

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL VARIABLES AND MARITAL STABILITY OF COUPLES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This research ascertained the relationship between social variables and marital stability of couples in Cross River State, Nigeria. Three hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Correlational survey design was used and the researcher sampled 400 married persons out of the total population of 49,317 registered couples in the state. Two instruments were used for the study which include: self-developed questionnaire titled Cultural Variables Questionnaire (SCVQ) and an adapted version of Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ). The instruments were subjected to face and content validation. Point Biserial Correlation was used to test hypothesis one while Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to test hypotheses two and three. Finding from the hypothesis one showed that null hypothesis was retained therefore, there is no significant relationship between educational attainment and marital stability among couples in Cross Rivers State. Null Hypothesis two was rejected which showed that there is a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among couples in Cross River State. From hypothesis three, it was found that there was a significant positive relationship between spousal communication and marital stability among couples in Cross River State. It was concluded that educational attainment has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State and at the same time sexual satisfaction and spousal communication have significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State. It was recommended amongst other that married couples should not use their educational qualification to judge their partner's commitment and not as a yardstick for marital stability.

**Keywords: Social Variables, Marriage, Couples, Stability**

## Introduction

Marriage is an important aspect of human society which creates identity. It is a legal and social commitment that two people make to share their lives and it is believed to be for procreation, love, companionship, security, status, religious obligations, economic consideration and conforming to social standard. Thus Osaigbovo and John (2015) observed that for a successful marriage, one needs to be biologically, economically, emotionally and socially matured to take on the responsibility of marriage. In the opinion of Amadi and Amadi (2014), marriage is a covenant relationship between male and female adults. The covenant nature of marriage provides a strong foundation and secure framework for spouses' commitment to each other. Covenant defines the marital responsibilities - of husband and wife toward nurturing and protecting their marriage. The couple is expected by their covenant to work hard to reach the level of relationship which protects the marriage from both internal and external negative forces. Thus Marriage is a legally recognized relationship, established by a civil or religious ceremony, between two people of opposite sex who intend to live together as sexual and domestic partners.

Marital stability is said to exist when a couple is able to live together in their marriage for a long time in peace, harmony and conjugal bliss for the realization of the goals of marriage. A stable marriage is not one in which there are no conflicts or misunderstandings, rather it is one which the couple has the ability of reducing the frequency of conflict as well as managing the few ones from degenerating into crisis. Thus, marital stability is the existence of relative peace and harmony over a long period of time among married couples. Esere, Iruloh, Ojiah, Bukoye and Chieke, (2015) asserted that marital stability connotes a marriage held together by such things as good listening, respect of one another, a good sense of humour, fun, being willing to adapt, accepting that one cannot change his/her partner and thinking rationally. Oyafunke, Falola and Salau, (2014) referred to marital instability as the process whereby marriages breakdown through separation desertion or divorce. Duke-Natrebo (2014) observed *marital instability has continuously increase in Africa and other developing countries in the last few decades – in most cases unnoticed – thereby, creating intractable problems in the early years of child development.*

Social factors associated with marital stability in long-term marriage has identified by Karimi, Bakhtiyari, and Abbas (2019) includes educational attainment, sexual satisfaction and spousal communication and extends to other related concepts such as love and attachment, intimacy, and conflict resolution approach. Educational attainment is considered to be important in every aspects of individual endeavour, Ojukwu, Woko and Onuoha (2016) investigated the impact of educational attainment on marital stability among married persons in Imo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between married persons' low and high levels of educational attainment and marital stability while there was no significant relationship between those with medium level of educational attainment and their marital stability. Similarly, Obiekwe and Ekebosi (2020) examined educational level as a predictor of marital stability among married persons in Anambra State.

