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THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON THE HAPPINESS OF MARRIED WOMEN IN ALIMOSHO LOCAL GOVERNMENT, LAGOS STATE.NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of social support on the happiness of married women in Alimosho Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria. The research adopted a cross-sectional survey design involving 486 married female adults selected through convenient sampling. Two hypotheses were formulated and tested using Pearson correlation analysis, Regression Analysis, and Independent Statistical Analysis. Results from Pearson correlation and regression analyses revealed a significant positive relationship between social support and happiness (r = .452, p < .001), with social support accounting for 20.5% of the variance in happiness scores. Further analysis showed that belonging and tangible supports were significant independent predictors of happiness, while appraisal support was not. Additionally, although older women reported slightly higher levels of happiness (M=107.52), than their younger counterparts (M=104.46), the difference was not statistically significant (t= -1.89, df(484), >.01). The findings reveals the importance of emotional and practical support in promoting marital happiness among women. Implications for mental health interventions, family counseling, and gender-sensitive support systems are discussed.

***Keywords*:** Social support, Happiness, Married women, Age.

INTRODUCTION

Happiness refers to a person's evaluation of their live which encompass the cognitive judgements of satisfaction and affective appraisals of moods and emotions, of which the emotional component refers to pleasure, and the cognitive component pertains to mental health (Veenhoven, 1984). Therefore, one can say happiness is a state of subjective well-being in the sense that there's individual differences when it comes to the perception of happiness. The concept of happiness can be evaluated from the hedonic approach and eudaimonic approach. From hedonic perspective, happiness is defined as pursuit of positive emotion, seeking maximum pleasure, and a pleasant life overall with instant gratification (Ryan and Deci, 2001), while the eudaimonic approach surpasses the limit of hedonic approach as it defines happiness as change, growth and breaking homeostasis. This approach stresses development as happiness and well-being. Happiness is important to humans both as individuals and the society at large, Studies (Koivumaa-Honkanen et al., 2001; Bukhari & Khanam, 2015 have shown that unhappy and unsatisfied people have more depression and anxiety and do not like their outcomes more than happy and satisfied individuals; suicide and death rate is higher among them and have a shorter life. When a person is happy, they strive to improve their relationships with friends, family, colleagues and even with strangers they just met. Additionally, the quality of their relationships improves, which drives away the feelings of loneliness, isolation, and seclusion (Fredrickson et al., 2008).

Happiness in adults has a great association with marital status as a study by Kobau et al. (2013) showed that married individuals experience more happiness and life satisfaction, which in turn leads to positive experiences such as marital satisfaction, improvement in social and family relationships and lower rates of divorce. For married women, the pursuit of happiness can be particularly vital, as it influences various aspects of their personal and social lives. In many Nigerian societies, married women are often expected to fulfil certain roles, including being the primary caregivers for children and maintaining the household. These expectations can create pressure to conform, which may impact their personal happiness. Therefore, understanding the factors affecting the happiness of married women is of great importance in every society. Their happiness has significant effects on both their family and society, it has been revealed that

happiness among married women is correlated with better parenting outcomes, improved relationship satisfaction, and a stronger sense of community engagement (Rogers & White, 1998).

In times of crisis or distress, individuals often rely on the support of those around them to cope and manage their challenges. One of the most crucial forms of help comes in the form of social support, which can take various forms, including emotional and practical assistance from family, friends, and colleagues. Social support can be defined as the emotional assistance or practical assistance that a person receives from social groups, such as family, friends, and colleagues during times of crisis and distress. These social groups provide the opportunity to augment one's quality of life and protect oneself against adverse life events (Guilaran *et al.,* 2018). Social support can be of various form, which include; emotional support i.e. having someone to share feelings and experiences with in order to enhance one's emotional wellbeing. It can also be in form of instrumental support which involves practical help, such as assistance in tasks or financial assistance. Also, it can occur in the form of informational support, meaning receiving advice or information that can help with decision-making.

