

Length of Marriage and Marital Adjustment of Christian Couples in Lagos State

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Abstract

This paper investigated the association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos. Multistage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 90 respondents for the study. Orthodox, Pentecostal and the Catholic churches were purposively selected from the CAN blocs. One research question and two hypotheses guided the study. The findings reveal that majority of Christian couples in Lagos state have stayed long in their marriages. Hence, we accept the hypothesis that there is no significant association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos.

Keywords: adjustment, couples, length, marital, marriage

Introduction

Marriage is a universal phenomenon irrespective of religion. Rich and the poor, educated and uneducated, people from different cultures all converge at this crucial matter of relationship between a man and his wife.

Marriage from various perspectives. For instance, Nwoye (1991) defines marriage as a sacred and permanent contract between a man and a woman who decide, on their own accord and in the presence of at least two witnesses, to live, love, care and promote each other's growth and welfare. From these definitions, marriage involves a man and a woman who consent to live as husband and wife, with social approval and permanency—"till death do us part."

Marriage is a legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife. It is usually formalized through some type of solemnization, which may be wedding in the church, mosque or contracted in the registry or in accordance with native law and custom. It is a life-long union, full of expectations and obligations. One of these obligations is the expectation that each should help the other to grow, to promote a life of fidelity and sincerity to each other so that the mutual trust required for the union to grow can be strongly safeguarded. There should be no problem or conflict between the couple that can justify divorce or separation, hence the need for marital adjustment among couples. Marriage assumes any of the following major types, monogamy and polygamy, as well as secondary types as practiced in different societies in Africa such as levirate marriage, ghost marriage (Ezema, 2001).

Most couples entering a first marriage want the best for their future. They

get married believing that marriage will last forever because they love each other. However, this belief is a misconception which can be devastating to a marriage (Larson, 2002).

Kehinde (2002) however, defines marriage as a house; while new, it sparkles with fresh smells with lots of surprises, romance and new discoveries about those involved, which makes each day exciting to both partners but experience show that not long after a family is established, both partners become major sources of each other's problems.

Marriage is the coming together of two totally different people as husband and wife who agree to plan and set up a family. Ogunsanmi (2005) views marriage as an agreement between a man and a woman who take vows to love and cherish each other, stay together through sickness and health. Marriage is a social institution for the union of man and his wife in body and soul. Marriage fosters the coming together of two totally different individuals with their personality traits as husband and wife, to plan for the future and set up their own family. In speaking of the motives of marriage, the chief satisfaction which a couple seeks in the marital relationship is the security of an enduring affection and companionship, a satisfying sexual relation, and the building of a home and family (Olayinka 2005).

According to De-Vries (2006), marriage is more than love. It consists of a life of effort and concern, felicitation and melancholy, illness and health. It consists of being young and becoming old, dealing with small and big problems, coping with internal and external hardships, and threats. A lot of days, weeks, months, and years are lived jointly. During this lengthy phase, the couple lives together in proximity, which unveils all their strengths and weaknesses to each other. It soon becomes clear that big things can matter very little, while small things can become awfully big.

The chief functions of marriage and family are to provide a forum for affection and emotional security for sex satisfaction, procreation and also for the transfer of cultural heritage from one generation to another. Only within the framework of marriage and family can a man and woman best develop the full sense of togetherness, belongingness, responsibility and interdependence. Without marriage stability, all the noble ideas enumerated above cannot be accomplished (Olayinka 2005). Marriage is an ancient practice, although its meaning may have changed throughout time and space. Arshad, Khalid and Mahmood, (2014).

However, disagreements and conflicts are part of the daily lives of many couples because marriage provides a fertile ground in which the seeds of conflict can germinate (Lingren, 1997). Conflict is also inevitable. Most marriages these days are riddled and afflicted with problem of maladjustment that often results in divorce. It is difficult to provide accurate statistics of the actual rate

of divorce in Nigeria due to the fact that not all cases of divorce are reported and recorded, but literate and media reports indicate a high rate (Yahaya 2008). Esere (2000) however notes that about 40% of the marriages contracted every year in Nigeria end up in divorce or separation. Similarly (Hurley, 2005) states that divorce rate has increased markedly in United States, Britain, South Korea, Canada, Brazil, Nigeria and South Africa, among many other.

