



PARENTAL MARITAL HISTORY AS A PREDICTOR OF MARITAL SUCCESS/FAILURE AMONG WOMEN IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Marital success/failure is believed to be partly associated with the parental background of couples especially in Nigeria. This study investigated the relationship between parental marital history and the success/failure of marriages among women. It further examined whether a relationship existed between marital success/failure and the predictor variables of intact marriage, divorce and remarriage. The participants consisted of 377 respondents, randomly selected from the Federal Secretariat in Rivers State, Nigeria. Parental Marital Success/Failure Questionnaire, developed by the researcher was the instrument used to generate data. The data were analyzed using Pearson (r) correlation and regression analysis. The study found a significant positive correlation between parental marital history and success/failure of marriage ($p < 0.01$); and that the multiple variables of intact marriage, divorce and remarriage significantly predicted marital success/failure, with divorce being the highest contributory variable in determining marital success and failure (Beta=.434; T-ratio=4.369). Based on the findings, recommendations were made.

Key Words: Marital success, Failure, Parental marital history, Prediction, Women

INTRODUCTION

Marital success refers to the degree of agreement and resolution of disagreements, amount of conflict, shared activities, self-rating of happiness, perceived permanence of the marriage, etc (Pittman & Lloyd, 1988). Perceptions of reciprocity within the marriage are said to be important factors in predicting marital success. In other words, the perceptions that each member has concerning the contributions of his/her partner is important in the determination of acceptable reciprocity. Marital failure is the reverse, in which the contributions of one partner to the other is disproportionate in terms of maintenance work within the marriage resulting into unhappiness and consequently, failure of the marriage (Burgess, 1939). Other important predictors of marital success were firstly the man's ability to accept influence from his partner and secondly the woman's ability to moderate her approach to seeking influence (Patricia & Kuhlman, 2003). This means that marriage succeeds when both partners give up some control.

There is widespread concern that the marriage institution may be witnessing more problems in recent times than was the case several decades ago in Nigeria. The seriousness of this issue is largely related to the effects of failed marriages on the society. For instance, Ajayi (2005) noted that the effects of bad marriages are often seen in the behavioural dispositions of children and that divorce has become very frequent since the 1990s.

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Previous study examined the influence of mothers' marital histories in the cohabitation and marital experiences of their children, in which the researcher investigated factors such as mothers' state at marriage - whether pregnant or not, age at marriage and experiences with marital disruptions and remarriage. Other features taken into account include socio-economic status and religious affiliation of parents. It reports that children of mothers who married young and were pregnant at marriage, entered into their own marital and non-marital unions earlier than others and that the experiences of parental marital dissolution increases children's non-marital cohabitation but has little effect on their marriages (Thurton, 1991). Hill and Peplau (2011) explain marital background in terms of similarities in partners' characteristics with respect to parents' education, mothers' work history or parents' religious similarities. However, the present study focused on another dimension of parents' marital history. This involves the influence of parents' marital history categorized into three dimensions such as intact marriage (where parents stay together), divorce (where parents are living apart) and remarriage (where parents entered into a second marriage) in determining marital success/failure of women in Rivers State, Nigeria. It presupposes that married women who come from homes where their parents have experienced marital dissolution or conflict have the greater chances of experiencing similar problems. This is predicated on the assumption that parents pass on values, norms and other qualities to their children, including parental style, support, and interpersonal relationship, which in turn affects the development of family relationship (Ebenuwa-Okoh & Obiunu, 2011).

This study is premised on the Attachment theory which posits that stable early family life experiences allow youths to feel secure in later relationship and teach them the skills needed to form their own positive relationships in adolescence (Collins & Sroufe, 1999). For instance, experiencing more family structure instability since birth is linked with greater odds of forming adolescent romantic relationships, with more instability in these relationships (Ryan, Perper & Schelar, 2009). The works of Burgess (1939) posits that the reported happiness of the parents' marriage, including the close attachment of the husband and wife to their parents, similar backgrounds of the partners, higher levels of education for both partners, etc signifies attainment of success and failure in marriage. Similarly, Spanier (1976) points to the fact that marital success consists of sub-dimensions that can be considered separately in order to draw a profile of marital success, satisfaction or adjustment. In view of this observation, it was proposed that the Dyadic Adjustment can be used as an overall measure of dyadic adjustment or the sub-dimensions may provide information about each factor within the relationship. Although Spanier's scale is perceived to be the soundest scale available, a scale with a combination of two different dimensions of marital quality (i.e positive and negative quality) is likely to yield ambiguous findings and contribute little to understanding of the marital success process (Johnson et al., 1986).

