Marital Satisfaction and Stability: Efficacy of Counselling

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Abstract: - This paper discussed the efficacy of counselling in marital satisfaction and stability in marriages. The paper covers some aspect of marriage, marital satisfaction, marital stability as a firm, steady well balance and healthy marital relationship between couple; as each member fulfills his/her role in the relationship, premarital counselling and marital counselling. Studies have shown that marriage has been a traditional component of family socialization, supported by religious and social guidance on mate selection and marital roles performance. The paper defined marital satisfaction as a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and cost of marriage to a particular person and the important qualities of a relationship or marriages such as responsibilities of each person in the marriage, provision of food, procreation and support for each other opening up to new experience among others. The paper also discussed some factors that tend to influence marital stability and satisfaction such as attitudes, in-laws, communication, roles, family background, personalities traits among others. Many marriages today, end in divorce due to lack of marital satisfaction and stability. In spite of the couple's attitude toward religiosity or the secular basis for their relationship and the efforts of psychologists, the divorce rates have continued to rise. Trends show an increase in the number of couples seeking assistance prior to marriage. Efficacy of marital counselling including helping couples understand expectations of marriage, the task of parenthood, understand the value of premarital laboratory testing (e.g., genotype), to distinguish between marriage and friendship and, understanding the realistic qualities of a good partner (e.g. loving, patience, dedication, caring and understanding). Marriage preparation strategies documented in professional literature advocate this as well. Effort couples put into their relationship is associated with satisfaction. Furthermore, counselling professionals, in growing numbers, suggested there are benefits to learning more about marriage stability and satisfaction.

Key Points: Marriage counselling; marital satisfaction, marital stability, Efficacy

I. INTRODUCTION

The motivations behind wanting to engage in a happy and satisfying marriage are undoubtedly diverse, researchers have found that there are many associated benefits to a happy marriage, including emotional and physical health and longevity. Although many marriages fail, they do not all fail for the same reason. There is not just one concrete reason for the collapse of marriage. Some of the common factors behind divorce include: poor communication, financial issues, infidelity, differing expectations, commitment, child-rearing concerns, employment’s among others. Success in marriage does not come merely through finding the right mate, but through being the right mate.’ Sambo, (2014).

Marriage has been a traditional component of family socialization, supported by religious and social guidance on mate selection and marital roles performance. Marriage is a very diverse system that is very difficult to define. According to Olayinka, (2001), marriage is a social institution for the union of a man and a woman as body and soul. From the above definition is an interpersonal relationship that is between a man and his wife/wives. Marriage is a culturally approved relationship of one man and one woman (monogamy), one man and two or more women (polygamy), of one woman and two or more men (polyandry) in which there is cultural endorsement of sexual intercourse between the marital partners of opposite sex and with the expectation that children would be born of the relationship Abubakar (2016). This definition suggests that marriages are of many kinds, varying from one society to another. Such variation notwithstanding has some common features; namely, there is agreement between a man and a woman to become husband and wife, a certain legal procedure is followed before it is accepted or regarded as a legal means of having sex between man (husband) and (wife) and their children are thus accepted as legal, payment of some money, or gift or even manual labour to one of the partners (to get married) or to their parents as well as the two partners staying in the same house or are free to meet each other (where they live apart), etc. Marriages could be in accordance with the laws of tradition, Christian rites or Muslim principles. Whichever option one decides to select, it still requires that people who enter into marriage do so for defined reasons with defined intentions and objectives.

According to Waite and Gallagher(2001), Marriage also called matrimony or wedlock is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between them, and their children and between them and their in-law. The definition of marriage varies according to different cultures, but it is principally and institution in which interpersonal
relationships, usually sexual, is acknowledged. In some culture marriage is recommended or considered to be compulsory before pursuing any sexual activity. Individual may marry for several reasons including legal, social emotional, financial, spiritual and religion purposely. Monroe (2003) in his opinion define marriage as a religious duty and is consequently a moral Safe guard as well as a social necessity. Marriage serves as a moral safeguard because it act as an outlet for sexual needs and regulates man's sexual desires, so that man do not become a slave to his or her own desire. Marriage is the legal or formally recognized union of a man and a woman (or, in some jurisdictions, two people of the same sex) as partners in a relationship.