Sexual satisfaction is also related to greater sexual wellbeing. Couples who are sexually satisfied generally report greater desire, arousal, and orgasm consistency (Sánchez-Fuentes, Santos-Iglesias, & Sierra, 2014). According to Ji and Norling (2014), sexual

satisfaction is an effective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one's sexual relationship. Oladapo (2012) states that sexual satisfaction is a blessing in marriage, claiming that sex ranks top after food in marriage. Ziaei, Jannati, Mobasheri, Taghavi, Abdollahi and Modanloo (2014) looked at the relationship between marital stability and sexual satisfaction among married women employees at Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Iran and found out that there was a significant association between sexual satisfaction and age and the effects of sexual satisfaction on marital stability were moderated by number of children and the level of education. Similarly, Quinn-Nilas, (2020) investigated relationship stability and sexual satisfaction and found out that relationship stability and sexual satisfaction change together over time and highlight that the longitudinal association between these outcomes is dynamic rather than static.

Spousal communication refers to frequent conversations between spouses. Without communication, it is nearly impossible to resolve conflicts or grow a partnership. Muna and Atinkut (2018) have considered communication as the heart of intimate human relationship and the foundation on which all other relationships built; they also assert that it is the key to a successful couple relationship. In fact, the ability and the willingness to communicate have been found to be among the most significant factors in maintaining a relationship. Adegboyega (2021) investigated on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability and conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin Metropolis and finding revealed that communication in marriage has a positive influence on marital conflict resolution thereby promoting marital stability. Also, Suleyiman (2014) looked at couple communication and marital stability among adults in Asella Town, Ethiopia and the analysis revealed that there was a positive correlation between couple communication and marital stability. In view of the roles play by social variables in marriage, the researcher sought to ascertain the relationship between social variables and marital stability of couples in Cross River State.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It is always the wish of all married men and women to joyfully spend their life time together till death part them but unfortunately sometimes the reverse is the case due to some social variables which may directly or indirectly affect the peaceful co-existence among the couples. Incidence of marital instability and disharmony appears endemic as the stability of personality role of marriage and the family wanes at alarming rates based on the increase in divorce rates which is one of the most visible changes in African societies and Nigeria in particular. Despite efforts being made by marriage counsellors, churches, mosques, among others to curb this menace, stakeholders are at a loss on the options available for identifying the causes of this situation in their attempt to proffer solutions. Many couples continue to experience turbulence in their marriages manifested in fighting, quarrelling, suspicion, unhappiness and even separation and divorce. However, the researcher observed that some marriages in Cross River State are peaceful and stable.

The relationship between educational attainment, sexual satisfaction, spousal communication, and marital stability of couples is essential as it highlights the factors that can contribute to a long-lasting marriage. Despite the growing body of research on the links

between education, sexual satisfaction, communication, and marital stability, there is limited knowledge of the combined impact of these factors on maintaining healthy relationships. Moreover, studies have shown that individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to experience sexual satisfaction and to communicate effectively with their partners. However, it remains unclear how these factors combine to promote marital stability for couples. With rising divorce rates globally, exploring the relationship between these factors is crucial to improving the understanding of what contributes to long-lasting marriages.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the relationship between socio variables and marital stability of couples in Cross River State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. examine the relationship between educational attainment and marital stability of couples
2. determine the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among couples.
3. ascertain the relationship between spousal communication and marital stability of couples.

### **Hypotheses**

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between educational attainment and marital stability of couples in Cross River State.
2. There is no significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability of couples in Cross River State.
3. There is no significant relationship between spousal communication and marital stability of couples in Cross River State.

### **Methods**

Correlational survey design was used to determine the relationship between socio-cultural variables and marital stability of couples in Cross River State. This design is justified by the fact that the purpose of the study is to establish the relationship that exists between the independent variables which are the social and cultural factors and the dependent variable which is marital stability among married couples in Cross-River State.

The population of this study consist of all married spouses in Cross River State. The population for the study comprises 49,317 registered couples in 18 Local Government Areas in the three (3) Senatorial District of Cross River State. (Marriage Registry of the 18 Local Government Headquarters, Cross River State, 2020). The sample for this study consisted of 400 married persons. Glenn (2012) formula was used to determine this sample size for the study. In determining the sample size, the researcher considered all the Local Government areas in the three Senatorial Districts (North, South and Central. A total of 210 couples were selected from the South, 110 couples from Central and 80 couples from the North making a total of 400 married couples through the process of convenient sampling technique. By convenient sampling, the researcher sampled the participants in the different Senatorial

Districts at his convenience and ensured that all the Local Government are represented in the sample.