Marital satisfaction is said to be the subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction and pleasure experienced by a spouse when considering all current aspect of his marriage and a continuum ranging from much satisfaction to dissatisfaction (Burnett, 1987). Some factors of marital success and failure are said to be out of the control of the couples. One of such is the belief that a couple may likely remain married if their parents are happily married, although some couples could beat the odds and succeed where their parents have failed (Giola, 2010). Similarly, a person believed to be experiencing a parent's marital dissolution or ever living in a non-traditional family form was associated with a greater likelihood of cohabitation and a greater risk of divorce (Teachman, 2002; Teachman, 2003; Thurton, 1991). The number of childhood family structure transitions experienced is also associated with marital dissolution in adulthood (Wolfinger, 2000).

Some identified factors of marital success include type of childhood, how familiar couples are to each other, age, attitude, interests, children, communication only to mention a few (Giola, 2010). One of the ways of assessing marital success by most families in Nigeria emanates from cultural perceptions of marital success and failure. For example, the people attribute causation using locus of control. Locus of control is the term used when people attribute either negative occurrences to

themselves or to others. Kunene (2009) reported that it could be internal or external and connotes the degree to which an individual perceives the outcome of an event to be either within or beyond his/her personal control. While a person having internal locus of control believes that he/she can influence the outcome of events through his/her ability, efforts or skills; a person with external locus of control believes that outside forces such as luck, fate or powerful others may control and determine outcomes (Kunene, 2009).

The internalized individual believes that he can take action to carry out his/her plans by using initiatives, self efficacy and self-confidence which the externalized individual cannot. Furthermore, the role of hard work is emphasized as an important element in any marital relationship and that a successful marriage does not end in divorce (Celello, 2011). In this regard, wives rather than husbands are held accountable for failure in their marriage (Celello, 2011).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine parental marital history as a predictor of marital success/failure among women in Rivers State of Nigeria. Specifically, the main objectives were to:

1. Investigate if parental marital history significantly correlates with marital success/failure of married women.
2. Ascertain if a relationship exists between marital success/failure of married women and the predictor variables of intact parents, divorced parents and remarried parents.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were investigated:

1. Parental marital history has no significant correlation with marital success/failure among women.
2. The predictor variables of intact parents, divorced parents and remarried parents will not significantly predict marital success/failure among women.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was a descriptive survey, with the population comprising all women in the Federal Secretariat in Port-Harcourt, Rivers State of Nigeria. The justification for using women workers in the Federal Secretariat is predicated on its concentration of various ministries with a large women workforce. Available records in the Ministries showed that an estimated 600 women constitute the population. Simple random technique was employed in selecting 400 women from four ministries on a pro-rata basis (i.e selecting more women from the ministry where they are more in number than the others) to form the sample of the study. This number comprised 67 women divorcees, 288 women who were in intact marriages and 45 women who were remarried. However, 377 respondents who returned their questionnaire forms participated in the study. This number consisted of 61(16.2%) women divorcees, 273(72.4%) women who were in intact marriages and 43(11.4%) women who were remarried.

Instrumentation

The instrument used for collection of the data was a researcher-designed questionnaire tagged 'Parental Marital Success/Failure Questionnaire' (PMSFQ). It contained 24 statements on what constitutes marital success/failure and factors influencing them. The two sections of the questionnaire consisted of the demographic data required of the respondents and the factors observed from literature review as causes of marital success and failure. While the main predictor variables included intact parents (i.e mother and father staying together); divorced parents (i.e mother and father living apart) and remarried parents (i.e mother or father or both entered into second marriage). The criterion variables were success and failure of marriage. The response

format of the PMSFQ was a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD).

