



## DEMOGRAPHIC CORRELATES OF MARITAL CONFLICT AMONG MARRIED INDIVIDUALS IN IBADAN METROPOLIS

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### ABSTRACT

*Marital conflict has been an everyday experience in our societies, with its accompanying detrimental effects staring in our faces. However, the actual trend of the occurrence of marital conflict among couples in Nigeria is not well known due to poor documentation, and a profile of couples at the risk of marital conflict not given attention. This study examined the relationship of marital conflict with couples' age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age-at-marriage. Using a cross-sectional survey method, 538 married individuals were accidentally sampled from three randomly selected local governments in Ibadan. A self-administered questionnaire made up of demographic variables and marital conflict inventory ( $\alpha=0.88$ ) was administered to the participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, person product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis at .05 level of significance. Results reveal a significant inverse relationship of marital conflict with age ( $r^2=-.110$ ) and marriage duration ( $r^2=-.107$ ). Marital conflict had no significant relationship with courtship duration, age at marriage [ $r = -.081, p > .05$ ] & [ $r = -.012, p > .05$ ] respectively. Age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age-at-marriage significantly jointly predicted marital conflict ( $R^2 = .012; F = 2.606; p < .05$ ). It was concluded that age and time spent in marriage is a necessary factor in the occurrence of marital conflict. However, these factors when alone might not be strong enough to predict marital conflict.*

**Keywords:** *Marital conflict, demographics, Ibadan*

**Word count:** 225

### INTRODUCTION

Marital conflict is quite a wide spread phenomenon in virtually all societies and has been the bane of continuity of most happily married couples (Shakerian, 2014). Its detrimental effect on the life and career of individual spouses as well as offspring of the marriage cannot be underestimated. It has become quite endemic in our society, such that several married couples now live as strangers within the same home (Meyer, 2011).

Marital conflict refers to open antagonism between spouses that is identified by both or either of them as disagreement or a source of difficulty in the relationship. Bassard (1995) defined a marital conflict (problematic marriage) as a breakdown in the communication among couples which result to constant argument in forms of verbal argument, physical aggression, psychological, emotional and physical separation, all of which may lead to an end in divorce. Adegoke and Esere (1998) and Sotonade (1998) argue that conflicts and hostilities create 'scars' on the partners, but Esere (2011) view marital conflict and misunderstanding as essential for the growth of all marriages.

The attention given to marital conflict is understandable when we consider its implications for mental, physical, and family health. Generally, marital conflict has been linked to the onset of depressive symptoms, eating disorders, alcoholism, episodic drinking, binge drinking, and out-of-home drinking among several populations (Fincham, 2001). Katu (1986) stresses that most social misfits found in Nigerian urban areas are products of broken homes as consequences of unresolved marital conflicts. The gross negative implications that the occurrence of marital conflict have on individual spouse, their children and the society at large form the motivation for this present research; an attempt to explore the basic correlates of marital conflict in our own society in comparison to what has been reported in other societies.

Virtually every day the social media platform is inundated with stories of celebrity marriages that are going through conflicts, separation, or divorce. These marriages make headlines basically because those involved are (or one of them is) popular. Many marriages of other professionals break down by the day as well, but those ones do not make headline news nor do those of the lower classes unless these are reported as judgements from customary and

magistrate courts. The conflicts, separations and divorces dispensed in families under native laws and customs are in fact, out of the view of popular media as well. Hence, the skyrocketing statistics of marital conflict in the Nigerian society can hardly be adequately documented.

Some researchers (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Cherlin, 2009 and National Vital Statistics Reports – NVSR, 2009) report that approximately 50% of marriages in the United States experience conflict that ends in divorce. Similarly, Gonzalez & Viitanen (2009) asserted that more than half of re-married individuals will experience marital conflict and divorce a second time; a trend that is apparent in many countries around the world. Although the actual rate of divorce in Nigeria is not available, Adegoke and Esere (1998) and Yahaya (2008) indicate that media reports and evidences from customary courts and Social Welfare Offices reveal high rate of divorce due to marital conflicts.

