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Factors Inhibiting Marital Stability in Nigeria: The Case of Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State

***Veta, Oghenechoja Dennis**
Department of Social Work
University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
E-mail: veta.od@unilorin.edu.ng
choja4den@gmail.com
+2348037455247

Ibiezugbe, Irabor Michael
Department of Social Work,
University of Benin, Benin City.
E-mail: ibzmike@yahoo.com
+2348063376076
*Corresponding Author

Abstract
This study investigated the factors inhibiting marital stability in Nigeria, focusing on Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. The multistage sampling method, comprising stratification, simple random, systematic, purposive, and snowball sampling methods, was adopted. The sample size for the study was 230. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study; a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview (IDI) guide were the instruments used in the collection of data for the study. Several factors including poverty, dominance, barrenness, peer influence, disrespectfulness, early marriage, in-laws' interference, adultery, sexual dissatisfaction, sex preference, distrust, and inadequate communication inhibited marital stability in the study area. In all of these factors, the study shows that inadequate communication ranked highest (12.1%). This was followed by adultery (11.2%). The effects of marital instability in the study area include out-of-school children, death, emotional disorder, social stigmatisation, poor socioeconomic status, single parenthood, addiction, poor child upbringing, and loneliness/isolation. Social stigmatization ranked highest (14.9%) followed by single parenthood (14.4%). Based on the findings, the study proffered, amongst others, that there is a need for the involvement of social workers in pre-marital counseling, and couples should be educated on the effects of marital instability on the victims, children, and the communities.

Keywords: Marriage, Marital stability, Inhibiting factors, Couples, Ilorin metropolis.

Introduction

Marital stability could be seen as an enduring relationship in midst of difficulties and/or in peace amongst legally married couples, which could be referred to, in the context of this study, as those who are husband and a wife/wives, and those cohabiting. That is, marriage could be seen as an intimate union that is willingly agreed upon by a husband and a wife or wives irrespective of their socio-economic, religious, and cultural factors (Okorodudu, 2010). Therefore, marriage is expected to be a major life goal and an indicator of a stable and healthy relationship in spite of incompatibilities (Proulx, Helms, & Buehler, 2007).

Married persons or couples are expected to keep a high esteemed companionship through sharing of useful information and continued discussion of differences, and always strive to build and maintain a healthier intimate relationship that would yield trust towards the attainment of a stable happy married life. Marriage gives legitimacy to a sexual relationship and reproduction for legitimate children (Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola & Salau, 2014). Marriage stability becomes imperative in our communities. Marriage stability, as Ojukwu and Obiji (2016) opined, is a condition that exists in a marriage situation, where two partners live, move, and share consistent favorable interests, knowledge, values, emotions, and beliefs. On the contrary, much of the marital attitude formed would be negative, resulting in marital conflict and marital breakdown (Ojukwu & Obiji, 2016), and this situation could lead to divorce resulting in negative effects.

Traditionally, in African societies, divorce was not considered an option; family members would address any dispute between a couple by judging the case on its merit and weighing all the consequences of the outcome, but divorce could only be allowed if a case of adultery was established against the wife (Mohlatlole, et al., 2017) in most cases. Presently, instability in matrimonial homes is a common factor in the contemporary world (Omoniyi-Oyafunke, et al., 2014). This trend of marital instability in the world today is caused by several factors.

According to Ojukwu and Obiji (2016) negative forces of social belief, in-law's inclusion, value orientation, and emotion influence marital instability. Asa and Nkan, (2017) revealed that socio-cultural differences, psychological, economic, marriage-based, health, sex-related, conflict, and communication-based factors were associated with marital instability among married persons. Similarly, other studies revealed that childlessness, forced marriage, incompatibility, communication gap, interference by in-laws, finances, infidelity, sex of children, abuse, lack of appreciation, and sudden character change were associated with divorce among couples (Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2015; DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017; Heaton, 2014; Mahmood, et al., 2016; Meaza, 2014; Mo, 2016; Mohlatlole et al., 2017; Osarenren, 2013; Preller, 2014; Tiruwork, 2015).

