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PERSONALITY TRAITS AND SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS AS PREDICTORS OF DIVORCE PRONENESS AMONG COUPLES SEEKING DIVORCE IN COURT IN ILORIN

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Abstract

This study investigated personality traits and social demographics as predictors of divorce proneness among couples seeking divorce in court in Ilorin, Nigeria. It adopted a survey method utilizing expo-facto design. 150 participants were sampled purposively. A structure questionnaire comprises of Marital Instability Index and Big Five Ten-item Personality Traits Inventory was utilized to assess divorce proneness and personality traits respectively. Results showed that female respondents ($M=43.07$, $S.D= 3.01$) were not significantly different in the scores of divorce proneness compared to male respondents ($M=42.08$, $S.D =3.01$). However, there was no significant difference between male and female on divorce proneness ($t(148)=-1.790$, $p>.05$). There was a significant joint influence of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism on divorce proneness [$F(5,144)=5.01$, $R^2=.148$; $p<.05$] with those variables accounting for 15% of the variance in divorce proneness. Further results showed that extraversion ($\beta=-.405$; $p<.05$), conscientiousness ($\beta=-.582$; $p<.01$); openness ($\beta=-.439$; $p<.05$) and neuroticism ($\beta=.337$; $p<.05$), did significantly predicted divorce proneness. While agreeableness ($\beta=-.174$; $p>.05$) did not significantly predict divorce proneness. The study, thus, recommends that governments should formulate policies or programs that will facilitate awareness on the need for self-understanding of individual personalities as couples; court should seek psychosocial intervention from experts as alternative to divorce to foster a better marital stability in Nigeria.

Key words: *Marriage, Couple, Personality Traits, Gender, Divorce Proneness, Court, Ilorin.*

Introduction

Divorce does not only have psychological consequences but also has some socio-economic and physical implications for all the family members involved. Divorce has become a common social problem in almost all the Western countries while Nigeria is not left out; as a result, researchers are attempting to understand the factors that hold marriages together or contribute to divorce (Hoem 1997, Kravdal 1994; White & Rogers, 2000). Broken homes have adversely increased recently and children from these families fall victims of political unrest, gangsterism, graft, religious bigotry, low education, drug abuse/alcoholism and sexual risk behaviour; society with these types of citizens are not save from terrorism, insurgency and backwardness. These children end up becoming dangerous to themselves and society at large. Consequently, this triggers the need for a research of this type to ascertain some probable factors influencing divorce proneness among couples. Knowledge of the interactions between the duration of marriage and the socioeconomic position of spouses might help to understand the processes by which the socioeconomic factors exert their effects on the risk of divorce and spousal abuse (Oguntayo, Oyeleke, Popoola, Opayemi, & Faworaja, 2018). It is further opined that knowledge gained in this kind of research would inform couples about the socioeconomic determinants of dyadic relationship in the midlife and later life of marriage (Oguntayo et al., 2018). According to them, if these interactional factors are ignored, the understanding of the effects of socio-demographic factors and personality traits on the risk of divorce may remain overwhelmingly restricted to relatively progressive one, where the incidence of spousal abuse is prominent. In another study, analyses of socioeconomic factors as determinants of divorce and separation revealed that the duration of marriage and the ages of spouses are standard extraneous variables, but their interactions with socioeconomic factors have been examined in relatively few recent studies (Barelds, 2005; Oguntayo et al., 2018).

Divorces are gendered experiences; researches have many differences between men's and women's history of divorce. For instance, a study has it that former wives provide longer and more complex explanations for their divorces than former husbands (Barelds, 2005). According to Barelds (2005), with regards to the perceived causes of divorce, women, than men, appear to be more likely to refer to relational or emotional issues, such as: sexual satisfaction, socio-economic factors, unhappiness and incompatibility (Cleek & Pearson, 1985; Okhakume, Oguntayo and Aroniyiaso, 2016), former spouses' personalities (Kitson, 1992), and a general lack of love and personality factors (Levinger, 1966; Okhakume, et al., 2016). Former wives also are more likely than former husbands to refer to a cluster of negative partners behaviours, including physical, sexual, emotional, abuses and going out with “concubines,” and neglect of family and children (Kitson, 1992; Adidu, 2001). In contrast, husbands, more often than wives, do blame the divorce on explicit factors, such as work life imbalance or problems with third party in family or

in-laws (Kitson, 1992; Adidu, 2001). Former husbands also are more likely to report their knowledge of the causes of the divorce (Kitson, 1992).