Marital Adjustment

Marital adjustment, according to Osiki (1989), is a process whereby two individuals, through consent, become husband and wife and are living in a healthy relationship despite all odds. The husband and wife see each other first as individuals with different backgrounds and orientation, which help them maintain a “give-and-take” relationship.

Marital adjustment is the condition of mutual understanding, love, care and happiness between couples and in the family. Marital adjustment is the condition in which there is usually a feeling of pleasure and contentment in husband and wife and with each other. (Hashmi, Khurshid & Hassan, 2000). Marital adjustment is the process during which partners in a marriage adapt and change to their new roles complementing each other acting as a team as opposed to two separate units. It is also important to unify the following: interests and values, maintaining open lines of communication and encouraging the expression of each other’s communication (Nugent, 2013).

Marital adjustment refers to the process of adapting to marital challenges which couples face in marriage. It may be used interchangeably with happiness, lack of distress, quality, and satisfaction. Marital adjustment involves the series of behaviours used in coping with new demands of the marriage relationship as they emerge whereby the couples change their expectations of their partners. It is a union in which husband and wife are in agreement with the main issues of marriage such as handling finances, listening to each other, avoiding unnecessary criticism, dealing with in-laws, in which they would have come to an adjustment on interest, objectives and values in which they are in harmony and demonstrations of affection and sharing confidence and which then have few or no complaints about marriage (Yahaya & Esere, 2008).

A couple that is in loving affection will adjust to each other and have a healthy family relationship which translates to family stability. An adjusted marriage is one in which each spouse is a source of emotional support, companionship, sexual satisfaction and economic support for each other, where the reverse is the case, we have lack of marital adjustment. Lack of marital adjustment can be caused by early marriage, educational status, finance, parental modelling, communication gap, influence of in-laws and other habits. Salako & Feyisetan (2014). Marital adjustment could therefore be referred to as the var-

ious adaptive steps that couples take to cope with different conditions. Some of the adjustment areas include individual taste, likes and dislikes, choice and many others (Aina, 2013).

Marital adjustment is the process of changing, adapting, and correcting the behaviour and interaction of individuals and couples in order to achieve maximum satisfaction (Bali & Diğ, 2010). Marital adjustment is referred to as marital happiness, marital success, and a state of well-being, marital satisfaction, and marital quality. It is also referred to as coping capabilities in marriage. The unfortunate thing, according to Ariyo (2004) is that when marital challenges occur, many marriages become disestablished. Many marriages become disestablished when the couples are not able to manage challenges such as challenges of resolving their conflicts, sexual fulfillment, good communication, mutual commitment, child bearing and rearing. The phenomenon of marital problem is worldwide, not limited to Nigeria alone. The statistics released by Canada's National Centre for Health, Marriage and Divorce (2003), reveals that divorce rate in Canada, England and Wales, Greece, the Netherlands, and the United States have more than doubled since 1970 and that divorce around the world has nearly quadrupled since early 1960 in Britain.

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria today, the rate of divorce is quite high (Dada & Idowu, 2006). No society can be stronger than the effectiveness of its individual families. This implies that a society or nation, in which the family, the basis of any community, is disintegrated, is not a healthy one. Many marriages have ended in divorce or passive relationship due to lack of marital adjustment. Many marriages break down weeks or months after wedding. Young spouses who feel happy and dance from dusk to dawn during their marriage ceremony turn out to call "the sugar in their tea" a thorn in their life (Olayiwola, 2009). This is due to the fact that more than ever before, marriage institution is confronted with all kinds of problems such as infidelity, poverty, spousal battery or domestic violence and unwillingness to take responsibility (Animashaun & Oladeni, 2012). Meanwhile, in Nigeria, poor marital relationship is on the increase, especially among workers, including public servants (Adigeb & Mbua, 2015). And this constitutes a serious threat to social stability.