Another study revealed that women who were married at an age of fewer than 15 years, urban women, women who did not attend formal education, women who were employed, and being childless are prone to a higher rate of marital instability (Dagnew *et al.,* 2020). From the foregoing, it could be said that the major reasons for marital instability include growing apart, not being able to talk to each other, how the spouse handles money, infidelity, personal problems of the spouse, and the spouse not getting enough attention (Hawkins *et al.,* 2012), and as a result of these social, economic, and cultural factors institution of marriage continues to decline globally (Wilcox, et al., 2016).

There are several effects of marital instability on divorcees, their children, families, and the communities at large. This is because marital instability is associated with separation, divorce, and widowhood (Omoniyi-Oyafunke, Falola & Salau, 2014). For instance, a study conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa showed an increased risk of death of children from divorced partners ranging from 36% in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to 75% in Kenya; in Ethiopia and Malawi, children whose mothers were in a new union were at a high risk of dying compared with children whose mothers were in marriage (Clark & Hamplova, 2013). Surviving children of divorced parents are more likely to be stunted, start school late, and have poor educational achievement compared with children of parents that are in marriage (Mugarura & Kaberuka, 2015; Ntoimo & Odimegwu, 2014; Thiombiano, et al., 2013). Tasew and Getahun (2021) identified stress, feeling of depression and grief, worry about what others say, feelings of despair, hopelessness, sadness, anger, and fatigue as effects of marital instability on the victims.

The children who experience marital instability are also much affected as Bloem (2013) opines that the children from marital instability experience emotional pain and suffering, feeling insecure, anxiety, lower self-esteem, aggressiveness or higher levels of anger, depression, poorer social skills, higher future divorce rates, and learning problems. Amadi and Amadi, (2014) summarised the consequences of crisis-ridden and or broken homes to include poor mental, emotional, and physical health of couples and their children, physical abuse and threat to the life of partners, escalation of social vices and crimes such as drug abuse, kidnapping, prostitution, and out of school children. In all of these studies reviewed, the factors inhibiting marital stability in Nigeria with reference to Ilorin Metropolis have not been examined. To fill this gap in knowledge the following research objectives guided this study:

Research objectives:

1) To find out the factors, if any, inhibiting marital stability in Ilorin Metropolis,
2) To ascertain the effects of marital instability in the study area, and
3) To proffer solutions that could reduce marital instability to the barest minimum in Ilorin Metropolis.

Research questions

1) What are the factors, if any, inhibiting marital stability in Ilorin Metropolis?
2) What are the effects of marital instability in the study area?
3) What are the solutions that could reduce marital instability to its barest minimum in Ilorin Metropolis?

Materials and methods

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The design was considered suitable as it enabled the collection of primary data from a sample through a structured questionnaire. Also, in-depth interview sessions (IDIs) were conducted with key informants. Ilorin Metropolis is a major city in Kwara State, it consists of Ilorin East, Ilorin South, and Ilorin West Local Government Areas made up of 44 communities. The general population is projected at 1,000,477 (World Population Review, 2022). The target population for this study was all those ever married, cohabiting, and married persons who were residing in the study area, excluding those involved in same-sex marriage. The sample size for the study was statistically determined to be 230 using Taro Yamane's formula (1973). In addition, six key informants were interviewed using an in-depth interview (IDI) guide.

The multistage sampling method, comprising stratification, simple random, systematic, purposive, and snowball sampling methods, was adopted in this study. The existing 44 communities in the study area were adopted as clusters. Six communities namely Gambari, Zango (Ilorin East), Tanke, Fate (Ilorin South), Adewole, and Oke-Erin (Ilorin West) were randomly selected. To reach the respondents, a street was purposively chosen in each of the selected communities. Every other household in each building on the street in each community was chosen, and two eligible respondents were selected until the required number of respondents in each community was gotten. Only males and females who were 18 years and above, who were residing in the study area, were included in the sample size, this was to ensure that the sampled respondents for the questionnaires were knowledgeable enough to provide useful information for the study.