Having a strong social support network can enhance the effectiveness of coping strategies, helping to reduce the severity of various psychological discomfort symptoms in individuals (Kowalchyk *et al.,* 2023). People with close social relationships tend to report higher levels of well-being and flourishing (Diener *et al.,* 2018) which will increase the level of happiness experienced by an individual. Studies have also shown a significant and positive relationship between social support and happiness (Janveic et al., 2004). Social support as a predictor of happiness involves having a network of significant others such as parents, husbands, brothers, sisters and friends that one can turn to in times of needs in terms of care, attention, respect and advice. Social support provides various functional benefits for married women including attachment (e.g support by spouses), reliable alliance (e.g social support by family), reassurance of self- worth (e.g support by friends), and opportunity for nurturance, all of which elevates their happiness level.

The Authentic Theory of Happiness developed by Seligman (2002) explains that true happiness goes beyond just experiencing positive emotions, but also involves a deeper sense of fulfilment and well-being, achieved through living a life of meaning and engagement. In light of this, he goes further to identifying three main elements of happiness which include positive emotion, engagement, and meaning. Positive emotion refers to the pleasant experiences and emotions that an individual might feel, such as love, joy, and contentment within their relationship with others. Engagement on the other hand involves being deeply involved in activities that are enjoyable and absorbing, for married women this could include being actively engaged in family life, work, hobbies, or other interests. Meaning refers to the sense of purpose and belonging. Having a supportive and loving marriage can enhance the positive emotions experienced by a married woman and also provide a space where they are freely heard, leading to a greater sense of engagement and meaning, contributing to a heightened level of happiness.

A study by Ahmadi et al. (2019), investigated the relationship between perceived social support and happiness among older people in Qazvin, Iran using 312 older adults, results revealed that there was positive and significant correlation between happiness and social support and its dimensions, such that the elderly who perceived more social support felt more happy, This is consonance with the findings of Ahmed and Mohamed (2022) who investigated the relationship between social support and happiness among elderly in Philadelphia. Other studies have shown that younger married women tend to have high levels of authentic happiness, with some exhibiting moderate levels as well (Puteri, 2023). On the other hand, research indicates that older married women generally experience higher levels of happiness compared to single older women, with different factors influencing their happiness levels based on their marital status and age (Nabilah, 2019). Additionally, findings suggest that married women, especially in older age groups, tend to exhibit more sociable and happier behaviours, enjoying harmonious relationships and experiencing less anxiety and narcissistic traits compared to younger married women and unmarried women (Chatterjee, 2015).

A study by Ariyo and Mgbeokwi (2019) assessed the perception of companionship in relation to marital satisfaction among married individuals in Lagos State, Nigeria. The findings indicated that a significant majority (95.9%) agreed that couples who consider each other as best friends are generally happier in their marriages. Additionally, 95% acknowledged the vital role of companionship in achieving marital satisfaction. However, a notable percentage reported a decline in expressing love and commitment (91.3%) and in open communication about mutual interests (89.6%) compared to their courtship period. This underscores the importance of sustained companionship and social support in promoting marital happiness. Further research by Okojide et al. (2023) examined psychological well-being as a predictor of marital stability among employed women in Lagos State. The study revealed a significant influence of psychological well-being on marital stability, emphasizing that positive relationships contribute to marital satisfaction. This suggests that social support systems play a crucial role in enhancing the happiness and stability of married women. Another study by Olabimtan (2022) investigated the influence of perceived social support and self-esteem on the psychological well-being of civil servants in Lagos State. The results demonstrated a significant positive relationship between social support and psychological well-being, highlighting that individual with higher perceived social support experienced better psychological health. This finding underscores the importance of social support in promoting overall well-being, which is integral to marital happiness.