In addition, understanding the specific reasons people give for divorce, requires the knowledge of whether these reasons are linked with post-divorce adjustment or not. Divorced individuals experience higher levels of depression, dysfunctional rates of life/marital satisfaction, and more mental health problems than married individuals (Amato, 2000). Also, Kitson (1992) found that couples who complained of extramarital affairs or sex of his/her partner did report of especially high tendency for divorce and subjective distressing life experience following marital discord phases. Added to that, cultural factors such as disparity in religion, belief, and tribal values have been accounted as among the great factors causing divorce in most homes in Nigeria (Idialu, 2003). Marriage as a union between man and woman to form a family involves a lot. It unites two different individuals into one in a relationship and their quality of marriage will be determined by their level of agreement and marital satisfaction.

For more than 60 years, personality factors have been a major interest of researchers to know the cause of couples' relationship satisfaction and to explain and predict relationship quality and stability among families (Schneewind & Gerhard, 2002). Therefore, to understand an individual's marital maladjustment or stability, the personality of both spouses should be accounted for, as evidence by significant partner's impact (Bouchard, Lussier and Sabourin, 1999). That is, personality of both spouses can impact the marriage quality itself and will determine the marital satisfaction of marriage couples. Psychological characteristics, including personality, may reflect individual variation in both preferences and capabilities. Tavares (2008) interprets the relationship found between personality and fertility timing of couples as reflective of individual wives' underlying preferences and motivations in maintaining stability in marriage, while Barelds (2005) describes the relevance of personality traits to financial status and peaceful home.

Personality refers to individual differences in traits or characteristic patterns which affect human thinking, feeling, perception, interpretation of events that lead to an enduring behaviour. The study of personality focuses on two broad areas: understanding individuals' difference personality traits, such as introversion and extraversion, sociability or irritability, warm or cold, etc. The second is understanding how the different parts of an individual combine together as a whole (APA, 2014). The relationship between personality characteristics and quality of marriage can be measured by several methods. The method which is often used is the Five Factor Model Proposed by McCrae and Costa (2003). The five-factor model of personality is a hierarchical organization of personality traits in terms of five basic dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience.

A study by Shamoradi, Maleki, Maleki, Shamoradi and Entesar-Founamy (2014) found that there was a positive correlation between agreeableness and conscientiousness with marital satisfaction and there was a negative correlation between neuroticism and marital satisfaction. There is also a significant correlation between some of the personality characteristics with marital satisfaction. Meanwhile, Furukawa, Hori, Azuma and Nakano (2002) have implemented a study that deepens the relationship between the personalities of the spouse to the relationship marriage. They found that the wife had a high score conscientiousness which describes their marriage relationship as more prosperous and stable. Wife who gets high scores in agreeableness is happier because of lack of control of the husband, while the husband shows the extent of extraversion is important to make a marriage more prosperous and happier. Wolcott & Hughes (1999) have collected information of causes of divorce. They found that there are three main factors which are: (1) affective aspects included incompatibility, emergence of communication and infidelity problems, (2) behavioral violence and personality traits, and (3) external stresses such as mental and physical health, financial problems, and jobs. Another study by Gattis, Berns, Simpson and Christensen (2004) put it that, a high degree of neuroticism, the low level of agreeableness and low levels of conscientiousness are contributing factors to dissatisfaction with marriage. According to their research, it was found that the existence of neuroticism characteristics is significant in pairs which are unhappy when compared to a happy couple. Personality traits also do have important role in determining marital quality of newly-wed couples. A study by Rumaya, Aini and Anwar (2014) with 549 Muslim newly-wedded couples in Selangor, Putrajaya and Kuala Lumpur showed that conscientiousness and emotional stability have a positive significant relationship with the marital quality of the respondents. This implies that the role of personality traits and emotional stability is vital for couples to undergo the adjustment process at the early stage of marriage. The declining prevalence and stability of marriage in wealthy industrialized societies have been explained as consequences of reduced returns to marriage as women's market work increases and production complementarities within the household become less important (Kalmijn, Poortman, 2006; Stevenson & Wolfers, 2007).