There has been several researches towards enunciating the basic causes of marital conflict, with several of them focussing on level of education of the married couples (Kreager, Richard & Marin, 2013), maturity (Olayinka, 2000), sexual satisfaction (Ezeukwu, 1988; Alahveriani, Rajaie, Shakeri, Lohrasbi, 2010, and Onyechi, 2003), communication patterns and interference of in-laws (Yagoob, 1984 and Onyechi, 2003), childlessness, poverty (Onyechi, 2003) among others. These findings have however not been able to identify the actual set of people that is at a high risk of being victims of marital conflict, of which inability to pinpoint such a population in our society makes any attempt towards intervening in marital conflict on a generic level rather a task too herculean to achieve. This problem worsens especially in the Nigerian society that is characterized by lack and/or inadequate record keeping.

There have been several studies that focused on identifying demographic attributes of individuals experiencing marital conflict; however most of them are carried out in other climes outside Nigeria. For example, a study conducted by Glass and Wright (1997) focused on the role of extramarital sex, length of marriage and marital satisfaction. Length of marriage was found to impact marital satisfaction, although it was less important than extramarital sex. Other studies conducted by Blood and Wolfe (1960), Bowerman (1957), Burr (1970), and Pineo (1961) examined the effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction over time. These studies found that while children are in the home, perceptions of one's partner are less favorable than prior to having a child or following the child leaving home (Glass & Wright, 1997). Although all of these studies examined length of relationship, none evaluated the impact length of relationship had on marital conflict.

It is well known that several Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that are family related, the likes of Society for Family Health (SFH), Association for Family and Reproductive Health (AFRH) among many others that are domiciled in the Nigerian community are making several attempts towards the betterment of family life among Nigerians, but without an adequate profile of the individuals that are more at risk of marital conflict, their efforts might not be well directed and the results they obtain would be largely discouraging, amounting to a waste of human, material and financial resources.

This study is premised on the stance of the Role theory propounded by Mangus (1957). It proposes that in any marital conflict situation, the causative factor is due to role conflict. This emerges in a situation where there is a disagreement between partners on their different role expectations. The role theory assumes that each partner in any marriage usually enters the marriage not only with some ideas or perceptions as to how he or she should behave but also with certain expectation as to how the other should behave.

They harbour not only expectation as to what should be done by the other in marriage, but also how the roles expected of the other should be executed. Disagreements in marital role expectations actually arise due mainly to the fact that two parties in the marriage come from different family / social backgrounds and usually lack the opportunity (before or after marriage) to sit down to discuss and harmonize for themselves what each is expected to do in the marriage. Because these expectations are fashioned from different social backgrounds, there is

therefore the tendency for such roles to conflict, leading in practical terms to the crisis of role strains among the parties concerned.

## **METHOD**

### **DESIGN**

This study is a cross-sectional survey and the correlational design was used for this study to establish a relationship between the independent variables of age, marriage duration, courtship duration and 'age at marriage' and the dependent variable, marital conflict.

### **SETTING**

The study was carried out using willing participants from within Ibadan metropolis. Ibadan is the capital of Oyo state and the largest city in terms of geographical area in Nigeria. It is the third most populous city in Nigeria after Lagos and Kano. Ibadan has eleven (11) local government areas; however, participants for this study were drawn from three randomly selected local governments in Ibadan, including Ibadan-North, Ibadan South-East and Akinyele local government areas.

### **SAMPLING**

The Accidental sampling technique was used to administer the questions at the different selected areas of Ibadan. A sample size of 550 participants was selected based on Slovin's formula for sample size calculation. The formula  $[n = N / (1+Ne^2)]$  for a population of 8 million inhabitants of Ibadan city gives a sample size of 400 participants. Salkind (1997) recommended over sampling by increasing your sample size by about 40% to account for lost questionnaires and uncooperative respondents; hence, the additional 150 to make up 550 participants. Only married individuals, who could speak, read and understand English language and are willing to participate in the study were included.