Happiness plays a crucial role in marriage, contributing to marital satisfaction, stronger social and family relationships, and lower divorce rates. However, divorce remains a persistent issue. According to a report by Divorce.com (2023), Nigeria's divorce rate reached 2.9% in 2023, translating to 1.8 divorces per 1,000 people. This places Nigeria eleventh among the 26 countries with the highest divorce rates. Research also suggests that divorced individuals report lower levels of happiness in marriage. Despite numerous studies on the topic, little is known about the role of social support in predicting happiness among married women in Lagos State. Understanding this relationship is essential, as it could help identify ways to enhance marital happiness for women in the region.

The main objectives of this study were to;
1. Investigate the extent to which social support predicts happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state.
2. Examine the influence of age on the happiness experienced among married female adults in Alimosho Lagos state.

The following hypotheses were formulated to test the identified aims and objectives of this current study.
1. Social support will be a positive predictor of happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state
2. Older married women will report higher level of happiness than younger married women

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This study adopted a cross-sectional research design. The design was chosen because all the variables were sampled at the same time. The independent variables in the study are social support, while the dependent variable is happiness. For primary data, structured questionnaires were used for data collection, and they lasted for about two months. This study was carried out in Alimosho Local Government Area, Lagos state.

Population
The study population comprised married women of various age groups residing in Alimosho Local Government Area of Lagos State. Alimosho was selected as the study location due to its status as the most populous local government area in Lagos, representing a diverse mix of socio-economic backgrounds, cultural practices, and family dynamics. This diversity provides a broad

and representative context for examining the factors influencing the happiness and well-being of married women.

Sample and Sampling Technique
This research was carried out using a convenient sampling technique in selecting the participants across the entirety of Alimosho Local Government area. This technique was chosen because it is cost and time effective in selecting the sample. The study utilized a sample size of 486 married women, due to financial constraints limiting the ability to reach a larger sample, a total of 554 married women were initially sampled, but only four hundred and eighty-six (486) properly filled out the questionnaire. The age range of the participants varied, with a mean age of 43.22 years and a standard deviation of 9.68. In terms of religion, 241 participants (49.6%) identified as Christians, 230 (47.3%) as Muslims, and 15 (3.1%) belonged to other religious groups. Regarding ethnicity, the majority were Yoruba (266 participants, 54.7%), followed by Igbo (145 participants, 29.8%) and Hausa (75 participants, 15.4%).

Measures
The researcher used an offline structured questionnaire for data collections which was divided into three sections.

Demographic variable: This consisted a question accessing the participants' age, religion and ethnicity

Happiness: This was measured using the 29 – item Oxford Happiness scale developed by Hills and Argyle (2002) to measure individual level of happiness and well-being. The scale adopted 6 – point response format ranging from; strongly disagree (1), moderately disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, moderately agree and strongly agree (6). Items 1, 5, 6, 10, 13, 14, 19, 23, 24, 27, 28, and 29 are reverse-scored, the scores for all 29 items are summed with higher scores reflecting greater happiness. The scale showed internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient of 0.74

Social support: This was measured using the 12 items measure of perception of social support developed by Cohen et al. (1985). The scale is rated on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 – (Definitely false) to 4 – (Definitely true). Higher scores on all sections are related to greater social support. The MSPSS has three sub-scales with 4 items for each type (**Appraisal support:** 2,4,6,11; **Belonging support:** 1,5,7,9; **Tangible support:** 3,8,10,12). Items 1,2,7,8,11,12 are reversed scored. The scores for all 12 items are summed with higher scores reflecting higher social support. The scale demonstrates acceptable internal consistency, evidenced by a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.72.

Procedure for Data Collection
The researchers contacted the participants in their various workplace then establish rapport with them and seek their consent before administering the questionnaire to them. Participants were told to an extent, the intention of the research, and were assured of the confidentiality of their response and their right to withdraw from the research at any point they feel they could no longer continue. Due to financial setback, the researchers were only able to administered the questionnaire to 554 married women, but after careful examination only 486 questionnaires were properly filled and which after verification and scoring, it was subjected to statistical analysis.
The researchers used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25 for analysis and testing of the hypotheses.