The instrument was assessed by trained counselling psychologists who affirmed that it possesses face and content validity. The instrument was pretested on a sample of 30 women to determine its reliability on two separate occasions using the test re-test method and the results analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, yielding a value of 0.76.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was done personally with the aid of two research assistants from the ministries. Out of a total of 400 questionnaire forms administered, only 377 were retrieved and used for the analysis. The results were analyzed using Pearson Correlation and regression analysis.

RESULTS

Hypothesis One: Parental marital history has no significant correlation with marital success/failure among women.

The comparison of marital success/failure among the respondents was on the basis of parents’ marital background history categorized as those from families that are intact, divorced and remarried as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation between parental marital history and marital success/failure

| | Intact Marriage | Divorce | Remarriage | Parental marital history |
|-------------------------|--------------------|---------|------------|--------------------------|
| Marital success/failure | .744** | ..762** | .711** | .796** |

** (p< 0.01 level; 2-tailed)

Table 1 shows that there is a significant positive correlation between the mean scores of parental marital history dimensions of (intact marriage, divorce, remarriage) and marital success/failure. Hence, the hypothesis was rejected.

Hypothesis Two: The predictor variables of intact parents, divorced parents and remarried parents will not significantly predict marital success/failure among women.

In order to test this hypothesis, multiple regression analysis was employed as shown in Table 2.

Table-2. Summary of Regression analysis on the influence of the dimensions of parental marital history on marital success/failure

| Predictor variables | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Standard Error | P |
|---------------------|--------|----------|-------------------|----------------|--------|
| Intact-Marriage | | | | | |
| Divorce | 0.792* | 0.629 | 0.618 | 6.532 | < 0.05 |
| Remarried | | | | | |

Table 2 shows that the dimensions of parental marital history (Intact marriage, Divorce and Remarriage) employed to predict marital success/failure yielded a multiple coefficient regression (R) of 0.792 and a multiple correlation square (R2) of 0.618, which is significant at the 0.05 level. This implies that parental marital history significantly predicted marital success/failure among women. The predictive contributions of each dimension of parental marital history is shown in Table 3.

Table-3. Relative contribution of the predictor variables on marital success/failure

| Predictor Variable | B | Standard Error | Beta | T | Sig |
|--------------------|-------|----------------|------|-------|------|
| Constant | 6.326 | 3.845 | - | 1.602 | .111 |
| Intact- Marriage | .346 | .168 | .244 | 2.144 | .032 |
| Divorce | .415 | .094 | .434 | 4.369 | .000 |
| Remarriage | .289 | 1.86 | .154 | 1.527 | .127 |

Table 3 shows that the highest contributory variable in predicting marital success/failure is divorce, having a value of (Beta=.434; T-ratio scores= 4.369), followed by intact marriage (Beta=.244; T-ratio 2.144) and lastly remarriage (Beta= .154; T-ratio= 1.527). On this basis, the hypothesis stating that the predictor variables of intact marriage, divorce and remarriage will not significantly predict marital success/failure was rejected.

DISCUSSION

The result of the first hypothesis has clearly shown a significant positive correlation between the dimensions of parental marital history namely (intact marriage, divorce and remarriage) with marital success/failure as seen in (Table 1). In other words, parental marital history is positively correlated with marital success and failure as indicated by the respondents. It implies that the success or failure of marriage may be linked with the background experiences of couples in the sense that when a marriage is intact (that is husband and wife staying together), there is the likelihood that future marriages of their children in adulthood will be successful. Conversely, when parents are divorced or remarried, there is the likelihood that their children may experience divorce or remarriage. The finding is in conformity with previous submission that a couple may likely remain married if their parents are happily married (Giola, 2010). Similarly, a person believed to have experienced a parent's marital dissolution or ever living in a non-traditional family form was associated with a greater likelihood of cohabitation and a greater risk of divorce (Teachman, 2002; Thurton, 1991).

Even though literature supports this finding, experience also shows that this may not be true in all cases. This is because some couples whose parents have experienced break up or divorce have worked extremely hard to maintain peace in their own families, especially the educated couples. Furthermore, culture in Nigeria is sometimes unfair to people as there is no reason why people should ascribe failure in one area to failure in others. In other words, the fact that a father could not keep his marriage does not in any way affect the future marriage of his children. This of course is where counselling families become very important with particular reference to the uneducated parents who may unjustly deprive their children from becoming married to people of their choice due to parental marital history, a practice common among the rural people in Nigeria.