In Lagos, where public servants are predominantly married and the increasing conflict and crisis of related family issues extend to offices and working environment, therefore, it becomes necessary to look on this issue and investigate possible ways to remedy it. That is why the researcher is concerned, this observation had put a burden on the researcher to carry out this study. Hence, the core problem investigated in this study is the association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research work study is the association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos. The study also aimed at investigating the difference on marital adjustment of Christian couples on the basis of gender.

Research Question

To aid the study, one research question was asked:

1. What are the levels of length of marriage of Christian couples in Lagos state?

Research Hypotheses

Two research hypotheses were equally postulated and tested:

1. There is no significant association between Length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos.
2. There is no significant difference on marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state on the basis of gender.

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive design approach to seek information about association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos. The sample for the study consisted of 90 participants drawn from three Christian denominations in Lagos. Multistage and purposive sampling techniques were used to select respondents. Christian couples were purposively selected as they were intact groups. Orthodox, Pentecostal and Catholic churches were purposively selected from the CAN blocs for the purpose of convenience and accessibility of population that were in line with the objectives of the study. The participants were randomly selected. A 30-item questionnaire designed by the researcher called Marital Adjustment Questionnaire (MAQ) was used for the study. The instrument was divided into four sections, A, B, C and D. Section A sought information on the couple's demographic data. Sections B, C and D measured patterns of adjustment in a marital relationship which are: compromise, accommodation and state of hostility respectively.

The instrument was validated by experts in the field of psychometrics. The reliability of this instrument was tested using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient and it stood at 0.77. The questionnaire was administered on individual basis and from the instrument analyzed using simple percentages, chi-square and t-test to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Result

What are the levels of length of marriage of Christian couples in Lagos?

Table 1: Length of Christian couples' marriages in Lagos

		Freq.	Percent	Cumulative %
Valid	Less than 5 years	12	13.3	13.3
	6-10 years	25	27.8	41.1
	11-20 years	39	43.3	84.4
	21-30 years	9	10.0	94.4
	Above 30 years	5	5.6	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	

From Table 1, 13.3% of respondents (44 people) were less than 5 years in marriage, 27.8% (25 people) were between 6 - 10 years in marriage, 43.3% (39) were between 11–20 years, 10.0% of respondents (9 people) were between 21–30years in marriage while 5.6% (5) were above 30 years in marriage. The findings, reveal that more respondents were over 10 years in marriage. It can be deduced that majority of Christian couples in Lagos have stayed long in their marriages.

- Research hypothesis 1: There is no significant association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state.

Table 2: Length of marriage marital adjustment cross-tabulation

			Marital adjustment		Total	
			Adjustment	No adjustment		
Length of marriage	Less than 5 years	Count	11	1	12	
		% within length of marriage	91.7%	8.3%	100.0%	
	6-10 years	Count	11	14	25	
		% within length	44.0%	56.0%	100.0%	
	11-20 years	Count	27	12	39	
		% within length	69.2%	30.8%	100.0%	
	21-30 years	Count	3	6	9	
		% within length	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%	
	Above 30 years	Count	4	1	5	
		% within length	80.0%	20.0%	100.0%	
	Total % within length of marriage		Count	56	34	90
				62.2%	37.8%	100.0%

Findings from Table 2 shows that 91.7 % Christian couples with less than 5 years in marriage show adjustment while 8.3 % show no adjustment; 44.0 % Christian

couples between 6–10 years in marriage show adjustment while 56.0 % show no adjustment. Also 69.2 % Christian couples between 11–20 years in marriage show adjustment while 30.8 % show no adjustment; 33.3 % Christian couples between 21–30 years in marriage show adjustment while 66.7% show no adjustment. Finally, 80.0 % Christian couples above 30 years in marriage show adjustment while 20 % show no adjustment. This result indicates that marital adjustment among Christian couples does depend on length of marriage.