II. MARITAL SATISFACTION

Marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person. The more costs a marriage partner inflicts on a person, the less satisfied one generally is with the marriage and with the marriage partner. Similarly, the greater the perceived benefits, the more satisfied one is with the marriage and with the marriage partner (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000). A study by Harvard researchers of Cohen and Waldinger (2012) confirmed the vital importance of two marriage factors - a happy wife and strong partnership communication when the husband is feeling upset. Three of the study's conclusions were that:

1. The old saying "happy wife, happy life" seems to be true: Husbands do tend to feel happier with their marriage when they see that their wives are happy. When a wife tells her husband via smiles, verbalized appreciation, agreement with things he says, sexual enjoyment, affection of all types, interest in his life, enjoyment of time and activities with him, etc. that she likes him, he feels happy. He's also likely to return the positive vibes, enhancing her happiness. Meanwhile their children grow happily in the sunshine of parental warmth. While spouses generally want to be happy, the impact of this factor is statistically stronger for men. Seeing that their wife is happy seems engenders particularly strong feelings of marriage satisfaction.

2. For wives, marriage satisfaction is especially enhanced when the husband is upset; provided that he opens up and talks in a non-blaming constructive way about his distress (she has strong listening skills). Whether his distress comes from a reaction to something his wife has done or from elsewhere, being able to talk in a mutually respectful, open, problem-solving way about the problems leads to a gratifyingly intimate feeling, especially for the wife. In other words, "perfect" in marriage does not require living-happy-ever. Rather, it takes being able to talk together cooperatively about situations that have created negative feelings.

3. From Conflict to Resolution: a couple's ability to partner in the movement from conflict to resolution sustains feelings of personal well-being and mutual goodwill. Some might call it emotional intimacy. Whatever the label, for women especially, being able to talk together about what upsets her spouse most significantly enhances her sense of marital satisfaction. What an irony, that a spouse who feels troubled and shares what troubles him brings forth increases in marriage satisfaction for the wife. According to Tashman (2007) some of the reasons for marital satisfaction are realistic level of expectations, ability to resolve conflict, strong supportive relationships with family and friends, Agreement on spending of money, being made to feel valuable in day to day exchanges.

Empirical evidence from the work of Offovwe, Ofili, Ojetu and Okosun (2013: 663-668), that studied a total population of 300 teachers in Benin, Nigeria concerning marital satisfaction also showed; two hundred and fifteen (82.7%) teachers had marital satisfaction while, 56 (21.5%) were dissatisfied with their job. No association was found between marital dissatisfaction and job dissatisfaction. A strong association was found between marital dissatisfaction and psychological disorder (X² = 56.826; df = 1, P = 0.0004). They concluded that the strong association found between marital dissatisfaction and psychological disorder provides empirical evidence on the need to educate married couples as well as the general public on the mental health implication of marital dissatisfaction.

III. MARITAL STABILITY

Marital stability refers to a firm, steady well balance and healthy marital relationship between couples. Stability is ensured as each member fulfills his/her role in the relationship. Echebe (2010), observed that marital stability lead to a well-balanced and well-adjusted family which in turn lead to well-adjusted progressive society, marital stability and happiness are to large extent reflected in the ratio of positive to negative behavior in the relationship.

