

BIRTH ORDER AND MARITAL ADJUSTMENT AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated birth order and marital adjustment among married couples in Rivers State. Ex-post facto research design was used for the study. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A sample of 888 married men and women were drawn from the population of 316,276 through simple random sampling technique. Birth Order Questionnaire (BOQ) and Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS) were used for data collection. The face, content and construct validities of BOQ and MAS were established. The reliability of BOQ was determined through Cronbach alpha to be 0.81 while the coefficient of BOQ was 0.74 and was determined through test-retest method using Pearson Product Moment. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while One Way Analysis of Variance was used to test the hypotheses. Results showed that; birth orders do not significantly influence marital adjustment among married men and women. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that marriage counselors should in their sessions lay emphasis on teachings that promote emotion regulation skills such as tolerance, patience, feelings of others and self-regulation that can result in improvement of family life as well as lead to psychological health both for the family and society.

Keywords: Birth Order and Marital Adjustment

Introduction

Adjustment has to do with the move into or away from what is not acceptable. Marital adjustment has to do with the tolerance that exists between couples. Adjustment of couple is a broad concept and determines the degree of countenance and sustainability of the family. It is a state where couples experience marital bliss and satisfaction. According to Adams (2012), marital adjustment frequently stems from the corporate relationship between the

individuals and their surroundings. Beck in Moradi (2007) maintains that marital adjustment is in fact the positive and enjoyable attitude that a husband and wife receive in various dimensions of their intimate relations. This positive attitude may range from the desirable to undesirable. In their own view, Brazetno and Yogman (2008) described marital adjustment as the feeling of satisfaction which each spouse may receive due to coordination and matching with their

partner in areas such as leisure, house chores, mutual interactions, sexual relations, and expressing feelings and sentiments.

Williams (2010) posited that marital adjustment refers to marriage bliss, harmony and satisfaction among couples. Marital adjustment is the effort of the spouses themselves and to each other to reach a consensus, achieve common purpose and balance on the specific conditions of marriage. Marriages of couples who can interact with each other, agree on marriage and family issues and solve their problems positively are defined as harmonious marriages (Erbekve-Ark, 2005). Marital adjustment is the process of changing, adopting, and correcting the behavior and interaction of individuals and couples in order to achieve maximum satisfaction in relation (Gutman, 2010). A harmonious marriage is hidden in the completion of a wife and her husband in all areas of life materially and spiritually (Ozguven, 2009). It is important for marital adjustment that spouses have a ripeness in understanding of the growth and development in their relationship. If this development is not fully realized, the end of the marriage relationship is inevitable. This is because marital adjustment requires a satisfying relationship between spouses, characterized by reciprocal interest,

involvement, understanding and acceptance (Slathia, 2014). Sexual harmony and mutual pleasure are among the most important factors that help to achieve marital adjustment (Goel&Narang, 2012).

Marital adjustment is defined as a positive feelings, love, sexual satisfaction, agreement on household economic affairs, housekeeping, and raising children (Frost, 2007). No wonder Gideon (2010) explained that marital adjustment has a strong influence on couples life style and working commitment. During marital adjustment process, some parents tend to love child or children of a particular birth order than the other. This may have caused more of marital adjustment problems in the family causing series of emotional torture and pains in the life of the children that will eventually become parents in the near future. In the family, some people are born first, second, third and so on depending on the number of children in the family.

First born children are the children that came first in the family or those that opened the womb of their mothers. First born children are in a unique and enviable situation. Usually the parents are happy at the birth of the first child and devote considerable time and attention to the new baby. First-borns typically receive their parents' instant and undivided attention.

As a result, first-borns have a happy existence until the second-born child appears. Suddenly, no longer the much of focus of attention, no longer receiving much of constant love and care, first-borns are, in a sense, dethroned. The affection first-borns received during their reign must now be shared. They must often submit to the outrage of waiting until after the new-born's needs have been met, and they are admonished not to disturb the new baby.

Adler in Schultz & Schultz (2005) believed all first-borns feel the shock of their changed status in the family, but those who have been excessively pampered feel a greater loss. Also, the extent of the loss depends on the first-born's age at the time the rival appears. In general, the older a first-born child is when the second child arrives, the less dethronement the first-born will experience. First-borns are often oriented toward the past, locked in nostalgia and pessimistic about the future. Having learnt the advantages of power at one time, they remain concerned with it throughout life. They can exercise some power over young siblings, but at the same time they are more subject to the power of their parents because more is expected of them.

