ROLES OF ASSERTIVENESS, RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND INTIMACY IN MARITAL SATISFACTION IN A NIGERIAN SAMPLE

Blessing N. Onyekachi, Ifeyinwa M. Mbadugha and Lawrence O. Amazue

Abstract

This study examined the contributions of assertiveness, religious commitment and intimacy in marital satisfaction in a Nigerian sample. A cross-section of two hundred and thirty-one married participants (128 men and 103 women), participated in the study. Their ages ranged from 21 to 65 years, with a mean age of 35 years. They completed a questionnaire pack which included - the Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS); the Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI); the Intimate Relationship Assessment Scale (IRAS); and the Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS). Results of multiple regression analysis indicated a significant negative relationship between assertiveness and marital satisfaction; but there was no significant relationship between religious commitment and marital satisfaction. There was a significant negative relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction. Implications of the findings were discussed, pointing toward the need to replicate the study with larger sample size from multiple backgrounds to ensure generalizability of the findings.

Keywords: Assertiveness, intimacy, marital satisfaction, religious commitment

Marriage is one of the important experiences that affect an individual’s life, and marital satisfaction describes the extent to which a person enjoys his/her marriage. It is beneficial both to the society and the individual when couples form strong marriages, as those unions frequently lead to less maladaptive behaviours by spouses and/or offspring (Bradbury, Finchman, & Beach 2000). Consequently, this very important factor plays a vital role in the progress and stability of the society. Marriage ought to provide companionship, psychological security, emotional assurance, reduced loneliness, fulfilled psychological needs and attained life goals for the parties involved. However, this is usually not the case. Many adults marry and look forward to meeting many of their important social-psychological and physical needs (Feeney, 2002). As a result, married individuals generally expect a great deal from their marriages and in general turn to their partners as primary sources of support. A marriage partner who provides good social support for his or her spouse contributes to the spouse’s marital satisfaction (Bradbury, Fincham, & Beach, 2000).

Over the years, researchers have used a variety of synonyms for marital satisfaction, including adjustment, happiness, consensus, and integration, and it depends on the individual’s needs, expectations, and desires as well as their fulfillment (Bailey & Snyder, 2007; Olson, & Wilson, 1982; Olson, McCubbin, Barnes, Larsen, Muxen, & Wilson, 1989). Marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person (Heaton, 2002). The more costs a marriage partner inflicts on a person, the less satisfied one generally is with the marriage and with the marriage partner. In as much as satisfaction is expected of every marriage, there are some marriages in our society today that experience turbulence, dissolution and dissatisfaction, which however manifest in various ways such as divorce and separation (Lyngstad, 2004). Gottman and Levenson (2002) opined that when there is no problem to make a crisis in a married life, couples tend to report a high level of satisfaction. Studies have also revealed that a perfect marriage will cause people to have a healthier and happier life (e.g., Withe & Rogers, 2000).
Using the social exchange theory of Homans (1958), which posits that rewards and costs drive relationship decisions, and both parties in a social exchange take responsibility for one another and depend on each other, the present study explores the degree to which certain behaviours could be costly or beneficial in a marital relationship. For instance, marriage is a venture with costs and benefits, and people have a tendency to calculate the overall worth of a particular behaviour or relationship either with a spouse, friends, or family members by subtracting its costs from the rewards it provides. Thus, certain behaviours are expected to either foster or impede marital satisfaction. Some factors could be potent predictors of marital satisfaction - communication skill training (Karbaasi, Manzari & Razavi, 2014), individual well being (Huff, Lianekhammy, & Perry, 2012). One factor that seems implicated in marital satisfaction is assertiveness.

