adopted as the statistical tools for analyzing the data.

Participants

The participants of this study were two hundred and eighty four (284) married males and females, within Nnamdi Azikiwe University Community. Among the participants, 138 were married students, both in regular and continuous education program (CEP) while 146 were married staff. Men among the participants were 112 (39.3) while women were 172 (60.4). Their age ranged from 18 to 47 years with mean age of 28.8 and standard deviation of 6.9.

Instruments

In this study, two instruments were used for data collection, they include: Index of Marital Satisfaction, and Trust scale (TS). More so, data for age at entry of marriage and gender were collected using information in the demographic section.

Index of Marital Satisfaction

The index of marital satisfaction (IMS) is a 25 item questionnaire developed by Hudson (1982) to measure the degree, severity or magnitude of the problems one spouse or partner perceived to be having in the marital relationship with their partner. The focus is on current problems which have reduced marital satisfaction. It is measured on a five point likert scale, ranging from 1= rarely or none of the time, to 5 = most of all of the time; and the items are either scored direct, or a reverse scoring. Direct scored items include: 2,4,6,7,10,12,14,15,18,22,24, and 25 and the reverse scored items are: 1,3,5,8,9,11,13,16,17,20,21, and 23.

a. Reliability: Hudson (1982) reported a Cronbach Alpha internal consistency of .96, and 2-hour-test-retest of .96.

b. Validity: Anene (1994) reported a concurrent validity coefficient of .48 by correlating IMS with Marital Stress Inventory (MSI).

Trust scale (TS)

Trust in Close Relationships Scale is a 17-item scale developed by Rempel et al. (1985). It is used to assess trust among partners. TS is divided into 3 sub-scales which included: predictability, dependability, and faith scale. The positive items are: 1-3, 7-13, and 15-17. While the negative items are: 4-6, and 14. TS is measured on a 7-point Likert- scale which ranged from 1 (strongly disagree), to 7 (strongly agree). High scores reflect better trust in a relationship.

a. Reliability: Rempel et al. (1985) reported an overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .81, .80, and .72 for faith, dependability, and predictability respectively. But .70 for the total scale

Inclusion Criteria

To be selected for this study, participant must

1. Be married for a minimum of one year
2. Be willing to be part of the study
3. Be within the age of consent and agree to be part of the study; by signing the consent form.
4. Be a member of the University Community; either as a staff or student.

Procedure

A letter of introduction was obtained from the Head, Department of Psychology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria; introducing the researchers as members and affiliates of the University that are conducting a study, focusing on marital satisfaction. After the letter has been obtained, purposive sampling method was used in selecting three hundred (300) participants that were administered the copies of the questionnaire; after they had signed the consent form. Of the three hundred (300) administered questionnaire, two hundred and ninety seven (297) copies were returned, and two hundred and eighty four properly filled copies were scanned, and coded in SPSS, and were used for analysis.

Statistics

The researchers adopted a factorial, and correlational research design; while simple linear regression and independent t-test were used as the statistical tools for analyzing the data. Simple linear regression statistics was used to test the predictive relationship between marital trust and marital satisfaction; while independent t-test was used to test age, and gender on marital satisfaction.

Results

Table 1: Summary table of Independent t-test for age at marriage and gender on marital satisfaction

Variables	M	SD	M	SD	t(282	P	Lower	Upper
	Male		**Female**					
Marital S	5.24	1.87	5.78	1.37	2.65	.009	.9009	1.647
	Early Marriage		**Later Marriage**					
Marital S	6.09	1.23	5.29	1.79	4.54	.000	.4544	1.749

Table 1 showed that there was a significant difference between male (M=5.24, SD=1.87), compared to female (M=5.78, SD, 1.37) on marital satisfaction. Thus, the first hypothesis that stated that there will be a significant different between male and female on marital satisfaction was accepted at t (283) = 2.65, p= .009; indicating that gender is among the factors that determines one's level of marital satisfaction. It was also found from the table, that there was a significant difference between those that married early (M=6.09,SD=1.23), compared to those that married later (M=5.28, SD,1.71) on marital satisfaction. Hence, the second hypothesis of the study which stated that there will be a statistically significant difference between those that married earlier and those that married later on marital satisfaction was accepted at t (283) = 4.54, p= .000; indicating that one's age at entry into marital union is a factor that can influence their marital satisfaction.

Table 2: Summary table of simple linear regression predicting marital satisfaction from marital trust

	R square	Adjusted R^2	df1	df2	F	B	SE	T	Sig
Model 1	.064	.060	1	282	19.13				
Mtrust						.252	.165	4.375	.000

Note, Mtrust=marital trust, p<.001

The result from table 2 above showed that marital trust predicted marital satisfaction at (β =.252, t = 4.37, p=000). Hence, the third hypothesis that stated that marital trust will positively and significantly predict marital satisfaction was accepted; indicating that as marital trust increases, marital satisfaction increases as well.