Omotosho as cited in Garba (2006) referred to marital stability as any interpersonal relationship which is most meaningful when it is dynamic and evolving rather than fixed or final. Thus, there may be periods of joy and excitement followed by times of conflicts, struggle, pain and distance. Unless two persons in this regard have settled for complacency, there are probably not too many long periods in which they are growing and changing, both separately and together, their relationship is bound to change. Dada and Idowu (2006) asserted that before marriage, couples in love have an idea and tendency to emphasis the similarities in their way of life rather than their differences. Husband and wife idealized each other. After wedding, they will find their beginning a metamorphosis. In other couples, the changes embarrass these newly wedded pairs. So base on this...
development Garba (2006:27) found the following as the most important qualities of a relationship. According to them:

1. Each person in the relationship has separate identity. Although each person desires the other, each can survive without the other;
2. Each should be able to talk openly with the other about matters of significance to their relationship;
3. Each person assumes responsibilities for his/her own level of happiness and refrains from blaming the other if he/she is unhappy;
4. The two persons are willing to work on keeping their relationship alive;
5. The two persons are able to have fun and to play together; they enjoy doing things with each other.
6. Each person is growing, changing and opening up to new experiences.
7. Each person makes some attempt to keep the romance alive as contained in the sexual component of married couples and the two persons are equal in relationship.

According to Goove cited in Abubakar (2016: 62-65), a stable marriage would enjoy the following:

1. Provision of food majorly assigned to the father.
2. Love and companionship very vital and important as expressed by Abraham Maslow in his hierarchy of needs.
3. Procreation and support.
4. Care and training practiced in the Nigerian society in the past before the existence of formal education.
5. Warmth and clothing necessary for extreme weather for example, rainy and dry seasons and for social outings.
6. Shelter with enhanced security for all members of the family. In any family where all the above points mentioned exist, there would be marital stability.

Empirical evidence from a study in Port Harcourt Municipality, Nigeria by Ambakederemo and Ganagana (2006:14-24), using a sample size of 150 subjects revealed that self-control, peer group influence and spending quality time at home are the most positive indicators to marriage stability in our Nigerian homes meanwhile, the causes of marital instability are in clusters of five, viz; absence of love and trust, anti-social vices, economic, socio-cultural and sex-related conditions. It is therefore recommended that pre-marital as well as family counselling be emphasized by both the government and professional counsellors to nip in the bud the prevalence of these conditions to avoid instability in the family.

According to Wilcox and Nock (2007: 104-110), other factors that tend to influence marital stability include the following:

1. **Attitudes**: a democratic attitude where both seek to cooperate and compromise with each other
2. **In-Laws**: are important if couples live close to them and get along with them.
3. **Common Interest**: Both couple with shared interest is more likely to participate in activities together and develop greater understanding and empathy for each other.
4. **Children**: Children in the family will strengthen already strong marriage and may only hold together a poor one.
5. **Roles**: Couples should maintain similar expectation of work roles, housework roles andspouse roles. If both of them are traditional that would work wonderfully.
6. **Communication**: Happily married couples tend to (i) talk to each other more often (ii) are more sensitive to each other's feeling (iii) use non-verbal communication more effectively.
7. **Personality Traits**: such as emotional stability, self-control, affection, responsibility, favorable self-perception and optimism are correlate with good marriage adjustment.
8. **Religious Participation**: religiosity and marital success are related regardless of denomination.
9. **Parenthood**: Marital quality of older married couples with children tends to be more stable than peers without children. Parenthood stains of older married couples appeared to be associated with the quality of their marriage in such a way that those with adult children wholived away from them are reported to enjoy marital stability while, older married couples without children tend to experience significant declines in marital quality over a period of eight years.
10. **Leisure Time**: When couple spends more time together at the early stage of their marriage, it encourages healthy and cordial relationship. When the wife is expecting a baby and couples spend leisure time together, they would still enjoy greater closeness even after the child is born.
11. **Pre-marital Education**: Spouses who received pre-marital education services before marriage are reported to have stronger marriages. Random sampling of couples who received pre-marital education had, on average, higher levels of satisfaction with their marriages, less conflict with their spouses, more commitment to their marriages and lower odds of divorcethan peers who did not receive pre-marital education.
12. **Family Background**: marriages in which both spouses come from intact families tend to be the most enduring.

IV. EFFICACY OF COUNSELLING IN ACHIEVING MARITAL SATISFACTION AND STABILITY
For a successful and satisfactory marital relationships, the following counselling programs aid in sustaining a satisfactory and stable marital life.