Assertiveness is found within the realm of communication, and it has been observed that relationship exists between assertiveness and communication competence (Onyeizugbo, 1998). Assertive communication is appropriately direct, open and honest and clarifies one’s needs to the other person (Virkler, 1999). According to Alberti and Emmons (2005), assertive behaviour promotes equality in human relationships, enabling us to act in our own best interest, to stand up for ourselves, communicate openly, communicating without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably, and to exercise personal rights without denying the rights of others. It focuses on the inalienable right of the individual to express his or her feelings to the person who generates the feeling, which may seem antithetical to African traditional culture (Ezeilo, 2005). The African culture is highly collectivist in nature, and family structure hierarchical, with gender differences and sex roles highly emphasized. Assertiveness being the ability to recognize one’s needs, desires and feelings and being willing and courageous enough to express them in ways that would maximize reinforcement (Onyeizugbo, 1998), would be reinforced if rewarding. For instance, an inhibition of assertive behaviour is a consequence of observed punishment of the model’s assertiveness, whereas encouraging assertiveness as opposed to direct anxiety reduction techniques relies primarily on those results from observed rewards for the model’s behaviour (Rich & Schroeder, 1976).

Assertiveness may be expressed in one’s communication pattern. Karbaasi, Manzari and Razavi (2014) reported that communication skills training influence mothers’ marital satisfaction, while Villa and Del Prette (2013) found a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and the social skills of married couples, with three classes of marital social skills (proactive self-control, reactive self-control and expressiveness/empathy) having a strong correlation with husbands’ marital satisfaction, whereas, husbands’ three social skills (assertive conversation, self-assertiveness and expressiveness/empathy) were correlated with wives’ marital satisfaction. Azadeh, Faramarz and Hassan (2012), as well as Mousavizadeh, Torani and Sohrabi (2013) reported that assertiveness skill training and problem-solving skill training were both effective on the content of marital satisfaction among female students. However, Kelly, Lawrence, Bradlyn, Himadi, Graves and Keane (1982) opined that assertive persons tend to be seen as less likeable and less friendly than unassertive people, even when assertive behaviour is considered effective, justified and appropriate. Thus, highly assertive people may damage their relationships and reputations because they are more willing to engage in conflict and to use defensive tactics with others. (Graziano, Jensen–Campbell, & Hair, 1996).

It is presumed that in a marriage where both partners involved have the ability to recognize individual needs, and are courageous enough to express them in ways that would not be perceived as aggressive nor spiral into aggression, marital satisfaction should be enhanced. On this premise, the present study is designed to explore the relationship between assertiveness and marital satisfaction in a Nigerian sample.

Another factor that seems to be implicated in marital satisfaction is religious commitment. Religious commitment cuts across several disciplines with each approaching it from different vantage point. For example, a theologian would address it from the viewpoint of faith (Moss & Dobson, 2006), while religious educators could focus on orthodoxy and belief (Idler, Musick, & Ellison, 2003). Psychologists might choose to address the dimensions of devotion, holiness, and piousness, whereas sociologists would consider it to include church membership, church attendance, belief acceptance, doctrinal knowledge, and living the faith (Ano, Vasconcelles, & Erin, 2005; Eze, 2011). According to Braam (2004), religious commitment refers to
religious faith in a power beyond oneself whereby the individual seeks to satisfy the demands of life through act of worship and service. It is the extent to which a person takes part in religious activities, and the belief one has about his actions not being solely determined by him, but can be influenced, due to respect or recognition accorded to a supreme being (God).

People often turn to religion in times of death, stress, inexplicable experiences in life, anxiety and threat. It often helps in facilitating problem-solving, and to prevent or diminish negative emotional consequences of stressful life experiences (Ghufran & Ansari, 2008). It also assists in the search for control (Ghufran, 2000) and people often get more religiously committed when marital challenges crop up, which is in line with the dictum that - a family that prays together stays together. Therefore, it is assumed that when a family is committed to religion, marital satisfaction could be enhanced, especially when the partners are of the same faith and belief. Thus, religiosity has been reported to have an effect on marital satisfaction for the following reasons - it creates close connectedness between couples; the couples having similar religious beliefs, leads to a sense of being closer (Robinson, 1994); it strengthens the importance of marriage which creates marital commitment between the husband and the wife (Larson & Goltz, 1989); church attendance and shared beliefs lead to a satisfying marriage (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993); and religious teaching about non-marital sex or extramarital affairs restrains Christian couples from having sex with other partners (Call & Heaton, 1997).