Various theoretical principles have strived in the past to explain reasons for divorce. The cognitive theory explains marital discord as the results of some factors related to faulty belief or thinking which results in a cognitive distortion in the process of an event or scenario in marriage. Discordant spouses may be different from harmonious couples in the rate at which their behaviour toward their spouse reflects diverse thinking or intentions and how the scenarios are also interpreted, and that different emergent goal during relationship and conflicts determine stable marriage (Fincham & Beach, 1999). While harmonious couples possess the ability to manage or amend conflict of interest or misunderstanding into opportunities for achieving a long-term objectives or goals, thereby fostering tolerance, accommodation, oneness

orientation, and forgiving spirits in their marriage (Fincham, et al., 1999), non-harmonious couples find themselves pulled toward a short-term and indulge in irresponsible acts that can leads to higher negative relationship or negative pay back. This accelerated negativity of intent, and non-reduce willingness to indulge in negativity or retaliatory behaviours could arise as the couple's goals and are capable of resulting to broken home.

Hypotheses

- H₁: Individual female respondents will significantly report higher on divorce proneness than male among couples seeking divorce in court.
- H₂: There will be a significant joint influence of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism on divorce proneness among couples seeking divorce in court.

Research Design

This study adopted survey method using an expost-facto design. The independent variables are personality traits and socio-demographic factors. The dependent variable is divorce proneness which was interval and continuously measured with a scale on couples seeking divorce in court. However, the study used the quantitative data collection techniques to achieve its objectives in the target region for the study.

Setting

This study was conducted in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State in Nigeria and it only involved only adults (18years and above) who were seeking divorce in court. This setting is the most suitable for this type of study because the dwellers are endowed with courts where couples who seek for divorce could be found to participate in the study.

Participants

The participants were randomly selected purposively during questionnaires administration. A total sample size of about 150 participants (which involved both males and females) were sampled in the target population in Ilorin in Kwara state of Nigeria. The age range is within adulthood to old age (18 and above). The male respondents were 84 (56.0%) while females were 66 (44.0%). Also, regarding their age, 18.7% were on the age range of 41-50 years while 6% were 51-55 years; regarding their educational qualifications, 78 (50.7%) hold primary school leaving certificate, 22.7 hold SSCE/OND certificates, 25.3% were graduates while 1.3% were postgraduates. The length of participant marriage includes: between 1-2 years (24.7%); between 3-4 years (38.0%); between 6-10 years (26.0%); between 11-20 years (7.3%) while from 21 years and above had (4.0%).

Sampling Procedure

The sampling technique employed is purposive sampling technique which involves the selection of participants in such a way that it would follow the purpose of the study strictly by considering only the married adults (including males and females) who have approached the court to seek for divorce.