RESULTS

Table 1: Summary table of Pearson correlation analysis showing relationship between social support and happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state.

Variables	1	2	Mean	SD
Happiness	1	.452**	105.92	17.83
Social Support	.452**	1	30.94	6.57

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The table above revealed a moderate positive correlation between social support and happiness, $r(486) = .452$, $p < .001$, indicating that higher levels of social support are associated with greater happiness. The correlation was statistically significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

Table 2: Summary table of simple linear regression showing independent influence of social support on happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state.

Variable	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	Sig
	B	Std. Error	B		
(constant)	67.937	3.480		19.521	.000
Social Support	1.228	.110	.452	11.158	.000

R^2 = .205; R=.452

The result on the table showed that happiness was significantly predicted by the composite influence of social support ($\beta = .452$; $t = 11.158$; $P < .01$). Social support independently accounted for 20.5% of the change observed in happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state. This means that 20.5% of the variance that occurred in the reported happiness among married female adults was attributed to social support. In addition, the result further revealed that happiness among married female adults increased by (1.228) for every unit of increase in the social support they receive. Overall, this regression table indicates that there is a weak positive relationship between social support and happiness, and this relationship is statistically significant. The hypothesis which states that "social support will be a positive predictor of happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state" is thereby accepted.

Table 3: Summary table of multiple regression showing joint and independent influence of appraisal support, belonging support and tangible support on happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state.

Variable	R	R^2	F	P	β	t	P
Model	.469	.220	45.386	.000			
Appraisal Support					.076	1.476	.141
Belonging Support					.161	3.155	.002
Tangible Support					.317	6.530	.000

R^2 adjusted = .215

The results on the table 4 above show that appraisal, belonging and tangible supports jointly influenced the level of happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state [R^2 =.220, F= (45.39), P<.01]. It could further be observed that appraisal support, belonging support and tangible supports jointly contributed 22.0% of the changes observed in the level of happiness among married female adults in Alimosho local government, Lagos state. This means that 22% of the variance observed in happiness among married female adults in Alimosho is attributed to the three domains of social support. Additionally, it could be observed that belonging support was a significant independent predictor of happiness (β = .161, t =3.155, p<.01), it could also be observed that tangible support was a significant independent predictor of happiness (β =.317, t =6.530, p<.01), while appraisal support is not a significant predictor of happiness (β = 076, t =1.476, p>.01)

Table 5: Summary table of independent sample t-test showing influence of age category on happiness among married female adults.

	Age Cat.	N	Mean	Std	df	t-value	Sig
Happiness	Younger	254	104.46	18.02	484	-1.89	.059
	Older	232	107.52	17.50			

The result from the table above showed that there was no significant influence of Age category on happiness (t= -1.89, df (484), >.01). This indicates that there was no statistical difference in the observed happiness scores between younger married female adults and older married female adults who participated in this study. However, older married female adults reported higher scores on happiness *(M=107.52)* compared to the younger married female participants *(M=104.46)*. This difference in scores were not statistically significant and enough to conclude that difference existed between the two groups. The hypothesis which state that "Older married women will report higher level of happiness than younger married women" is hereby rejected.

DISCUSSION

The first hypothesis, which posited a significant relationship between social support and happiness among married women in Lagos State, was supported by the findings of this study. A significant positive relationship was observed, indicating that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with greater happiness. This finding aligns with previous studies, such as those by Diener et al. (2018) and Seligman (2002), which emphasized the essential role of close relationships and social ties in promoting happiness. The findings also support Cohen et al. (1985) buffering hypothesis, which suggests that social support helps individuals cope with stress more effectively, leading to better psychological outcomes like increased happiness. This result of the current study also supports the findings of Olabimitan (2022) which demonstrated that individual with higher perceived social support experienced better psychological health.