In line with this assumption, several studies have reported significant positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Ahmadi, Azad-Marzabadi, & Ashrafi, 2008; Cho, 2014; Dowlatabadi, Saadat, & Jahangiri, 2013; Fard, Shahabi, & Zahdkhaneh, 2013; Oh, 1995; Park, 2001; Yeganegh & Shaikhmahmoodi, 2013). However, Huff, Lianekhammy and Perry (2012) reported that individual indicators, such as well-being and distress, predict relationship satisfaction more than religiosity. Schramm, Marshall, Harris and Lee (2012) showed that more religious couples have happier and more stable marriages than less religious couples, while Karslow and Robinson (1996) found that religious beliefs are ranked as the fifth most important element for marital satisfaction. Furthermore, religiosity has been reported as a factor that could cause conflict in marriages especially when a couple does not have the same level of commitment for church attendance (Call & Heaton, 1997); when one member of a couple violates religious regulations or values and the spouse does not agree with interpretations of religious activities (Mahoney, 2005); and when wives regularly attend church but husbands never do, the peril of marital dissolution increases by three times (Lambert, & Dollahite, 2006). In view of these disparate findings, it is imperative for us to understudy the direction of the relation between religiosity and marital satisfaction particularly among Nigerians, who seem to be unaccounted for in most of these studies.

One other factor that seems to be implicated in marital satisfaction is intimacy. Intimacy is a familiar and very close affective connection with another as a result of a bond that is formed through knowledge and experience of the other (Rusbult & Van, 2002). It is the emotional tie formed in friendships that count and serve to reduce anxiety (Hewstone, 2003; Pettigrew & Troop, 2000). Genuine intimacy in human relationships requires dialogue, transparency, vulnerability and reciprocity (Tommasco, Branrein, Burgess, & Nelly, 2002). Researchers (e.g. Guisinger & Blatt, 1994; Shulman & Knafo, 1997; Connolly & Goldberg, 1999), maintain that mature and genuine intimacy incorporates a balance of emotional closeness and separateness. Thus, intimacy calls for mutual surrender of people to themselves, in such a way that is so complete that they become one with one another without losing their individuality (Ryff & Singer, 2000). Adult intimacy is possible only when one’s sense of self is enhanced rather than lost in relationship with another person (Ezeanochie, 2009). It is neither suffocating nor disinterested, but is rooted in mutuality, equality and quality in the relationship (Lahey, 2001).

The journey of intimacy begins with the self. It involves a process of self exploration – a tendency to focus one’s attention on the private and innermost aspects of one’s life (Diamond, 2004). Relationships progress from superficial exchange to more intimate ones, and people at first give relatively little of themselves to the other, and receive relatively little in return. However, when initial encounters are rewarding, exchange
becomes broader, involving more areas of their lives, and deeper, involving more important and sensitive areas, with the basic social exchange that occurs as relationship develops being self-disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Whatever path a relationship follows, more extensive and intimate self-disclosure is associated with greater emotional involvement in dating and greater satisfaction in marriage (Hansen & Schult, 1984). When people do not know themselves, the vacuum is filled with pleasures that leave the person frustrated and dejected such as alcoholism, drug abuse, wanton desire for wealth and power as well as sexual promiscuity (Clark & Wilkinson, 2006). Thus, intimacy has an important influence on marital satisfaction and its presence in a relationship gives a sense of belonging to the individuals involved (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004), because it entails the expressions of compassion and deep sharing of thoughts and feelings between two married persons. Conversely, a lack of intimacy in a relationship can lead to feelings of depression, marital dissatisfaction and loneliness (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). Anim (2013) reported communication, time spent together, sex relations, and friendliness as psychosocial areas of high distress in marriages, while Douglas (2013) in examining the love factors - commitment, intimacy, and passion - that predict marital satisfaction, reported a strong significant relationship between the love factors and marital satisfaction.