**Pre-marital Counselling**

Premarital counselling is an effective way to increase marital satisfaction resulting in overall improvement for families in our society. Premarital counselling is effective for increasing marital satisfaction for not only couples at high risk of marital satisfaction, but for most couples that participate in the therapy sessions. The benefits of premarital counselling such as gaining better communication skills and having time to slow down and think about what is going on in a couple's marriage helps to increase marital satisfaction. The scales and models used to assess couples allow counsellors to focus on strengthening areas of weakness for couples, which leads to increased marital satisfaction. Feedback on past studies and therapy sessions help to improve the practice of premarital counselling and better improve its client's marital satisfaction(Blanchard, Hawkins, Baldwin and Fawcett, 2009).

Premarital counselling does improve marital satisfaction; however, improvement cannot be made if couples do not participate. It is imperative to increase awareness of how participation in pre-marital counselling can better generations of young people that are planning to going into marriage. Pre-marital counselling is a way for engaged couples to learn more about themselves, their partners and their relationship before they are married. It usually consists of about 5, 8, to 50 minutes couples counselling session with a therapist.

Abubakar (2016), refer to pre-marital counseling as a type of therapy that help couples prepare for marriage. Premarital counseling can help to ensure that you and your partner have a strong, healthy relationship giving you a better chance for a stable and satisfying marriage. It is advised that couples should receive counselling from a professional counsellor before engaging in marriage relationship as this will help them have better knowledge of what the marriage union is all about, the good and bad moments, to know their spouses better and know the adjustment better and coping strategies to employ in marital lives. However, it commonly refers to a method that is intended to improve and enhance premarital relationships leading to more pleasing and established marriages with the envisioned consequence intended to avoid divorce. The providers of premarital counselling can be private or faith-based, although they come from different backgrounds, the share the same goals. The ultimate goal of premarital counselling is to support relationships prior to marriage in order to prevent the risk of future divorce and give them a better base for a stable and satisfactory marriage (Stahmann, 2000).

The primary goals of premarital counselling include:

1. Facilitating the shift from single to married life.
2. Increasing stability and satisfaction (long and short term),
3. Developing the couple's communication skills,
4. Enhancing the companionship and promise to the relationship,
5. Enhancing intimacy between the couple,
6. Introducing and implementing problem-solving and decision-making abilities in the capacities of finances and marital responsibilities.

Sambo (2014: 75-79) identified some of the areas premarital counselling deals with, which the writer briefly elaborated on. The areas include:

1. Acquiring a satisfactory understanding to the meaning and expectations of marriage. During the counselling section, the intended couples will apprehend what marriage is all about, and that they are bound to face challenges, marriage is not a bed of roses that they may be thinking of. The information will the by equip the couples on ways to tackle with the duels.
2. Help the couples to apprehend the meaning and task of parenthood. Parenting is one of the issues that bring about marital instability, premarital counseling help the couples to plan and duly face the task ahead.
3. Assist prospective couples understand the value of blood genotype testing before marriage. The program ensures compatibility, so as to avoid having children with sickle cell traits make appropriate selection of mates. So as to avoid children with sickle cell disorder due to its rare survival rate, high cost of sustaining and coping with the disorder, and the trauma involved with the disorder.
4. Be able to distinguish between marriage and friendship. Most young couples are faced with problem of adjusting to marriage life as they can't differentiate it from mere friendship. The former as being more or less permanent and full of challenges and the later as being temporary and changeable at intervals.
5. Appreciate much more realistic qualities of a good partner for marriage such as truthfulness, understanding, loving, patience, dedicated etc. rather than illusive attractions such as wealth, facial beauty etc.