Furthermore, the study further revealed that while the different types of social support (belonging, tangible and appraisal support) would have a significant joint influence on the happiness of married women, only belonging support and tangible support showed a significant independent effect. Appraisal support, although positively correlated, did not independently predict happiness at statistically significant levels. These findings partially contrast with the work of Uchino (2009), who reported that appraisal, belonging and tangible support significantly contribute to psychological well-being. This discrepancy may reflect the unique socio-cultural context of Lagos State, where emotional bonds, especially within marriage and family structures, might be prioritized over practical assistance or informational advice. Interestingly, the limited impact of appraisal support on happiness could also suggest that while these forms of support are beneficial, they may not evoke the same sense of emotional fulfilment or psychological security

that emotional support provides. In Nigerian cultural settings where communal living and emotional connection are highly valued, the role of affective support may naturally exert stronger influence on subjective happiness.

The second hypothesis which stated that older married women would report higher levels of happiness than younger married women was not supported by the results. Although older women had a slightly higher mean happiness score compared to younger women, the difference was not statistically significant. While previous research has suggested that older individuals may experience greater happiness due to increased stability, emotional regulation, or life satisfaction (Chatterjee, 2015; Nabilah, 2019), the current results do not provide sufficient evidence to support this assertion within the sampled population.

This suggests that age does not significantly influence happiness among married women in Lagos State. The finding indicates that other factors—such as quality of marital relationship or emotional support—may play a more critical role in determining happiness than age alone. The lack of significant age-related differences in happiness could be attributed to several factors. First, it is possible that both younger and older married women face unique stressors and sources of satisfaction that balance out in their overall evaluation of happiness. Younger women may benefit from optimism and new marital experiences, while older women may enjoy emotional maturity and long-term companionship. Secondly, cultural expectations and shared communal values in Nigerian settings may foster resilience and support across all age groups, thereby minimizing age-related disparities in well-being.

CONCLUSION

The current study investigated the impact of social support on the happiness of married women in Lagos State, drawing on social psychological theories and empirical models of well-being. Findings confirmed that perceived social support is a significant predictor of happiness, with higher levels of support corresponding to greater subjective happiness among married women. This study highlights the crucial role of social connectedness and interpersonal relationships in fostering emotional and psychological satisfaction within marital contexts.

These results add to the growing body of literature emphasizing the multidimensional and context-specific nature of happiness, particularly among women in urban African settings. While age alone did not significantly influence happiness levels, the findings suggest that other factors—such as marital duration, emotional intimacy, and overall life satisfaction—may interact with age and merit further investigation. Most importantly, this study highlights the need for family-oriented and culturally sensitive interventions that strengthen emotional bonds and support systems for women. Mental health professionals, marriage counsellors, and community-based organizations can use these insights to develop targeted strategies that promote emotional well-being and lasting marital happiness.

LIMITATIONS

While the findings of this study provide valuable contributions to understanding the role of social support in the happiness of married women in Lagos State, several limitations should be acknowledged.

First, the sample was drawn exclusively from Alimosho local government area, Lagos state, which may limit the generalizability of the results toother regions in Nigeria or different cultural settings. Lagos is a cosmopolitan and urban area, and the experiences of married women in more rural or less developed areas may differ significantly due to varying social norms, economic conditions, and access to support systems. Apart from that, the study relied on self-report questionnaires to assess both social support and happiness. While such instruments are common in psychological research, they are susceptible to social desirability bias, where participants may overstate positive aspects of their lives or underreport dissatisfaction to conform to perceived social expectations. This could have influenced the accuracy of the reported levels of happiness and support.

The study did not account for certain moderating variables such as personality traits, mental health status, or the quality of the marital relationship—all of which may influence both perceived social support and happiness. Including these variables in future studies could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological mechanisms at play.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes meaningfully to the discourse on social support and well-being, particularly within the Nigerian context. It sets the stage for future inquiries that can build upon these findings and explore deeper psychological and cultural dimensions of marital happiness.

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