In terms of the second hypothesis, there was a significant positive relationship between the dimensions of parental marital history namely (intact marriage, divorce, remarriage) and marital success/failure. In essence, this means that the dimensions of parental marital history significantly predicted marital success/failure as can be observed in (Table 2). This means that parental marital history contributes greatly to marital success/failure. Furthermore, the result in (Table 3) indicated that of the three dimensions of parental marital history, the variable of divorce significantly predicted marital success/failure. In support of this finding, Wolfinger (2000) reports that the number of childhood family structure transitions experienced is associated with marital dissolution in adulthood. On the contrary, the finding negates that of Kelly and Conley 1987 in (Hill & Peplau, 2011) in which majority of the women indicated that traditional attitudes such as respect, downright conservation and intimacy predicts marital success.

Literature also reports the negative impact of divorce on children and future adjustments. For instance, children who experience two or more parental divorce and/or remarriages are said to have the lowest adjustment and the most behavioural problems (Calpidi & Patterson, 1991) than those who live continuously with both biological parents, believed to have higher levels of adjustment and a positive view of their experiences (Najman et al., 1997; Brissette, Scheier & Carver, 2002).). Similarly, the studies by Furstenberg and Kiernan (2001) and Mato (2000) found that children who experience parental divorce than those in first marriage families have lower scores on emotional wellbeing, self-concept, academic performance and physical health.

Other studies support the present finding that negative parental relationships result in depression and anxiety (Garber & Little, 2001; Rohner, 2008). In the same vein, children who experience poor relationships with their parents experience psychological maladjustments, substance misuse, conduct problems and delinquent acts (Blatt & Homann, 1992; Sanders, Pidgeon, Gravestock, Connors, Brown & Young, 2004).

CONCLUSION

The present study has shown that parental marital history significantly predicted marital success/failure and that divorce is the highest predictor variable of marital success/failure. In view of these findings and the effect that the various dimensions of parental marital history have on future marriages, the finding implies that parents should be mindful of their habits and attitudes which could influence their children's future marriages negatively, especially in considering divorce. The effects of divorce on the behavioural dispositions and marital adjustments of children especially in adulthood cannot be over-emphasized. In line with this observation, the following recommendations are made:

1. Parents should be properly educated and counselled, especially through seminars and conferences by letting them understand the implications of their marital history on the marital success/failure of their adult children. This will go a long way in helping them to preserve their marriage and be tolerant of one another. A failed marriage more than an intact one has more severe consequences for future families as literature suggests. Marital education is important in discouraging divorce and helping couples to communicate effectively with each other in a more acceptable way.
2. Communities, families, churches and mosques should re-emphasize the place of marriage in religion. Thus, the sacred institution should be preserved rather than dissolved as is frequently observed lately in Nigeria. Literature places more emphasis on the wife's role in ensuring a secure marriage, which invariably means that women should be encouraged to work hard in preserving their marriage as was done in the olden days. Therefore, marriage counsellors, community heads, Pastors, Imams and women organizations should organize programmes aimed at encouraging positive family living/marital success and ensuring that couples are allowed to weigh the benefits and consequences of intact marriage, divorce and remarriage on marital success/failure of future marriages. Therefore, divorce should be greatly discouraged among families because it has the tendency of exacerbating marital success; and rather than divorce, counsellors should teach couples strategies of resolving marital conflicts through rational means.
3. Institutions of higher learning should incorporate marital counselling lessons into their curriculum for the benefit of would-be parents especially in view of the Nigerian cultural belief in preserving the marriage institution, which will contribute immensely to reducing the rate of divorce and conflicts among couples.

LIMITATIONS

This study was carried out in Port Harcourt Municipal area of Rivers State of Nigeria and caution should be taken in generalizing the findings. The results stem from using a small sample of women selected from one establishment in the area. There are probably other variables relating to parental marital history that were not explored in predicting marital success/failure. Hence, future researchers are encouraged to use other factors of marriage in determining its success or failure. Lastly, the instrument used in generating data was designed by the researcher and could be suggestive of the responses made in this study.

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