Some researchers (e.g., Greeff & Malherbe, 2001; Carandang & Guda, 2014), reported a positive association between experienced intimacy and marital satisfaction. Thus, the physical components of intimacy (e.g., physical closeness, touching, hugs, cuddles, holding hands, etc.) have been associated with greater relationship satisfaction (Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann, 2003), and the ability to engage in intimate sexual relations appears to contribute to greater relationship stability and marital satisfaction compared to less frequent sexual relations (Yabiku & Gager, 2009). From the extant literature, one may deduce that substantial evidence supports that intimacy has a positive impact on marital relationship. However, most of these studies were conducted in the Western societies with their differing socio-cultural beliefs and values. Thus, it is of great importance to explore the direction of the relationship between intimacy and marital satisfaction using a Nigerian sample. Hence, the present study explores the relationship between assertiveness, religious commitment, intimacy and marital satisfaction. It is hypothesized that – assertiveness, religious commitment and intimacy will have a significantly positive relationship with marital satisfaction.

Method

Participants

Two hundred and thirty-one (231) married persons participated in the study. The sample was drawn from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. They were mostly Christians (n = 227, 98.3%) and few Muslims (n = 4, 1.7%). The ethnic groups involved were mostly Igbo persons (n = 200, 86%), with Hausa (n = 1, 0.4%), Yoruba (n = 14, 6.1%) and other ethnic groups (n = 16, 6.9%). Their educational qualifications ranged from First School Leaving Certificate (n = 3, 1.29%); through B.Sc. (n = 58, 25.11%); and M.Sc. (n = 122, 52.82%); to PhD (n = 48, 20.78%). Age range was from 21 to 65 years (M = 35.97; SD = 9.41).

Instruments

Four instruments were used in the study, namely: Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS, Rathus, 1973); Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCullough, Berry, Schmitt, Berry, Bursley, & O’Connor, 2003); Intimate Relationship Assessment Scale (Ahia & Onyeizugbo, 2006), and Index of Marital Satisfaction (Hudson, 1982).

The Rathus Assertiveness Schedule (RAS)

The RAS is a standardized psychological assessment instrument developed by Rathus (1973) and validated by Anumba (1995). It is a 30-item inventory designed to assess assertive behaviour or social boldness or the extent to which an individual claims rights, voices out true feelings in social settings. Sample items from the scale include: “Most people seem to be more aggressive and assertive than I am,” “I have hesitated to
make or accept dates because of ‘shyness’,” etc. The RAS requires participants to describe themselves using a code (3 = very much like me; 2 = rather like me; 1 = slightly like me; -3 = very much unlike me; -2 = rather unlike me; -1 = slightly unlike me). Separate norms have been reported for male and female Nigerian samples as follows: males = 48.25, female = 48.61 (Anumba, 1995). The reliability coefficients reported by Rathus (1973) are: split-half = .77 and eight week interval test retest = .78. Anumba (1995) obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .25 by correlating RAS with Index of Peer Relations (IPR) (Hudson, Nurius, Daley, & Newsome, 1988). The direct-scored items include items: 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 18, 20, 21, 22, 25, 27, 28, 29, while the reverse-scored items include: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19, 23, 24, 26, 30, and a sum of the direct and reversed scores items gives the participant’s overall score, which could range from +90 to -90. The Nigerian norms were the basis for interpreting the scores of the participants. Scores higher than the norms indicate that the client is assertive, while scores lower than the norms indicate non-assertiveness.