**Reasons for Pre-marital Counselling**

Given the staggering divorce rates, one of the best things you can do to help save people marriage before it begins is premarital counseling. According to psychology today, studies suggest that couples that choose to receive counselling have lower divorce rates than those that do not. According to (Waite & Gallagher cited in Abubakar, 2016:364-365) the following are consideredas reasons for marital counselling:

1. **Face Issues**: Couples who attend premarital counselling have the opportunity to discuss issues that most couples argue about and most often lead to
divorce or separation. Marital counselling can help you address hot issues before they arise and assist you in discovering what the other person believes about the issue so that you may come to an agreement before you walk down the aisle. For example, you may discuss under what religion you will raise your future children or talk about what you will do if in-laws try to interfere. In counseling, you will also address the main issues that are currently affecting your relationship. Little problems can turn into major arguments if they are given a chance to fester. Counselling can help you work through any negative feelings before they turn into something bigger.

2. **Counsellor Wisdom:** Oftentimes, it helps having someone to talk to that has already been through the issues you will be facing. A great marriage counsellor has that been married can provide experience that can only come from being married and living with another person. It also helps to talk to potential couples who may have felt some of the same feelings about family and relationships.

3. **Effective Communication:** One of the most important aspects of any marriage is effective communication. Communication is the to healthy relationship, it allows for expression of love and affection between spouse or families. At first, communication is a clear and non-explainable concept. Because we communicate in every second and in different ways. As vateslavic said: “no communication is impossible.” Olagunju and Eweniyi (2002) maintained that, marriage without effectively communication is likely to crumble. Communication is a life wire of any marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship. John cited in Abubakar (2016), nonetheless, we have so many different meaning of communication. One of its intelligence descriptions is “good communication is wise message and expression of its own, “communication has different dimensions and characteristics”. The first one is, presenting information to others about our own aims. When a couple stops caring and stops talking to one another, the marriage will eventually fall apart. Counselling can help couples to learn how to be a good listener, so you know what the other person wants and needs. It’s easy to take each other for granted, but by keeping an open line of communication and expressing love, couples can build a relationship that can withstand the test of time. One-on-one therapy helps couples learn to talk to one another and express feelings in a way that will not damage the relationship. You learn to hold your tongue when it’s appropriate and how to speak with honesty. It’s a good idea to sit with one another and discuss what you want to achieve during the meetings, which is your first step toward effective communication.

4. **Review Finances:** Many individuals enter into marriage in debt because they financed a wedding that they really couldn’t afford. Counselling can help you create a budget, find out about the credit of the person you will marry, and discover any loans and outstanding balances the person may have. Ongoing financial problems can destroy even the healthiest of relationships, so it helps to sit down with a marital counselor and draw up a plan of action for how you handle your bank accounts and how you will handle paying for your responsibilities. You should already know ahead of time the major issue of paying for the wedding and whose responsibility it will be. If you do not have relatives that intend to cover the cost, it’s wise to plan the wedding well within your means so you won’t argue about the cost later. Learning about your spouse’s spending habits before you say I do can help you avoid arguments about money in the future.

5. **Discover Something New:** Premarital therapy sessions will give you the opportunity to discuss things that do not come up in normal conversations, such as hurtful past experiences, sex, and expectations. Too often, we think we know our spouse well, but we may not learn of past abuse or how the person expects the marriage to be. The relationship your spouse has with your in-laws will usually reflect on how your children will be disciplined and treated, so pay attention to other relationships and if the person suffered from abuse as a child or young adult, it’s a good idea to seek individual therapy to resolve any underlying issues.

6. **Divorce Prevention:** One of the most important reasons to seek premarital counseling is to prevent divorce. Studies show that couples that attend counselling sessions are 30 percent less likely to entertain the notion than those who do not. This lowers your risk of divorce to around 20 percent, which is why many religious leaders encourage counseling for couples. Premarital counselling will help increase your likelihood for happiness because you will identify your fears, values, beliefs, reeds, desires and learn how to communicate them to your partner.

7. **Spouse to be Positive to Negative Behaviors:** Partners in happy marriages are more prone to associate positive meanings to their spouse's behavior than spouses in unsatisfying marriages. According to Phillips, Bischoff, Abbott and Xia (2009), reviews these findings and other similar research by describing happy spouses as more likely to see the optimistic, relationship-building behavior of their partner. Negative behavior occurs in all marriages but when it happens among happily
married couples, they are more likely to justify it as being unusual or as attributable to the pressure and anxiety of the situation.