### **INSTRUMENTS**

The instrument for data collection was a structured self-administered questionnaire which comprises of two sections, sections A and B.

#### **Section A: Demographic Variable**

This section of the questionnaire contains items measuring demographic information of the participants which include Sex, Religion, Marital Status, Ethnicity, Courtship Duration, Age at marriage and Marriage duration.

#### **Section B: Marital Conflict Inventory (MCI)**

Marital Conflict Inventory (MCI) developed by the researchers was adopted. It contains 14 items and is measured in two levels of high and low. The overall norm for the MCI showed Cronbach alpha of .88, split-half coefficient of .89, standard deviation of 7.82 and mean value of 45.06.

### **PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION**

The researchers approached households in the sample areas, requested the consent of married individuals in the households and administered the questionnaires to those that gave consent. They were assured of anonymity and confidentiality with respect to the information being given, especially bearing the sensitivity of the variables of interest to the study. Administration for each participant had an average time of ten minutes. Of the 550 questionnaires administered, only 538 were retrieved and validly filled, hence was gathered and coded for statistical analysis.

### **STATISTICAL ANALYSIS**

Using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software 21.0 version, data collected in the study were analyzed. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the

analysis of the data collected. Specifically, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) analysis was used to test the hypotheses.

## RESULT

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participants

Variable	N	%	Mean	SD
<b>Sex</b>				
Male	264	49.1		
Female	274	51.9		
Total	538	100.0		
			35.6	8.9
<b>Age</b>				
Below 35	328	61.00		
Above 35	210	31.00		
Total	538	100.0		
			8.01	7.7
<b>Marriage Duration</b>				
Less than 8 Years	372	69.1		
More than 8 Years	166	31.9		
Total	538	100.0		
			27.64	3.8
<b>Marital Age</b>				
27 and before	297	55.2		
After 27	241	44.8		
Total	538	100.0		

The total population of study in this present research was 538, among which 264 (49.1%) are males and 274 (51.9%) are females; 328 (61%) are below the 35 years of age while 210 (31%) are above 35 years of age; 372 (69.1%) have been married for less than 8 years while 166 (31.9%) has been married for more than 8 years age; 297 (55.2%) got married on or before age 27 while 241 (44.8%) got married after age 27.

Table 2: Relationship between the Dependent Variable and Independent Variables

S/N	Variable	1	2	3	4	5
1	Marital Conflict	-				
2	Age	-.11*	-			
3	Marriage Duration	-.11*	.87**	-		
4	Courtship Duration	-.08	.28**	.20**	-	
5	Age at Marriage	-.01	.46**	.05	.26**	-

\*\**p* < 0.01. \**p* < 0.05.

Table 2 shows that marital conflict has a significant negative relationship with age of participants and marriage duration [ $r = -.11, p < .05$ ] & [ $r = -.11, p < .05$ ] respectively]. Marital conflict had no significant relationship with courtship duration, age at marriage [ $r = -.08, p > .05$ ] & [ $r = -.01, p > .05$ ] respectively].

**Table 3: Summary table of multiple regression analysis showing joint and independent influence of Age, Marriage duration, Courtship duration and Age at marriage on Marital Conflict**

Variables	$\beta$	T	P	R	$R^2$	F	P
Age	-.29	-1.41	>.05	.02	.01	2.61	<.05
Marriage Duration	.15	.84	>.05				
Courtship Duration	-.07	-1.50	>.05				
Age at Marriage	.13	1.37	>.05				

Results from table 3 shows that age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age at marriage significantly jointly influenced the marital conflict ( $R^2 = .01$ ;  $F(4,531) = 2.61$ ;  $p < .05$ ). This infers that age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age at marriage jointly accounted for only about 1.2% of the variance observable in marital conflict of couples in Ibadan. Further, the independent contribution of age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age at marriage were not significant [ $(\beta = -.29$ ;  $t = -1.41$ ;  $p > .05$ ),  $(\beta = .15$ ;  $t = .84$ ;  $p > .05$ ),  $(\beta = -.07$ ;  $t = -1.50$ ;  $p > .05$ ) &  $(\beta = .13$ ;  $t = 1.37$ ;  $p > .05$ ) respectively].