The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI)

This is a 10-item inventory developed by Worthington et al. (2003). It was designed to measure an individual’s level of commitment to his/her religion. Sample items on the scale include: “I often read books and magazines about my faith,” “I make financial contributions to my religious organization,” “I spend time trying to grow in understanding my faith,” “my religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life”, etc. Items 1 to 6 assess intrapersonal religious commitment, while items 7 to 10 assess interpersonal religious commitment. Items are rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Not at all true of me) to 5 (Totally true of me). The developers reported a coefficient alpha of .93 for full scale, as well as .92 for intrapersonal religious commitment and .82 for interpersonal religious commitment subscale. A Pearson’s correlation coefficient was calculated to determine the subscale intercorrelation and intrapersonal religious commitment was highly correlated with interpersonal religious commitment ($r = .72$). Ifeagwazi and Chukwuorji (2014) obtained a Cronbach’s alpha of .83 (full scale), .78 (intrapersonal religious commitment) and .71 (interpersonal religious commitment) using a Nigerian sample. Responses on all items are directly scored, and higher scores indicate more commitment to one’s religion.

The Intimate Relationship Assessment Scale (IRAS)

This is a 12-item inventory developed by Ahia and Onyeizugbo (2006) to assess one’s level of intimacy with one’s partner. Examples of items on the scale are: “we talk about our interest”; “my partner feels uncomfortable sharing his/her feelings”; “I know my partner has certain weaknesses, but I don’t think there is any real problem,” etc. Items are rated on a four–point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 4 (Always). The developers (Ahia, & Onyeizugbo, 2006) reported a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient of internal consistency, $r = .64$. In terms of concurrent validity, IRAS and the Adjustment Scale (DAS) by Spanier (1976) had a positive correlation coefficient of .81. In a preliminary study, the researchers administered IRAS to 64 students in Benue State University Markurdi, Nigeria. The collected data was computed to obtain a split-half reliability of $r = .77$ which rose to .87 when corrected with Spearman Brown formula. Thus IRAS proved to be both valid and reliable. The negatively keyed items are reverse –scored, and a sum of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participant’s overall score, with higher scores indicating higher level of intimacy.

The Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS)

The IMS is a 25-item inventory developed by Hudson (1982). It is designed to measure the degree of severity or magnitude of the problems one spouse or partner perceives to be having in the marital relationship with his or her partner. Sample items on the scale include: “I feel that my partner treats me badly,” “I feel that my partner is affectionate enough,” “I feel that my partner really cares for me,” “I feel that I would not choose the same partner if I had it to do over,” etc. Items are rated using these codes - (1 = rarely or none of the time; 2 = a little of the time; 3 = some of the time; 4 = good part of the time; and 5 = most of the time). Hudson (1982) reported reliability coefficients of .96, while Anene (1994) obtained a concurrent validity coefficient of .48 by
correlating IMS with Marital Stress Inventory (MSI). Separate norms have been reported for male (28.09) and female (31.28) samples. Hence, scores higher than 31 are regarded as poor or problematic marital satisfaction; while scores lower than (28) are regarded as normal or adequate marital satisfaction. A sum of the direct and reverse-scored items gives the participant’s overall score, and the final score is obtained by subtracting 25 from the participant’s raw score (Hudson, 1982).

Procedure

The questionnaire form containing the measures of relevant study variables and a demographic section was given to the participants. They were approached in their offices during working hours by the second author who explained the purpose of the study to them and requested for the completion of the form. Participation was voluntary and only those who gave informed consent received the questionnaire. They were assured of confidentiality of their responses and anonymity was achieved since there was no provision on the questionnaire for any identifying personal information. Upon completion of the questionnaire, respondents returned it and were verbally appreciated for taking time to take part in the study.

Design/Statistics

The study is a survey and cross-sectional design was adopted. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used for data analysis to test the hypotheses of the study. The regression analysis was suitable because the study was aimed at predicting values on an outcome variable from multiple predictor variables.

