

Sexual and marital satisfaction among married couples: Role of family relationships

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Abstract

The high rate of marital discord and divorce in our present society is quite alarming. Research has shown that marital satisfaction is a precondition for healthy and successful family lives. Hence, to attain a happy and harmonious family living, it is important to investigate the predictors of marital satisfaction. Accordingly, this study examined the influence of sexual satisfaction and family relationships on marital satisfaction and the moderating role of family relationship on the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction. One hundred and thirty-two convenient samples of married couples in designated areas in Lagos Nigeria, comprising of 67 females and 65 males with a mean age of 37.34 years participated in the study. Data collected were analysed using multiple linear regression analysis. Findings suggest that high sexual satisfaction relates significantly with marital satisfaction. Also, a good family relationship has a positive significant relationship with marital satisfaction. More so, the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction was significantly moderated by family relationship. Results were discussed in line with previous literature, and it was recommended that couples should express affection to each other and not underestimate the importance of sexual and family relationships in cementing their love and ensuring greater marital quality.

Keywords: Sexual satisfaction, family relationships, marital satisfaction, married couples

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Introduction

Disharmonious relationship between married couples creates a potential threat to the existence of the family since its survival is dependent on these two people. Thus, sustenance and continual existence of the family institution rest upon living successful marital lives. One of the primary elements of marital acclimation and satisfaction is sexual satisfaction (Alahveriani et al., (2010). In the research literature, studies on marriage have shown that marital satisfaction is a precondition for successful marital lives or stability (Bilal & Rasool, 2020; Chapman & Guven, 2016; Whisman, 2001; Whisman et al., 2018), physical and mental health (South et al., 2021;) and children's level of psychological distress (Fishman & Meyers, 2000). Basically, Stone and Shackelford (2007) defined marital satisfaction as "a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person" (p. 541). Also, marital satisfaction is a subjective interpretation of one's marriage as a whole or an individual's level of happiness in the marital relationship (Knowles, 2002). Moreover, it is explained that marital satisfaction as one of the measures of quality marital life is characterised by a sincere pleasurable feeling, satisfaction, and a state of contentment encountered by any couple when they review every area of their marital journey (Taghani et al., 2019). This means that the level of rewards derived from a marital relationship determines an individual's degree of satisfaction for their marital life. In other words, marital satisfaction may be synonymous to marital happiness.

Since marital satisfaction is deemed to be a predictive factor of marital happiness and healthy family life it is important to identify and investigate the variables that could influence the occurrence of marital satisfaction. To understand the mechanism that prompts certain behaviour among individuals in a marriage, which could be negative or positive and can lead to marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction among couples, we would explore the family systems theory. Basically, Family systems theory has been applied in several domain of clinical practice like the Bowen family systems theory (1978) which posits that people's ability to attain intimacy and mutuality in a couple relationships is largely dependent on their level of self-differentiation. People who have a higher I-position are generally happier in their intimate relationships and have less relational conflict. Additionally, is the contextual family therapy (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Sparks, 1973), the communication-based systems approach (Jackson 2005) among many others. Generally, the fundamental focus of family systems theory lies on exchanges of behaviour that manifests in time of communication between family members. Additionally, the theory maintains that patterns of communication between the members of a family convene, maintain and sustain both trouble and non-troubling behaviour (Johnson & Ray, 2016). Increase in non-problematic behaviour will improve individuals' satisfaction in their relationship such as marriage. Our present study aims to explore the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction and the moderating role of family relationship on this link. As far as we know, studies that explore such relationship is lacking in the literature.

Sexual satisfaction, family relationships and marital satisfaction

Several authors (e.g., Aderemi, 2012; Malm et al., 2022; Ziaee et al, 2014) have tried to explore the elements associated with marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Despite these studies, there is little scientific literature available that focuses on the link between marital satisfaction and contentment with one's marital sexual life. For example, past studies have indicated that increase level of sexual satisfaction predicted higher levels of marital quality (Yeh et al., 2006; Ziaee et al, 2014). In a National research, Aderemi (2012) found that sexual dysfunction was an antecedent of marital dissatisfaction among Nigerian couples. These researchers point to the notion that, when couples are satisfied with their sexual lives, the consequence may be

shown in increased levels of marital satisfaction, even though most local research did not link sexual satisfaction with marital satisfaction. Thus, it is important to investigate the nexus between sexual and marital satisfaction. Family relationship as another factor of interest in this study is discussed accordingly.