Two instruments were used for the study which include: self-developed questionnaire titled Social Variables Questionnaire (SVQ) and an adapted version of Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ). For the reliability of the instrument, the questionnaires were administered on 50 married persons. Both questionnaires yielded split-half reliability coefficient .620 and Cronbach's Alpha .850 were reported accordingly for the study. The instruments were subjected to face and content validity by three experts: One in Measurement and Evaluation, another one in Guidance and Counselling, and one in Educational Psychology; from the Department of Educational Foundations, Benue State University.

To ensure that the right procedure is followed in the process of data collection, the researcher and three research assistants visited the local government headquarters in the three Senatorial Districts to select 210 married persons from the South, 110 from the Central and 80 couples from the North to make up 400 persons. The direct delivery and retrieval method was used to ensure a good or high percentage return of the instruments. When married couples that were sampled for this study were finally located, the researcher and his assistants first of all introduced themselves to the participants and explained to them the purpose of the study. They also briefed them on the benefit of the study to them and the researcher. Those who are willing to participate in the study were issued a questionnaire each to respond to.

To analyze the data for this study, Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) and Point Biserial Correlation were used to test the hypotheses and answer their corresponding research questions. Point Biserial Correlation was appropriate for testing hypotheses one and four and their corresponding research questions because of the presence of dichotomous variables (educational attainment and religious affiliation) and continuous variables while PPMC was considered appropriate for testing hypotheses two, three, five and six and their corresponding research questions at .05 level of significance.

## Results

**Hypothesis One:** Educational attainment has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State. This hypothesis was tested using Point Biserial correlation and the result is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Point Biserial Correlation showing the Relationship between Educational Attainment and Marital Stability of Couples in Cross River State**

		Educational Attainment	Marital Stability
Educational Attainment	Pearson Correlation	1	.019
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.701
	N	400	400
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	.019	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.701	
	N	400	

Data in table 1 shows a Correlation Coefficient (r) of .019 at  $p = .701 > .05$  [ $r(398) = .019$ ;  $p > .05$ ]. Since  $p .701$  is greater than the alpha value of .05, the null hypothesis which stated that ‘educational attainment has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State’ was therefore retained. This implies that there is no significant relationship between educational attainment and marital stability among couples in Cross River State.

**Hypothesis Two:** Sexual satisfaction has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the result is presented in table 3.

**Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing the Relationship between Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Stability of Couples in Cross River State**

		Sexual Satisfaction	Marital Stability
Sexual Satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	1	.780**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	.780**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	

**\*\* Correlation is Significant at .001 (2-tailed)**

Data in Table 2 shows a correlation coefficient (r) of .780 at  $p = .000 < .05$  [ $r(398) = .780$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. Since  $p .000$  is less than the alpha value of .05, the null hypothesis which stated that ‘sexual satisfaction has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in cross river state’ was therefore reject. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among couples in Cross River State.

**Hypothesis Three:** Spousal communication has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State. This hypothesis was tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and the result is presented in table 4.

**Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing the Relationship between Spousal Communication and Marital Stability of Couples in Cross River State**

		Spousal Communication	Marital Stability
Spousal Communication	Pearson Correlation	1	.627**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	400	400
Marital Stability	Pearson Correlation	.627**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	400	