Second-borns are those who come after the first child. Second-born child who caused such upheaval in the lives of the first-borns are also in a unique situation. They never

experienced the powerful position once occupied by the first-borns. Even if another child is brought into the family, second-borns do not suffer the sense of dethronement felt by the first-born. Furthermore, by this time the parents have usually changed their child-rearing attitudes and practices. A second-born is not the novelty the first was; parents may be concerned and anxious about their own behaviour and may take a more relaxed approach to the second child.

From the beginning, the second-borns have a pacesetter in the older siblings. The second child always has the example of the older child's behaviour as a model, a threat or a source of competition. Competition with the first-born may serve to motivate the second-born, who may strive to catch up and surpass the older sibling, a goal that spurs language and motor development in the second-born. Not having experienced power, second-borns are not concerned with it. They are more optimistic about the future and are likely to be competitive and ambitious (Adler in Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Youngest or last-born children are those that make up of the required number of children. Youngest or last-born children never face the shock of dethronement by another child and often become the pet of the family, particularly if the siblings are more than a few years older. Driven by the

need to surpass older siblings, youngest children often develop at a remarkably fast rate. Last-borns are often high achievers in whatever work they undertake as adults. The opposite can occur however if the youngest children are excessively pampered and come to believe they need not learn to do anything for themselves. As they grow older, such children may retain the helplessness and dependency of childhood. Unaccustomed to striving and struggling, used to being cared for, these people find it difficult to adjust to adulthood (Schultz & Schultz, 2005).

Finally, sole child unlike other children in the family is born alone either by providence or for any other reason never loses the position of primacy and power they hold in the family; they remain the focus and center of attention, spending more time in the company of adults than a child with siblings, only children often mature early and manifest adult behaviours and attitudes. Sole/Only children are likely to experience difficulties when they find that in areas of life outside the home, such as school, they are not the center of attention. Only children have learnt neither to share nor to compete. If their attitudes do not bring them sufficient recognition and attention, they are likely to feel keenly disappointed and this may affect their relationship with people. It is not very obvious on the role of birth order on the

adjustment in families. It is against this backdrop that the researcher investigated birth order and marital adjustment among married men and women in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Many young girls today are desiring to get hooked to a man, as being single shows irresponsibility as some may term it, especially if the lady is of age to marry, but they are asking the question watching marriages fail “can I make it”? although they desire the security and joy of a lifelong relationship, they fear marriage. No generation reaching the age to marry has ever brought with it more baggage related to family breakdown. Rainy (2018) in the united states more than one million each year experience break up of families. In Nigeria so many marriages break up within the first six months of marriage ceremony and some even after staying for some years still break up as a result of poor marital adjustment. This has kept the researcher wondering if there are some variables that could be responsible for these.

When people make choices to marry, they want to live happily ever after. They want a loving, happy, successful marriage. After they have been married for a while, and the novelty has worn off, they tend to discover that marriage does not maintain

itself. Marriage takes work from both spouses to stay. Marriage depends on what one makes of it. Marriage depends on many different things to be successful; tolerance, trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty, sincerity and effective communication, to mention but a few, so since the home remains the nucleus of the society and marriage is the major avenue whereby the society is populated by the number of children that are born into such marriages, thus marital maladjustment produces negative multiplier effect on the society this is because when there is marital maladjustment, there is a problem in raising and nurturing the children, which may lead to an increase in the rate of juvenile delinquency in the society and lack of peace.

In order to avoid marriages ending tragically in divorce, the researcher believes that it is more important now to work on the marital adjustment of couples. So many problems escalate when married couples are not well adjusted. Truly, marital adjustment is the key to a successful marriage and without that no marriage can survive in this divorce-filled world we live in. Married couples need to understand what it takes to achieve marital adjustment.

Hence, this study was conducted to investigate the extent to which birth order predicts marital adjustment among married couples in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The following objectives guided the study:

1. Identify influence of birth order (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) on marital adjustment of married men.
2. Ascertain influence of birth order (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) on marital adjustment of married women.

Research Questions

The following research questions posed were answered to guide the study:

1. What is the influence of birth order (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) on marital adjustment of married men?
2. What is the influence of birth order (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) on marital adjustment of married women?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance:

1. Birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not

significantly influence marital adjustment of married men.

2. Birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment of married women.

Methodology

Ex-post facto research design was used for the study. The population of the study consisted of all married men and women in Rivers State totaling 316276 as at the time of this study (FMRPH, 2017). A sample of 888 (415 married men and 473 married women) married couples was drawn for the study using simple random sampling, purposive and accidental sampling techniques. The simple random sampling technique (Balloting) was used to draw 4 Local Government Areas from each of the

three senatorial zones making it a total of 12 Local Government Areas out of the 23 LGAs in Rivers State. Lastly purposive and accidental sampling techniques were used to draw sample of married men and women used for the study. Only literate respondents were used for the study.

The maximum and minimum points that were obtainable from BOQ are 60 and 15 points respectively.

The reliability of Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS) was done using Pearson Product Moment Correlation with a coefficient of 0.74. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at .05 alpha level of significance.

Results

The results of this study are presented as shown below.

Research Question 1: What is the influence of birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) on marital adjustment of married men?

Hypothesis 1: Birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment of married men.

Table 1A: Means and standard deviation of influence of birth order on marital adjustment of married men

Birth Order	N	\bar{X}	Std
First-Born	119	66.37	6.22
Second-Born	156	64.15	8.45
Last-Born	98	61.05	9.82
Sole Child	42	60.26	10.41

Table 1B: Summary of ANOVA of the influence of birth order on marital adjustment of married men

	Sum Squares	of Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	16.23	3	8.39	1.40	.76
Within Groups	31856.01	411	5.40		
Total	15936.12	414			

Table 1A shows that married men who are first born have marital adjustment mean value of 66.37 while second-born married men have mean value of 64.15, followed by last-born married men with mean value of 61.05, and lastly, married men who are sole children have mean value of 60.26. The result showed that married men who are first-born had marital adjusted in marriage followed by second-born married men, then, last-born married men, and lastly by sole child married men.

However, Table 1B shows that the sum of squares are 16.23 and 31856.01, with degrees of freedom of 3 and 411. The calculated F value of 1.40 is not significant at .76 when subjected to probability level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis one is accepted. By implication, birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment among married men.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of birth order (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) on marital adjustment among married women?

Hypothesis 2: Birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment among married women.

Table 2A: Means and standard deviation of marital adjustment among married women on the basis of their birth order

Birth Order	N	\bar{X}	Std
First-Born	186	71.16	6.01
Second-Born	140	70.32	6.12
Last-Born	86	69.01	6.96
Sole Child	61	67.72	7.71

Table 2B: Summary of ANOVA of the influence of birth order on marital adjustment among married women

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14.02	3	7.00	2.45	.41
Within Groups	17701.11	469	6.15		
Total	8857.57	472			

Table 2A shows that married women who are first born have mean value of 71.16 above second-born married women with mean of 70.32, followed by last-born married women with mean value of 69.01, and lastly, sole child married women with mean value 67.72. This shows that married women who are first-born are more

adjusted in marriage followed by second-born married women, then, last-born married women, and lastly by sole child married women.

However, Table 2B shows that the sum of squares are 14.02 and 17701.11, with degrees of freedom of 3 and 469. The

calculated F value of 2.45 is not significant at .41 when subjected to probability level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis two is accepted. By implication, birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment among married women.

Summary of Findings

The summary of findings of the study is presented as follows:

1. Birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment among married men.
2. Birth orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) do not significantly influence marital adjustment among married women.

Discussion of Findings

Birth Orders (first-born, second-born, last-born, sole child) and Marital Adjustment among Married Men and Women

The result showed that married men and women who are first born are more adjusted in their marriage followed by second-borns, then, last-borns, and lastly by sole child married men and women. Though there were slight differences among the mean values of the different birth orders however, on further statistical

analysis through the deployment of analysis of variance, the influence of birth order on marital adjustment among married men and women was found not to be significant.

This result is not surprising because marital adjustment requires a satisfying relationship between spouses, characterized by reciprocal interest, involvement, understanding and acceptance rather than the order in which spouses are born. This may have influenced the outcome of this study. Present findings agrees with Levinger and Sonnheim (2009) who in their study found that both male and female romantic relationship were not influenced by the order of their birth

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that birth order whether first-bone, second-born, last-born or sole child does not significantly influence marital adjustment of married couples in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. The study revealed that birth orders (first-born, second born, last born, sole child) do not significantly influence

marital adjustment of married couples hence, it is recommended that marriage counselors should in their sessions lay emphasis on teachings that promote emotion regulation skills such as tolerance, patience, feelings of others etc that can result in improvement of family life as well as lead to psychological health of both the family and the society.

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