Instruments

A carefully designed questionnaire that is made up of three validated scales of measurement was used in this study as an instrument for collection of data. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A, B, and C. Section A consisted of socio-demographic information of the participants, such as age, gender, occupation, educational level, religion, economic status and marital status. Sections B and C involved Marital Instability Index of Booth, Johnson, & Edwards (1983) and Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann (2003)'s Big Five personality Inventory to assess divorce proneness and personality traits respectively, the scale are describe thus:

Section B which comprises of Marital Instability Index was a validated scale designed to assess *divorce proneness*. It was developed by Booth, Johnson, & Edwards (1983). Participants were asked to respond to five questions: (a) "Have you ever thought your marriage might be in trouble?", (b) "Has the thought of getting a separation or divorce crossed your mind?", (c) "Have you discussed divorce or separation from your spouse with a close friend?", (d) "Have you or your spouse ever seriously suggested the idea of divorce?", and (e) "Have you and your spouse talked about consulting an attorney regarding a possible divorce or separation?" on a 6-point Likert-type scale (1 = "never"; 2 = "yes, but not within the last 3 years"; 3 = "yes, within the last 3 years"; 4 = "yes, within the last year"; 5 = "yes, within the last 6 months"; 6 = "yes, within the last 3 months"). Higher scores represent greater instability and are highly predictive of marital dissolution (Booth, Johnson, White, & Edwards, 1985). In this sample, internal consistency was excellent ($\alpha = .85$).

Section C is comprised of the Ten-Item Personality Inventory-(TIPI) developed by Gosling, Rentfrow, & Swann (2003). It was used to assess personality traits. The overall internal consistency reliability level recorded as Cronbach alpha coefficient for the present study was .66. The present study also recorded reliability coefficient thus; extraversion traits =.79, agreeableness= .69, conscientiousness= .70, neuroticism= .76, and openness to experience = .65.

Procedure

Before handing the questionnaire to each participant, a simple introductory discussion was conducted, stating partial intent of the research so as to gain the participant's cooperation and sincerity. The questionnaires were then administered.

The use of non-probability purposive sampling procedure was adopted, using the purposive sampling procedure. The participants were approached in the courts where they had come to seek for divorce. It took the researcher several weeks to administer the questionnaires and retrieve.

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using (statistical packages for the social sciences) SPSS 21.0. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, mean, Standard Deviation and variance were performed to analyze information gathered. The reliability analysis of the study instruments was ascertained and reported for future reference. T-test was used to analyze hypothesis one and Multiple regression analysis was used to analyzed hypothesis two.

Results

The statistical test below showed zero order correlation and multiple regression analysis results of the study.

Table 1: T-test summary table showing difference between male and female respondents on divorce proneness

	Gender	N	Std	Df	T	P
Divorce proneness	Male	84	42.08	3.62	148	-1.790
	Female	66	43.07	3.01		

The result from Table 1 showed that female respondents ($M=43.07$, $S.D= 3.01$) were not significantly different in the scores of divorce proneness compared to male respondents ($M=42.08$, $S.D=3.01$). There was no significant difference in the score of divorce proneness reported by male and female respondents ($t(148) = -1.790$, $p>.05$). This implies that gender did not significantly influence divorce proneness. The hypothesis is thus accepted.

Table 2: Summary of Multiple Regression table showing joint and independent influence of extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism on divorce proneness

Predictors		T	P	R	R ²	F	P
Extraversion	-.405	-3.842	< .01				
Agreeableness	-.174	-1.768	>.05	.385	.148	5.01	< .05
Conscientiousness	.582	4.787	<.01				
Openness	-.439	-3.333	<.05				
Neuroticism	.337	3.049	<.05				

From Table 2, the results indicate that there was significant joint influence extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism on divorce proneness [$F(5,144) = 5.01$, $R^2 = .148$; $p < .05$] with the variables accounting for 15% of the variance in divorce proneness. Further results show that

extraversion, ($\beta = -.405$; $p < .05$), conscientiousness ($\beta = -.582$; $p < .01$); openness ($\beta = -.439$; $p < .05$) and neuroticism ($\beta = .337$; $p < .05$) significantly predict divorce proneness while agreeableness ($\beta = -.174$; $p > .05$) does not significantly predict divorce proneness.