**\*\* Correlation is Significant at .001 (2-tailed)**



Data in Table 3 shows a correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) of .627 at  $p = .000 < .05$  [ $r(398) = .627$ ;  $p < .05$ ]. Since  $p .000$  is less than the alpha value of .05, the null hypothesis which stated that 'spousal communication has no significant relationship with marital stability of couples in Cross River State' was therefore rejected. This implies that there is a significant positive relationship between spousal communication and marital stability among couples in Cross River State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The finding in hypothesis 1 shows there is no significant relationship between educational attainment and marital stability among couples in Cross River State. This implies that educational attainment is not a condition for marital stability among couples particularly in Cross River State, Nigeria as stability in marriage does not depend on the kind or level of education attained by couples neither does the level of educational attainment have any link with couples' marital stability. This finding is not consistent with that of Ojukwu, et al., (2016) which investigated the impact of educational attainment on marital stability among married persons in Imo State, Nigeria. The finding showed that there was a positive relationship between married persons' low and high levels of educational attainment and marital stability while there was no significant relationship between those with medium level of educational attainment and their marital stability. Similar findings to this study were obtained by Obiekwe and Ekebosi (2020) who examined educational level as a predictor of marital stability among married persons in Anambra State and found that though there was a relationship between educational attainment and marital stability, the level of the relationship was weak and not strong enough to make adequate conclusion. This means that the finding of this study is similar as it found that no significant relationship exists between educational attainment and marital stability among participants. This study on the other hand found contrary result as marital stability was not significantly related to educational attainment of participants because couples' level of education may have liberated them, where individual's independence is paramount than marriage. Therefore, leaving marriage is seen not to be an issue.

The finding in hypothesis two shows that there was a significant positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital stability among couples in Cross River State. This implies that married persons who reported high level of sexual satisfaction in their marriage had stable marriages while those who reported low level of sexual satisfaction in their marriages were experiencing instability in their marriages. This finding is consistent with that of Ziaei, et al (2014) who looked at the relationship between marital stability and sexual satisfaction among married women employees at Golestan University of Medical Sciences, Iran. The finding showed that in marital satisfaction scale, the majority of the participants were very satisfied and none of them were very unsatisfied and those with high level of sexual satisfaction reported higher level of marital stability in their homes. Furthermore, this finding is consistent with that of Quinn-Nilas, (2020) who investigated relationship and sexual satisfaction and marital stability in a developmental perspective on directionality and high level of sexual satisfaction was reported to have significant impact on both the relationship, the marriage and family life as well as marital satisfaction and stability. This

further confirms the fact that, when there is a high level of sexual satisfaction which is one of the major reason for marriage (consummation), there is relative level of stability even if there are other related factors that could create a dwindle.

The finding in hypothesis three showed that there was a significant relationship between spousal communication and marital stability among couples in Cross River State. This implies that the more spouses engage in quality communication between each other, the more intimate they become and the higher the chances of marital stability. In this study, finding showed that increased spousal communication was linked to increased level of marital stability among couples. This finding is consistent with that of Adegboyega (2021) who investigated the influence of spousal communication on marital stability and resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. The researcher found that communication in marriage has positive influence on marital conflict resolution thereby promoting marital stability. In the same vain, this finding is consistent with that of Suleyiman (2014) who looked at couple communication and marital stability among adults in Asella Town, Ethiopia. The finding showed that that there was a positive correlation between couple communication and marital stability. This means that lack of effective communication was the cause of misery to marital stability. This finding further confirms that of Esere, Yusuf and Omotosho (2011) who investigated influence of spousal communication on marital stability. They also found that most of the respondents agree to the statement that lack of effective communication is the bane to marital stability. It was also found that there was significant difference in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability on the basis of gender and length of years in marriage.

## **Conclusion**

On the basis and strength of the findings of this study, it is concluded that educational attainment is not a condition for marital stability among couples particularly in Cross River State as stability in marriage does not depend on the kind of education attained by couples neither does the level of educational attainment as any link with the education received by the couples. Moreover, married couples who reported high level of sexual satisfaction in their marriage had stable marriages while those who reported low level of sexual satisfaction in their marriage were experiencing instability in their unions. It is also concluded that the more spouses engage in quality communication between each other, the more intimate they become and the higher the chances of marital stability. In this study, finding showed that increased spousal communication was linked to increased level of marital stability among couples.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Married couples should be counselled not to use their educational qualification to judge their partner's commitment and not as a yardstick for marital stability.
2. Couples should be counselled on the need to satisfy their partners to avoid marital instability and other related aspect of marital issues. Also, undue denial of sex should not be encouraged in marriage at every given period of time.



3. Couples should be counselled on the need to communicate with each other on all issues relating to their marriage as well as personal issues.

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