## DISCUSSION

The findings from this study indicated that marital conflict is inversely significantly correlated with the age of a married individual and the duration of marriage, but not significantly related to the duration of courtship and the age of marriage onset. This infers that as married couples become older, the occurrence of marital conflict declines; the longer the years spent in marriage, the lesser the occurrence of marital conflicts. This finding is in consonance with the conclusion of other existing studies. Nwobi (1995) found that length of marriage among other personal factors have significant impact on the couple's ability to tolerate one another and avoid conflict in marriage. Nwobi (1995) also found that younger marriages are more likely to be conflict prone than older marriages. Rabbin and Rahar (1995) found that older couples had significantly lower levels of distress, less desire for change in their marriage and better perceptual accuracy of the changes desired by their partners than younger couples, the conditions that work to avoid marital conflict. Landis (1997) also found a similar result that predicted better adjustment of couples at older age. Levenson & Robert (2009) found that in terms of age difference, older couples used more we-ness words than did middle aged couples.

Further, the association between separateness and marital satisfaction was strongest for older wives. Baby (2010) also found that women who are younger and similar in age with their counterparts were well relaxed in their marriages. Timothy, Berg, & Cynthia (2009) found that older couples reported less negative affect during disagreement and rated spouse as warmer while middle aged couples reported high negative affect during disagreement. Further, older couples were said to display little evidence of greater positivity and reduced negativity,

especially, women while middle-aged couples displayed higher evidence of greater positivity and increased negativity, during collaboration, older couples displayed a unique blend of warmth and control suggesting a greater focus on emotional and social concerns during problem solving while reverse was the case for middle aged couples.

This study further revealed a significant joint influence of age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age at marriage on marital conflict while accounting for about 1.2% of the variance observed in marital conflict of married individuals; none of the demographic variables however had a significant independent influence on marital conflict. This would infer though that the demographic variables considered in this study have an influence on marital conflict in families, their influence is quite little in comparison to other factors that were not considered in the present study. It would also follow that age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age at marriage have complementary effects on marital conflict, of which each factor, though significantly correlated with marital conflict, do not independently predict the occurrence of marital conflict in marital relationships.

These findings are similar to assertions of Wheeler (2010) that age at the time of marriage, and number of years married is linked to marital quality, and are important to consider in relation to age differences. Other researches have also shown that marriages of longer length experience more positive and less negative interactions (Carstensen, Gottman, & Levenson, 1995).

## CONCLUSION

This study found that marital conflict decreases with increase in age of couples and the length of years spent in the marriage. It also found a significant joint but non-independent influence of age, marriage duration, courtship duration and age-at-marriage on marital conflict. This establishes 'time' as major factor that can make or mar marital relationships, although accounting for only very little percentage of what contributes to conflict in marriages.

These findings however suggests that these time factors should considered while evaluating the cause and militating against the occurrence of marital conflict. It has contributed to existing knowledge relating to the factors involved in the occurrence of marital conflict in our society. Bearing the positive influence of age and length of marriage on marital conflict, the findings can be useful in encouraging young couples and early marriages experiencing conflict in their marriages not to relent in their efforts to make the marriage work and not to consider divorce as the outright solution, since it gets easier as they spend more time in the marriage and as they grow older. It is therefore recommended that marriage counselors, family therapists and religious leaders involved in marital issues adopt time as one of the strategies for dealing with cases of marital conflict brought before them. Probably arbitrators and magistrates in customary courts should also consider these time factors in the process of litigating marital contracts to issue or not divorce certificates for conflicting couples.

The findings of this study could however suffer certain limitations not unrelated to the generalizability of findings to other populations outside experiences and culture that obtains in Ibadan city, the setting for this study; hence could be replicated in other settings. Some other demographic factors that can affect the occurrence of marital conflict could also be considered in future studies, such as the age differences among couples and the amount of time spent together and apart. This would further clarify the influence of time factors on marital conflict.

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