A snowball sampling method was adopted to select one key informant, who has experienced marital instability, from each of the selected communities for the in-depth interviews (IDIs). Thus, there was a total of six IDIs. The interviewees for the IDIs were those who were not included in the administration of the questionnaire and were 18 years and above.

The analysis was based on 215 questionnaires that were completely filled and returned. The statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis. In characterizing the respondents, descriptive statistics such as percentages, and frequency tables were utilised. The qualitative data from the IDIs were thematically analysed to buttress the quantitative data.

Results

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents of interest in this study include age and marital status as shown in Table 1:

Table 1: Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 215)

Age (in Years)	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 27	42	19.5
28 – 37	58	27
38 – 47	67	31.2
48 +	48	22.3
Marital Status		
Married/cohabiting	84	39.1
Separated	42	19.5
Divorced	50	23.3
Window/Widower	39	18.1

Source: Authors' Survey

Table 1 shows that 19.5 percent of the respondents were within the age range of 18 – 27 years. 27 percent were within the age range of 28 – 37 years, while 31.2 percent and 22.3 percent were within the age range of 38 – 47 and 48 years and above respectively. Table 1 also shows that 39.1 percent of the respondents were married, and19.5 percent separated. 23.3 percent, 18.1 percent were divorced, and widow/widower respectively.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents by Perceived Factors inhibiting Marital Stability (n=215)

Response	Yes	No
Poverty	20 (9.3%)	195 (90.7%)
Dominance	15 (7%)	200 (%)
Barrenness	22 (10.2%)	193 (89.8%)
Peer influence	14 (6.5%)	201 (93.5%)
Disrespectfulness	16 (7.4%)	199 (92.6%)
Early marriage	11 (5.1%)	204 (94.9%)
In-laws' interference	21 (9.8%)	194 (90.2%)
Adultery	24 (11.2%)	191 (88.8%)
Sexual dissatisfaction	9 (4.2%)	206 (95.8%)
Sex preference	18 (8.4%)	197 (91.6%)
Distrust	19 (8.8%)	196 (91.2%)
Inadequate communication	26 (12.1%)	189 (87.9%)

Source: Authors' Survey

Table 2 shows that 9.3 percent of the respondents indicated that poverty was the factor inhibiting marital stability in the study area, 7 percent said that it was dominance, 10.2 percent said that it was barrenness, 6.5 percent said peer influence, 7.4 percent indicated disrespectfulness, early marriage scored 5.1 percent. 9.8 percent said in-laws' interference, adultery had 11.2 percent, sexual

dissatisfaction scored 4.2 percent, while sex preference, distrust, and inadequate communication scored 8.4 percent, 8.8 percent, and 12.1 percent respectively. The interviewees were also probed on the factors inhibiting marital stability in the study area. They varied in their responses, but they also mainly emphasised inadequate communication and adultery as factors inhibiting marital stability in Ilorin Metropolis. One of the male interviewees said that 'the major factor that inhibits marital stability is communication gap which has caused disruption in several married lives'. Another interviewee had this to say:

> As far as I'm concerned, the major factor that can easily lead to marital instability is adultery, not only in Ilorin but in Africa as a whole…no, it is when the wife is involved…the husband is culturally allowed to marry more than one wife. Another reason is lack of intimacy due to inadequate communication in the matrimonial homes which could lead to many other issues (A female, IDI)

Table 3: Distribution of Respondents by Perceived Effects of Marital Instability (n=315)

Response	Yes	No
Out-of-school children	27 (12.6%)	188 (87.4%)
Death	24 (11.2%)	191 (88.8%)
Emotional disorder	17 (7.9%)	198 (92.1%)
Social stigmatisation	32 (14.9%)	183(85.1%)
Poor socioeconomic status	18 (8.4%)	197 (91.6%)
Single parenthood	31(14.4%)	184(85.6%)
Addiction	22 (10.2%)	193(89.8%)
Poor child upbringing	27 (12.6%)	188(87.4%)
Loneliness/isolation	17 (7.9%)	198(92.1%)