Past studies have suggested that the quality of family relationships in terms of affection, care support received, and shown by each family member to other members of the family has a major impact on family well-being (Acock & Demo, 1994; Brown, 2010; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Good family relationships consist of qualities such as good communication among family members, commitment to the family, spending quality time together, appreciation and respect for each person in the family. It may be expected that marital satisfaction of couples would increase if there were a healthy emotional connectedness between parents, parents, and children. As a result of paucity of research in the literature linking family relationships and marital satisfaction, we consider it of great interest in the present study to understand the role played by family relationship in the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Considering the foregoing, we hypothesised that both sexual satisfaction and family relationships would predict marital satisfaction. Specifically, this study tested the hypotheses that: participants with better sexual satisfaction will report increased marital satisfaction than participants with poor sexual satisfaction (H_1). We propose that participants with better family relationship will report better marital satisfaction than participants with poor family relationship (H_2). Also, we suppose that family relationship will moderate the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction (H_3). The conceptual model of the moderating role of family relationship on the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction is represented in Figure 1.

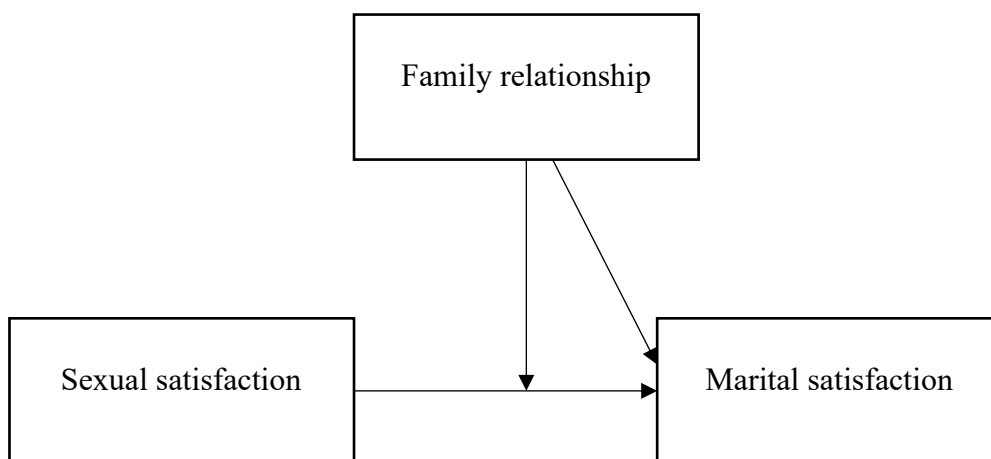


Figure 1: Conceptual model of the moderating role of family relationship on the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction.

Method

Participants and Procedure

One hundred and thirty-two married people were recruited from Ago Okota Lagos for this study. The participants consist of 67 (49.2%) women and 65 (49.2%) men. The age of participants ranges between 25 and 64 years ($M = 37.34$, $SD = 9.55$). The cross-sectional survey design was used to select convenient samples for the study. Participants' consents were obtained while assuring them of the anonymity of the study. The anonymity promised to participants was adhered to. They were also acquainted that participation was voluntary, and they were free to quit from participation during the study. People who turned down from participating were those who did not have the time to participate. Out of a hundred and fifty questionnaires that were distributed, 132 were correctly filled and recovered making it an 88% response rate. These numbers were all usable for data analysis.

Measures

Three standardised psychological instruments were used for this study, which are:

Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS)

This scale is a 25-item inventory developed by Hudson (1982). The scale was designed to measure the degree of problems associated with sexual satisfaction. That is, it measures the degrees to which an individual derive satisfaction from sexual relationship with his or her partner. Satisfaction is evaluated in terms of an individual's attitude, feeling or preference for various forms of an aspect of sexual behaviour. This scale is based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = rarely or none of the time to 5 = most or all the time. Additionally, it contains items like "I feel my partner enjoys our sex life"; "my partner does not want sex when I do". The internal consistency of the scale obtained for the study is acceptable at $\alpha = .95$.