Discussion

This study examined the influence gender, age at marriage, and marital trust on marital satisfaction. Three hypotheses were postulated in this study and tested with two statistics: independent t- test, and simple linear regression. The analysis indicated that gender is a factor that determines one level of marital satisfaction. Also, one's age at entry into marital union was found to be among the factors that determines marital satisfaction. Furthermore, marital trust was found to predict marital satisfaction. These findings showed that these study variables (gender, age at marriage, marital

trust) are associated with marital satisfaction. Hence, hypotheses number one, two and three were accepted.

The confirmation of the first hypothesis indicated that there was a gender differences in marital satisfaction. So to say, both males and females are not satisfied in marriage equally. This finding is in line with that of Fowers (1991) that conducted a study titled his and her marriage: A is in line with that of Fowers (1991) that conducted a study titled his and her marriage: A multivariate study of gender and marital satisfaction; and found that there was a gender difference in marital satisfaction. Also, Jackson et al. (2014) investigated gender differences in marital satisfaction: A meta-analysis, and found a significant difference between husbands and wives on marital satisfaction.

The second hypothesis was also accepted which showed that one's age at entry into marital union is among the determinant factors in marital satisfaction. This observation could be because, most of the times, the people that marry early, mostly marry out of mutual love, learn each other marital goals and expectations, as well as grow older in love. While those that marry later mostly marry out of societal pressure, resulting from their single status, at some certain age. This observation is in line with the finding of Dabone (2014) that examined whether age was a determinant factor in marital satisfaction levels of married people in the Sunyani Municipality of Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana. His finding indicated that both younger and older married people in the municipality were dissatisfied with their marriages. However, he found that the younger ones were significantly more dissatisfied than the older ones. The dissonance between the finding of Dabone (2014), and that of this present study could be the resultant of differences in location, culture, and research designs both studies adopted. Furthermore, Samson (2021) in his study that investigated the implication of age at marriage and marital satisfaction, found that there was an interaction between age and marital satisfaction.

The third hypothesis of this study was also accepted, indicating that marital trust is a significant factor in marital satisfaction. This finding is in consonance with that of Atta et al. (2013). They examined the role of trust in marital satisfaction and found that trust is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction for single career couples, dual career couples, and for the whole sample respectively. Also, Asif and Saim (2018) investigated the role of trust in marital satisfaction. Their finding indicated that trust is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction for single career couples and for dual-career couples respectively. Aneetha et al. (2019) investigated marital adjustment and trust among the married couples. Their finding showed that there was a significant positive correlation between marital adjustment, and trust. Furthermore, Arora and Shetgovekar (2021) examined trust and marital satisfaction among love and arrange married couples. In their findings, marital trust was observed to be a factor associated with marital satisfaction among love and arranged married couples.

Implication of the study

This study examined influence of age at marriage, and marital trust on marital satisfaction; while comparing the gender differences, and found significant implications.

1. The findings in this study implied that age at which a person entered into marriage is among the factors that determines the persons marital satisfaction; hence, validating the theoretical framework of this study which is dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction that holds that three different types of marital goals exist that bring about marital satisfaction; and they are influenced by age, and changes as one grow older.
2. Practically, the findings in this study will help marriage counsellors working with married couples to know areas to look for, when dealing with marital dissatisfaction.
3. The findings will also help policy makers, social media houses, and stakeholder to know appropriate issues to include in premarital counselling.

Limitation of the study

As with most survey research that depend on self-reportage as means of data collection, there are possibility that the respondent might have responded in a way that will make them look socially acceptable, by presenting themselves, and their marital relationship as perfect; thus, negatively affecting the outcome of the study. Nonetheless, during data collection, the respondents personal information like name, address or phone number were excluded from the demographic information requested form them. Also, they were assured that their personal information will be kept confidential. Thus, would have increased the respondents' sincerity in their responses.

Recommendations

These recommendations were made in line with the findings of this study

1. Seeing that gender was found to be among the factors that determine marital satisfaction; which could be the resultant of cultural expectations placed on male genders; as females were found to be more satisfied in marriage, it is recommended that males should adopt lifestyles that will make them satisfied in their marital relationship. Also, they shoul avoid unhealthy competitions and pressures.
2. Seeing that age at marriage and marital trust were among the factors that impacts marital satisfaction, marriage counsellors and therapist should develop interventions that will help unsatisfied couples to improve on the amount of trust they share. Also, society, and family members should support, and encourage their relatives to marry early.
3. Since trust predicted marital satisfaction, it is recommended that marriage counsellors should lay emphasis on the need for trust between couples, as well as the importance of avoiding life styles that can endanger the trust they share during marital counselling.

Conclusion

This present study comparatively examined the influence of gender, age at marriage and marital trust on marital satisfaction among married couples in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria. From the research objectives, three hypotheses were proposed and tested. All the tested hypotheses were all accepted which indicated that gender, age at which one got married, as well as the amount of trust shared by married couples were found to be among the significant factors that determines marital satisfaction of married couples.

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