Similar research has found that a repetition of everyday positive interactions and routine involvement in joint activities produces an increase in marital satisfaction and adjustment. Driver and Gottman (2004) discovered that couples that are satisfied in their marriage frequently participate in behaviors such as kissing, hugging, and conversing with the spouse about their day. The routine engagement in these types of communications leads to thoughts of closeness and connection that give to a shared value; when repetitive, patterned, and significant; they take on a symbolic and strong meaning of cohesion.

**Marital Counselling**

Marital counseling also called couple therapy is a type of psychotherapy. Marriage counseling help couples of all types realize and resolve conflicts and improve their relationships. Through, marriage counseling you can make thoughtful decisions about rebuilding your relationship or going your separate way. It also covers areas of finding solution to problems of married life such as domestic violence, divorced single parenthood.

Marital counseling which is an interactive process characterized by a unique relationship between counselor(s) and clients (couples) lending to change in the counselees behavior (Ubacited in Echebe, 2010). Marital counseling is as old as man itself as all societies around the world offer counseling services before and during marriage relationship but formal marriage counseling was introduced into the Nigerian system, through religious institution as they seek to reduce and unhappiness and strengthen marital bond between couples in order to weaken the menace of divorce (Echebe, 2010:149-151)

Couples can seek counselling in the following areas:


According to British counseling Directory, (2015: 943-946); the following problems also need counselling:


These listed problems usually cause instability in marriages, thou counseling is recommended as soon as discontent arises in a relationship, it is good to seek for a solution to the problem by visiting a therapy. Successful therapy often resolves most of the problems that causes unstable marital relationship, the success of marital counseling session depend on each partner motivation and dedication to the process and couples can expect to become better listeners and communicators and to find new ways to support one another. Convenient and conducive environment is needed for ensuring the required privacy and comfort, the counselor’s office is normally used to achieve these. The counsellor is expected to be able to decide on the structure to be applied during the counselling session. According to Shafer, (2012:64-69) four methods are available, among which a counsellor is expected to chosesfrom and apply during the marriage counselling. Those possible methods to be applied include:

1. Seeing both partners separately
2. Seeing both partners at the same time
3. Separate counsellors to see the partners
4. Seeing only one partner, while the other is not accessible.

Goals will be established by the couple under the guidance of the therapist, and in order to achieve these objectives, each partner must be prepared to acknowledge and understand his or her role in the relationship, it is not uncommon for conflict to arise with therapy sessions, but ethical therapist will strive to remain neutral and avoid taking sides. The counselling sections hereby curb the instability in marriages and enhance a healthy relationship with fewer problems.

**V. CONCLUSION**

Marital counselling is vital to marital satisfaction and stability in any culture, community and religion. Marital counselling enhances great understanding, effective communication skills and ways to effectively handle challenges in the marriage which leads to a satisfactory marital relationship. Premarital counselling leads to increased social adjustment which in turn leads to marital stability which leads to reduction of divorce among couples. Marital counselling help separated individuals to positively adjust to marital life and also to enhance stability when the individual remarry. When couples remain together they produce healthier, happier and well-adjusted families which result in a well-adjusted society.

**VI. SUGGESTIONS**

1. Government should help to establish counselling centers purely on pre-marital counselling
2. Government Non-governmental, faith based organization and community base organization should organize seminars, conference, workshops and enlightenment programmes for both intended and married couples.
3. Individuals should be encouraged to go for blood genotype testing before getting involved in romantic relationships, to ensure choosing partners that are compatible in order to eliminate the transfer of inherited disorder such as sickle cell anemia.
4. Sex education program should be executed and implemented in the school curricula.
5. The government should also mount a sensitization campaign through news and print media by encouraging women to seek marital counseling which exposes women to ideas and open communication necessary for problem solving.

6. Finally young boys/girls should be targeted early in schools using well planned counseling programmes in teaching them desirable attitudes capable of promoting positive changes that will bring about marital stability in future

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