Index of Family Relation (IFR)

This scale was constructed and validated by Hudson (1982) to measure the problems of interpersonal relationships in the family. The 25-item inventory is designed to measure the extent, severity, or magnitude of problems that family members have in their relationships with one another. Essentially IFR assesses family distress/discord and the impact of family disharmony on individual clients. The IFR items were measured on a five points Likert scale ranging from 1 = 'rarely or none of the time' to 5 = 'most or all of the time'. Samples of items are "do members of my family really care about each other"; "there seems to be a lot of friction in my family". Hudson (1982) provided the original psychometric properties. Cronbach's α of .94 was obtained for the current study.

Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS)

This instrument was developed by Hudson (1982). It is a 25-item inventory designed to measure the degree, severity, or magnitude of the problems one spouse or partner perceives to be having in the marital relationship with his or her partner. The focus is on current problems which have reduced marital satisfaction. This scale is based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = really or none of the time to 5 = most or all the time. Examples of the items are "I feel that my partner treats me badly"; "I feel that my partner really cares for me". Hudson (1982) provided the original psychometric properties for American samples. For the current study, an acceptable reliability coefficient of .91 was established.

Research Design/Statistics

A cross-sectional research design was adopted for the study. The independent variables were sexual satisfaction and family relationship while the dependent variable was marital satisfaction. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was applied to test the interrelationships among the studied variables. This correlational analysis shows the mean and standard deviations. A multiple linear regression analysis was used to test the direct and interaction effect between the study variables with Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software (SPSS) Version 25 and R software, version 4.1.2. To avoid multicollinearity, the independent variables were centred before an interaction analysis was carried out (Huang, 2020).

Results

Descriptive analysis between study variables

The relationship between the study variables were analysed using descriptive statistics. This shows the mean score, standard deviation, and the correlation values of the correlation between the study variables. Specifically, as can be seen from table 1 below, Sexual satisfaction is positively related with marital satisfaction ($r = .21, p < .05$). Family relationship has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction ($r = .22, p < .05$).

Table 1: Correlation analysis between study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Sexual satisfaction	3.39	1.09	1				
Family relationship	3.46	.61	.13	1			
Marital satisfaction	3.99	.91	.21*	.22*	1		
Age	37.34	9.55	-0.05	-0.11	-0.12	1	
Gender	-	-	-0.04	-0.07	0.12	-0.13	1

Note: * = $p < .05$

Hypotheses testing

Table 2: Result of the linear regression applied in testing the hypotheses.

Variable	B	R ²	T	SE	P	95% CI
Sexual satisfaction	.20	.06	2.36		.02	[.03, .04]
Family relationship	.22	.08	2.59		.01	[.08, .58]
Sexual satisfaction X Family relationship	-.39	-	-3.66	.11	.001	[-.60, -.18]

Dependent variable: Marital satisfaction

Relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction

Multiple regression analysis indicated that sexual satisfaction has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction, $b = 0.20$, $R^2 = 0.06$, $t(132) = 2.36$, 95 % CI [.03, .04], $p = .02$, which show that when couple are happy and satisfied with their sexual life, they tend to be satisfied with their marriage. This result is in line with our first hypothesis H_1 .

Relationship between family relationship and marital satisfaction

Here we analysed the link between family relationship and marital satisfaction. The multiple linear regression analysis show that family relationship is positively related with marital satisfaction, $b = 0.22$, $R^2 = 0.08$, $t(132) = 2.59$, 95 % CI [.08, .58], $p = .01$. This explains the fact that when there is a peaceful family relationship, couples tend to be satisfied with their marriage.