Table 3: Test of significance of association between length of marriage and marital adjustment

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson chi-square	12.640 ^a	4	.013
Likelihood ratio	13.547	4	.009
Linear-by-linear association	.508	1	.476
N of valid cases	90		

From table 3, it is evident that $\chi (1) = 12.640, p = 0.013$. This is not statistically significant. Hence, we accept the hypothesis that there is no significant association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state. That is marital adjustment of Christian couples does not depend on length of marriage.

- Research hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference on marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos on the basis of gender

Table 4: Independent samples tests of gender and marital adjustment of couples in Lagos

		Levene's test for equality of variances		T-test for equality of means						
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean diff.	Std. error diff.	95% confidence interval of the difference	
									Lower	Upper
Post-Test	Equal var. assumed	1.721	.193	-.911	88	.365	-1.498	1.645	-4.766	1.771
	Equal var. not assumed			-.917	87.649	.362	-1.498	1.634	-4.744	1.749

From table 4 above, the independent t-test revealed that $df = 88, F = 1.721$, and $p > 0.05$. This result shows that there is no statistically significant difference between the variables. Hence, we accept the null-hypothesis. In other words, there is no significant difference on marital adjustment of Christian couples in

Lagos state on the basis of gender. This implies that marital adjustment is not gender-based.

Discussion

The general objective of this research is to carry out investigation on the association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state. In the course of analyzing the data, the two hypotheses were accepted. This showed there is no significant association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples. This result is in contrast with the findings of Peleg (2008), who argue that marriage longevity is very important since family duration is one of the most significant variables pertaining to family satisfaction. Some researches show that the length of marriage is positively associated with marital satisfaction (Bookwala, Sobin, & Zdaniuk, 2005; Hatch & Bulcroft, 2004; Hinchliff & Gott (2004) show that long marriages improved sexual intimacy among some older couples since they were able to know each other better, knew about each other's likes and dislikes more and had a closer relationship as a couple. Ogidan (1991), also find out that though marriage in Nigeria is besieged by a lot of constraints like divorce and separation, the longer the spouses stayed together, the more stable their marriage becomes.

In agreement, Sandberg, Miller and Harper, (2002) believe that depression negatively impacts older marriages. Some researches consider marital adjustment as a fluctuated phenomenon. For example, Umberson et al. (2005) approach marital quality from a life-course perspective, presenting it as a developmental trajectory that over time has ups and downs. They conclude that marital quality tends to decline over time, and is impacted more by age than marital duration. Osiki (1995) also reports that there was no direct relationship between years in marriage and marital adjustment. Research shows that marital satisfaction is lower in long-term marriages than in those of short duration (Jansen et al., 2006).

The findings show that gender does not influence marital adjustment. This agrees with the findings of Makinde & Ayeyika (2014) that there is no significant difference of spousal conflict resolution pattern between males and females in the training and control groups.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made:

- (1) There is no significant association between length of marriage and marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state.
- (2) There is no significant difference on marital adjustment of Christian couples in Lagos state on the basis of gender.

Recommendations

There is need to introduce marital guidance and counselling as a course at the first degree level as well as making courses in family and marriage counselling compulsory for counsellors in training. The researcher recommends the setting up of marital counselling clinics in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria, most especially in metropolitan cities. The government and marriage counsellors should help to maintain marital stability among couples through seminars, workshops marriage enrichment programmes. The government should provide an enabling environment for couples to improve their living standards as a means of ensuring marital adjustment. For counsellors, lectures, workshops, etc. should be organized for couples to enhance marital adjustment and to teach them some skills in maintaining good marital relationships. Also, premarital counselling should be regularly organized for youths on techniques of enhancing marital adjustment before they go into marriage. There must be adequate provision for preventive, remedial, and rehabilitative counselling interventions through marriage and sex guidance.

There is also the need for premarital counselling for intending couples to help them understand themselves and each other before marriage. There is also a need to train marital counsellors and post them to social welfare offices and religious organizations. Institutions of learning should also include in the curriculum a period for pre-marital counselling for those that have attained the age of maturity. There is the need to recommend religious leaders for training in counselling psychology so that they can acquire professional counselling skills.

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