Results

Table 1: Summary of Regression Coefficients for Assertiveness, Religious Commitment, Intimacy, and Marital Satisfaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>F - change</th>
<th>$R^2$ change</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assertiveness</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-.13</td>
<td>-1.94**</td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious commitment</td>
<td>-.28</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>-1.86</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy</td>
<td>-1.01</td>
<td>-.46</td>
<td>-7.78***</td>
<td>60.53</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: ** = $p< .05$; *** = $p< .001$

Results showed that assertiveness was a significant negative predictor of marital satisfaction, with the B being -.12 indicating that for every one unit rise in assertiveness, marital satisfaction reduces by .12 units. Thus, assertiveness accounted for 1% of the variance in marital satisfaction. Findings also indicated that intimacy was a significantly negative predictor of marital satisfaction, and the B being 1.01 indicating that for every one unit rise in intimacy, marital satisfaction reduces by 1.01 units. Thus, intimacy accounted for 21% of the variance in marital satisfaction. Findings also showed that religious commitment was not a significant predictor of marital satisfaction ($F = 3.49$, $\beta = -.12$).

Discussion

This study investigated the role of assertiveness, religious commitment and intimacy in marital satisfaction in a Nigerian sample. The first hypothesis that assertiveness will positively predict marital satisfaction was not confirmed by the findings as assertiveness negatively predicted marital satisfaction. Thus, as assertiveness increased, marital satisfaction decreased. This could mean that people in an attempt to express their feelings honestly, tend to go beyond basic assertion and escalating assertiveness to over-assertiveness,
and while unassertiveness courts one set of problems, over-assertiveness creates another (Swiss, 2001), and most often, self-assertion is misconstrued for assertiveness, which could be counterproductive. However, the finding is inconsistent with previous findings by Azadeh, Faramarz and Hassan (2012); Villa and Del Prete (2013) and Karbassi, Manzari and Razarus (2014) who reported a significant positive effect of assertiveness on marital satisfaction. Assertiveness being the ability to recognize one’s needs, feelings and desires and having the willingness and courage to express it in ways that would not spiral into aggression demands skill. Thus, experts in assertive behaviour research have noted that the appropriateness of an assertion depends on the skill with which it is emitted (Eisler, Hersen, Miller, & Blanchard, 1975), and on the extent to which it adheres to the social and cultural norms of the environment in which it is emitted. For instance, in the Nigerian culture, assertiveness is often discouraged in marriages especially on the part of a woman who is expected to be seen and not heard. This is further buttressed by Ezeilo (2005) who reported that assertiveness seems antithetical to African traditional culture, and as such might be detrimental to marital relationship in a Nigerian setting.

In addition, the second hypothesis that religious commitment would have a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction was not confirmed by this finding, because religious commitment had no significant relationship with marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with previous researches of Call and Heaton (1997); Lambert and Dollahite (2006); Schramm et al. (2012), which showed that religious commitment does not always produce a good influence on marital satisfaction, and that there are other hidden factors which could predict marital satisfaction other than religious commitment (Huff, Lianekhammy, & Perry, 2012). Thus, being dissatisfied in marriage could predispose individuals to getting more devoted in religious activities, not necessarily in a bid to increase their marital satisfaction, but rather to take solace in a supreme being who is believed to have the ability to satisfy their unmet marital needs. The finding is also inconsistent with some previous research findings (Ahmadi et al., 2008; Cho, 2014; Dowlatabadi et al., 2013; Fard et al., 2013; Yeganeh & Shaikhmahmoodi, 2013) indicating a significant positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction.

This implies that people often get “religious” when the going gets tough, not because religiosity offers satisfaction, but religiosity is used as a distraction mechanism that takes their minds off their marital challenges as long as they are involved in religious activities. Thus, whenever the religious activity elapses, they return home to face their problems which usually stare back at them. In other words, having faith in a power beyond oneself with an individual seeking to satisfy the demands of life through acts of worship and service does not have a significant impact on marital satisfaction.