Interaction analysis between sexual satisfaction, family relationship on marital satisfaction

Here, we explored the interaction effect of family relationship on the link between sexual and marital satisfaction. The linear model shows that family relationship has a negative significant interaction effect on the relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction $b = -0.39$, $R^2 = 0.11$, $t(132) = -3.66$, 95% CI [-0.60, -0.18], $p = .001$. Figure 1 shows that the effect of SS on MS decreases as good family relationship increases. That is to say that the more FR is harmonious the less the importance of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction. This confirms our hypothesis 3 that family relationship will moderate the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction.

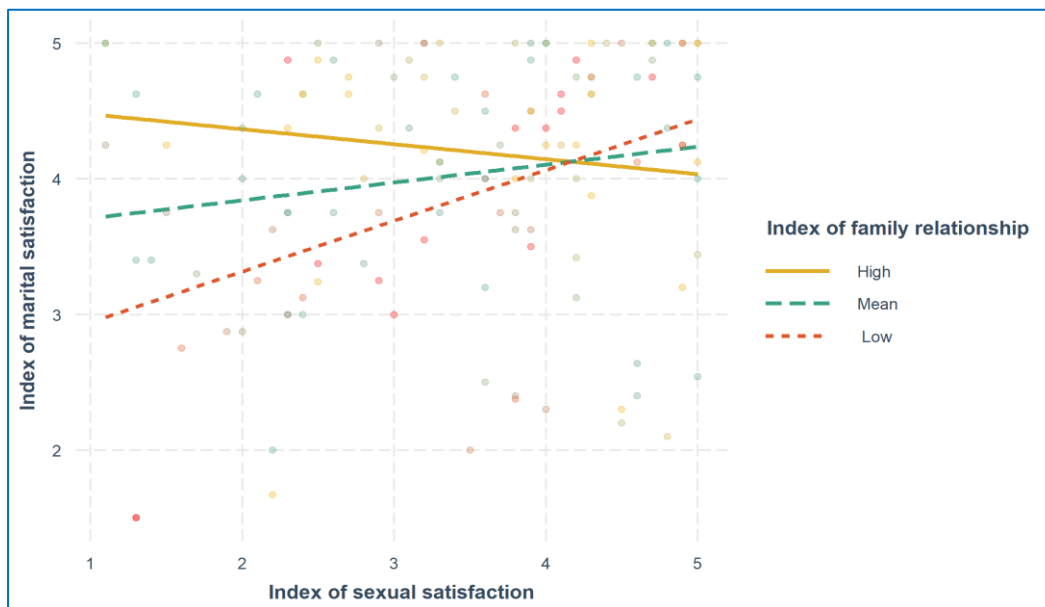


Figure 2: Interaction effect of family relationship and sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction

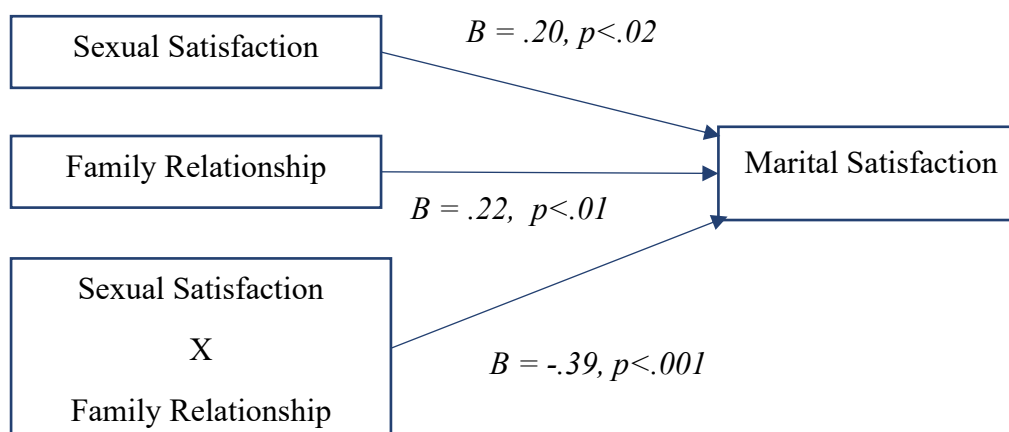


Figure 3: Statistical model of the study hypotheses

Discussion

The outcomes of this study have demonstrated that sexual satisfaction and family relationships are both predictive factors of marital satisfaction. Specifically, individuals who reported higher levels of sexual satisfaction tend to have higher levels of marital satisfaction as compared with those that reported lower levels of sexual satisfaction. Additionally, good family relationships account for better marital satisfaction than poor family relationships. This pattern of result reviews that people don't just take marital oats because of procreation and child upbringing, but also for sexual pleasure and enjoyment, relieve of tensions and boosting the feelings of personal power and self-esteem (Meston & Buss, 2007). Though may not be empirically founded, it has been opined by many that there can be no pleasure or gratification in the world that can equate to that experienced during orgasm. Hence, a marital life that is devoid of sexual satisfaction may bring feelings of disappointment, boredom, lack of excitement and reduced personal self-worth in the marital relationship. This result is in tandem with the works of Rahmani et al. (2009); Yeh et al. (2006) and Ziael et al., (2014) where it was suggested that sexual satisfaction relates with marital quality and satisfaction. It has also been demonstrated in this study that good family relationships predict better marital satisfaction than poor family relationships. This result sounds reasonable because when there is adequate support and emotional attachments among members of a family, the consequence is peaceful and joyous family atmosphere and coexistence which may ultimately translate into marital satisfaction of spouses. Since one of the essences of marital life is to raise families and observing that one's family is well knitted and united, couples become happy and fulfilled that their efforts towards building a family was not futile after all and thus resulting into marital satisfaction. According to Acitelli and Antonucci (1994); Rostami (2013), emotional support received from one's spouse and family cohesion (which is an indication of good family relationship) was found to be very important for marital satisfaction of couples. Similarly, in other study, it is found that when children are securely attached to their parents (especially the mother) there is a corresponding increase in marital satisfaction (Nikmanesh, 2014).

Interestingly, studies on this subject matter have not explored the moderating effect of family relationship on the link between sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction. We found an interesting result which indicates that when good family relationship increases, effect of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction decreases. As found by Rostami (2013), a healthy relationship encourages marital satisfaction. This study has shown that a change could occur if

any of the elements as found in this study, is lacking in marriage there by leading to a lower marital satisfaction.

Implications of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, it would be imperative to improve on designing programs like marriage seminars, marriage conferences, where couples would be exposed more on successful marriage tips and be encouraged to work hard in positive living system. These should also include encouraging couples to improve on expression of affection in the family through adequate communication and giving of emotional support, adoption of consensus in dealing with family issues and considering sexuality and intimacy. In admonishment, couples should not underestimate the importance of their sexual relationships in cementing their love and ensuring marital liveliness and satisfaction. Marriage counsellors, family therapists and religious leaders should emphasize the significances of harmonious family relationship and sexual relations to couples to strengthen the institution of marriage and reduce the rate of divorce which is becoming alarming in the society. Theoretically, the study has strengthened the scientific knowledge of existing literature on the link between sexual satisfaction, family relationship and marital satisfaction. Additionally, the direction of interaction effect of family relationship on the link between sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction is new to this field of study and can be a platform that will inform future research when other personal characteristics will be considered.

Limitations of the study and directions for future research

Though this study has demonstrated some indicators of marital satisfaction and ways by which it could be improved, it should be noted that there are some limitations to inferring causality among study variables. Firstly, this study was a cross-sectional study and could not be used to establish the cause and effect among study variables. Secondly, the study consists of limited sample size, and this may not be sufficient to generalize the result. Based on these limitations, future studies should consider using longitudinal designs and larger sample size to expand the understanding of sexuality, family relationships and marriage. Moreover, several demographic makeup's like tribe, religion and profession were not considered in the study. This could inform future research to see if there is any significant effect of these personal characteristics on sexual and family lives of married people in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Conclusively it has been demonstrated in this study that sexual satisfaction and good family relationships are indicators of marital satisfaction. Moreover, an increase in a good family relationship can reduce the influence of sexual satisfaction on marital satisfaction. This is a new knowledge to this field of study as studies have failed to establish an interaction relationship between family relationship, sexual satisfaction and marital satisfaction. Generally, family relationship should be given maximum attention in studies relating to marriage and marital satisfaction.

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