Source: Authors' Survey

Table 3 shows that 12.6 percent of the respondents indicated that out-of-school children were the effect of marital instability in the study area, 11.2 percent indicated death, 7.9 percent said that it was an emotional disorder, and 14.9 percent mentioned social stigmatisation. Also, Table 3 shows that 8.4 percent of the respondent believed that the effect of marital instability was poor socio-economic status. 14.4 percent said single parenthood, while 10.2 percent, 12.6 percent, 7.9 percent mentioned addiction, poor child upbringing, and loneliness/isolation respectively. The interviewees were probed to mention what they perceived as the effects of marital stability in the study area. One of the female interviewees said that 'there are many effects of marital instability which include single parenthood, addiction, poverty, death and stigmatisation of those involved…I mean the couples (divorcees) and their families. Another interviewee said:

> Society frowns at marital instability because it leads to divorce. Divorcees are seen as irresponsible people and as such, they are stigmatised, their families are not that respected, and people are not attracted to marry from such families. The children from broken homes, are not well brought up and have poor academic performance (A male, IDI)

Discussion

This study revealed that several factors inhibited marital stability in the study area. These include poverty, dominance, barrenness, peer influence, disrespectfulness, early marriage, in-laws' interference, adultery, sexual dissatisfaction, sex preference, distrust, and inadequate communication. In all of these factors, the study shows that inadequate communication ranked highest (12.1%). This was followed by adultery (11.2%). This finding is similar to previous findings which indicated that childlessness, forced marriage, incompatibility, communication gap, interference by in-laws, finances, infidelity, sex of children, abuse, lack of appreciation, and sudden character change were associated with marital instability among couples (Clark & Brauner-Otto, 2015; DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017; Heaton, 2014; Mahmood, et al., 2016; Meaza, 2014; Mo, 2016; Mohlatlole, et al., 2017; Osarenren, 2013; Preller, 2014; Tiruwork, 2015).

This study discovered that marital instability has various effects on the victims, and their children which in the long run affect the study communities. These effects include out-of-school children, death, emotional disorder, social stigmatisation, poor socioeconomic status, single parenthood, addiction, poor child upbringing, and loneliness/isolation. Social stigmatisation ranked highest (14.9%) followed by single parenthood (14.4%). This finding is in line with previous findings which showed that children of divorced parents are more likely to be stunted, start school late, and have poor educational achievement compared with children of parents that are in marriage (Mugarura & Kaberuka, 2015; Ntoimo & Odimegwu, 2014; Thiombiano, et al., 2013). This finding also corroborates Tasew & Getahun (2021) who identified stress, feeling of depression and grief, worry about what others say, feelings of despair, hopelessness, sadness, anger, and fatigue as effects of marital instability.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the factors inhibiting marital stability in Nigeria with reference to Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study; a structured questionnaire and an in-depth interview (IDI) guide were used in the collection of data for the study. Several factors including poverty, dominance, barrenness, peer influence, disrespectfulness, early marriage, in-laws' interference, adultery, sexual

dissatisfaction, sex preference, distrust, and inadequate communication inhibited marital stability in the study area. In all of these factors, the study shows that inadequate communication ranked highest (12.1%). This was followed by adultery (11.2%). The effects of marital instability in the study area include out-of-school children, death, emotional disorder, social stigmatisation, poor socioeconomic status, single parenthood, addiction, poor child upbringing, and loneliness/isolation. Social stigmatization ranked highest (14.9%) followed by single parenthood (14.4%).

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following suggestions are made to mitigate the menace of marital instability in the study area and Nigeria in general:

(1) There is a need for the involvement of social workers in pre-marital counseling. This would help couples to be familiar with expectations of married life and have the understanding that marriage is not a bed of roses and how to handle marital issues in their life. Thus, there is a need for government at all levels to engage social workers across the communities and social welfare agencies in Nigeria.

(2) There is a need for re-orientation of couples about the importance of communication and intimacy between couples, and the rights of an intimate partner in matrimonial homes. This would avert distrust and dominance in their married life.

(3) Couples should be educated on the effects of marital instability on the victims, their children, and the communities. This would instill discipline, and respect for one another, and enhance enduring marital stability across the communities.

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