Discussion

Results from this study showed that gender does not have a significant difference on couples' proneness to divorce; this implies that the sex of a couple does not determine the tendency to divorce. This result supported the previous studies that both men and women have the tendencies to make decision that will lead to either high rates of intimate partner victimization and divorce (Ogunlayo, et al., 2018; Shor, Roelfs, Bugyi, & Schwartz, 2012). However, there is a pressing need for longitudinal research, which can capture growth over time, to compare gender difference as related to divorce rates of spouses; this is important to explore gender differences between spouses on divorce proneness.

The second hypotheses significantly jointly and independently influence extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and neuroticism on divorce proneness; the assertion that personality traits did jointly predict divorce tendency result is accepted for this study. This conclusion is similar to that of Rumaya et al., (2014). This result implies that couples who are legally and traditionally married will need to go for psychological assessment to understand themselves better and how to cope with each other's weaknesses and strength to foster a head long or eternal marital life without dyadic relationship. Added to this result, extraversion and neuroticism did predict divorce proneness, which is inline with the study of Dyrenforth, Kashy, Donnellan, and Lucas, (2010); Karney and Orth (2013). This result can be explained that neurotic person may be too irritant and have possible aggressive behaviour or abnormal emotional reactions while extraverted individuals may have tendency to react overtly without concealing issues and feelings especially sharing with friends and relations (third party) which may initiate intruders to mar some relationship in Africa culture. Conscientiousness also predicted proneness to divorce as a personality trait which contradicted the results of previous studies (John & Srivastava 1999; Dyrenforth, et al., 2010). Conscientious person facilitates task- and goal-directed behaviour such as delaying gratifications and planning and prioritizing tasks; this contraction may be as a result of other confounding variable not considered in this study such as: level of income and religiosity or religion affiliation. Furthermore, openness did predict divorce tendency. According to previous literature, openness has been a weak predictor of relationship outcomes. Donnellan et al. (2004) found a positive relationship between wives' openness and her sexual satisfaction among 400 couples, yet no association with global relationship satisfaction. Also, Dyrenforth et al. (2010) found inconsistent results for openness, with negative influence on partner's

divorce tendency in the Australian sample; still, there was a positive effect on relationship satisfaction only in the British sample. Other studies did neither find actor nor partner effects for openness (Furler et al. 2014; Orth 2013), and Malouff et al. (2010) did not find any evidence for partner effects in their meta-analysis. This implies that openness seems to be unrelated to relationship satisfaction. Openness to experience is also a factor for divorce proneness because of over concentration on career and which may lead to work-life imbalance that could trigger dysfunctional relationship. However, the result showed that agreeableness did not significantly predict divorce proneness; this supports recent literature such as the study of Dyrenforth et al. (2010). Also in the result of Okhakume et al (2016), it was found that agreeableness was a great predictor of dyadic relationship; couples with these personality traits have attributes such as being altruistic, trustful, tender-minded, and modest.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The findings of this study are in support of other studies. It is also worthy to note that the above findings were based on individuals seeking divorces in Ilorin metropolis. In this light, gender did not predict divorce proneness; however, individual's personality traits have been found to predict divorce proneness among the studied sample while agreeableness did not predict divorce proneness. Among personality variables, neuroticism has emerged as one of the most robust predictors of divorce proneness, with high levels of neuroticism predicting lower divorce proneness in oneself and the partner. Openness to experience is also a factor for divorce proneness because of over concentration on career which may lead to work-life imbalance that could trigger dysfunctional relationship. Higher levels of agreeableness have positive relationship with better and satisfying relationship. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Individual couples desiring a satisfying romantic relationship should seek experts help through marriage counseling and psychological assessment that will make each couple understand themselves better and foster a strong relationship.
2. Governments should create and administer policies or programs that will facilitate self-awareness in welfare homes in order for couples to understand their personality and how to manage their relationships in lieu of court intervention (divorce) that has recorded no positive results in fostering marital stability, especially in the Nigerian context.
3. Also, court should involve psychologists and social workers in court decision-making to reduce divorce and aid a better marital stability. Adequate communication styles should be encouraged among couples to enhance problem solving focus/skills in marriage.

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