Furthermore, the third hypothesis that intimacy would have a significant positive relationship with marital satisfaction was not confirmed in this study, as intimacy had a significant negative relationship with marital satisfaction, such that, as intimacy increased, marital satisfaction decreased. Thus, having a close affective connection with another based on a bond that is formed through knowledge and experience of the other does not have a significant impact on marital satisfaction. Interestingly, this finding is inconsistent with numerous previous researches (e.g., Carandang & Guda, 2014; Douglas, 2013; Greff & Malherbe, 2001; Gulledge, Gulledge, & Stahmann, 2003; Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Yabiku & Gager, 2009) that reported a strong significant positive influence of intimacy on marital satisfaction. This finding could be explained with the cliché, “familiarity breeds contempt.” When two people have stayed together for a long time, and developed intimacy, a high level of intimacy could make partners get so familiar, that there are no surprises in their marital relationship. This fosters boredom, thereby reducing the level of satisfaction one garners from the relationship, which in turn increases the likelihood that dissatisfaction would set into the relationship.

These findings imply that assertiveness which is often proffered as a panacea to conflict (Ome, 2013) could predispose an individual to marital dissatisfaction as a result of his/her partner frowning at it. Hence, in marriage, assertiveness should be employed skillfully, and minimally, in order to ensure that partners understand each other’s point of view. In addition, it is noteworthy that being religiously committed does not
automatically result in marital satisfaction, but could be a strategy employed to distract one from unfavourable marital situations, and as such has no significant relationship with marital satisfaction. On this note, the present study advocates that couples who are dissatisfied in their marriages should seek practical ways of solving their marital problems, and resolving marital issues. This is because, one being so devoted to church activities is not an indication of one’s love for God, but could imply that one is adopting a “marital coping strategy” that might not proffer a lasting solution to marital issues.

Furthermore, in as much as intimacy is good in marital relationships, getting so familiar could undermine one’s satisfaction with one’s spouse. Thus, individuals should try as much as possible to maintain a sense of individuality in all relationships, especially in marital relationships. It is also paramount that couples spice up their marriages by springing up palatable surprises on each other once in a while, so as to reduce the level of predictability between partners. On the other hand, intimacy, over-familiarity, predictability, etc. could be predisposing factors to disregard, boredom and infidelity, and most married men and women could become unfaithful in a bid to spice up their marriages, while hinging on the cliché that “variety is the spice of life”.

The data has some notable limitations. Firstly, sample was drawn from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, only, which is not a representative of the married population. No comparison was made between these participants and other married people in other establishments at other locations within Nigeria. Thus, generalization of the findings from the obtained data may be limited to the university workers sampled. Another limitation is the cross-sectional design of this investigation. Causal sequences were not assessed; rather patterns of association between variables predicted by the theoretical framework of the study were explored. Thirdly, the attribution of relationship to the variables studied, there are other individual and demographic variables like maturity and wisdom that might be implicated in marital satisfaction. These factors could be confounding variables to the study. An additional limitation exists in terms of the method employed in this research. A purely quantitative, self-report method relying on surveys may be inadequate in understanding marital satisfaction. Thus, this method may be prone to bias. Lastly, the schedule used in assessing assertiveness might be more appropriate for the assessment of students than married people.

Following the limitations highlighted above, it is recommended that in subsequent researches, it could be necessary to carry out further studies on the mediating and moderating effects of the variables used in this study, as well as other demographic, social and personality variables. It is also recommended that one incorporates qualitative methodology with quantitative approach in the study of marital satisfaction, and subsequent studies should make use of a larger population in order to increase generalisability of the findings. Also, subsequent studies should adopt assertiveness schedules that are more appropriate in assessing married adults.

Conclusively, the influence of assertiveness and intimacy in marital satisfaction in the Nigerian setting needs to be studied closely. Therefore, it is highly recommended that one asserts oneself skillfully and diplomatically in a way that would not result in conflicts. On the other hand, partners should be intimate with each other but ensure that they do not lose their sense of individuality while at it, since at some point in marriage, couples tend to see each other as siblings rather than partners. Knowledge of the impact of assertiveness and intimacy on marital satisfaction would be helpful in detailed diagnostics and effective interventions with couples, especially in this era of increased divorce rate.

References


Heaton, T. B. (2002). Factors contributing to increased marital stability in the United States. *Journal of...*
Nigerian Journal of Psychological Research

*Family Issues, 23 (3), 392-409.*


