

Childlessness and Marital Dissatisfaction Among Married Teachers in Delta State

Ehikwe, F. O.

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria

faithoziomaobi@gmail.com

Prof (Mrs) A. Onoyase

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria

anna.onoyase@delsu.edu.ng

Assoc. Prof (Mrs) E. O. Egbule

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria

eoegbule@delsu.edu.ng

Abstract

This study investigated childlessness as a factor causing marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. One research question and two hypotheses guided the study. The correlational research design was employed in the study. The population for the study comprised 8,526 married teachers in Delta State. A sample size of 879 married teachers were drawn through a multistage sampling method. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire. The instrument was assessed for face, content and construct validity by experts and factor analysis, while Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient was used to check for the reliability of the items, and it yielded a coefficient of 0.81 for Marital dissatisfaction Rating Scale. The data were analysed using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficient of determination, regression statistics statistics. The hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers; but that there is no significant moderating impact of duration of marriage on the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. The study recommended amongst others, that counsellors should provide guidance on coping strategies for couples facing childlessness, including emotional support and alternative family-building options.

Keywords: Childlessness; Duration of Marriage; Marital Dissatisfaction; Married Teachers.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest social institutions known to humanity. Across civilizations and traditions, the relationship between a man and a woman is universally acknowledged as the foundation for family life and societal continuity. In most cultures and religions, adulthood is considered incomplete without marriage, as it provides the primary framework for companionship, procreation, and child upbringing. Both Biblical and Islamic teachings trace the origin of marriage to the creation of the first humans in the Garden of Eden (Okafor & Nnadi, 2020).

Despite the importance attached to marriage, achieving satisfaction within it remains a complex process. Research evidence suggests that many marriages experience tension and instability, which often lead to dissatisfaction (Adeniran & Olatunji, 2022). Marital dissatisfaction refers to a subjective experience in which spouses feel unfulfilled because their emotional, social, or physical needs and expectations are unmet. This dissatisfaction can create emotional distress, poor mental health, and behavioural problems among couples. It can also result in workplace distraction, marital breakdown, and even contribute to anti-social tendencies among children and irresponsible behaviours in adults (Eze & Mbah, 2021).

The consequences of marital dissatisfaction extend beyond individual couples, affecting the broader stability of society, as the family is regarded as the nucleus of every nation. Persistent dissatisfaction can lead to physical and psychological health challenges among spouses, as well as negatively influence children's academic performance, social skills, and emotional development (Egbule, et al., 2022; Olawale & Ayeni, 2023). Furthermore, it has been established that women's wellbeing and life satisfaction are often more adversely affected by marital problems due to cultural and gender expectations (Onah, 2021). Various studies (Afolabi, 2022; Eze & Mbah, 2021; Onah, 2021) have explored marital dissatisfaction from the perspective of how individuals perceive and respond to specific elements of marital life.

Identifying the causes of marital dissatisfaction remains a vital research concern. Evidence from contemporary studies indicates that it is influenced by multiple factors such as educational attainment, length of marriage, number of children, economic status, love, emotional commitment, sexual compatibility, communication, and relationships with in-laws (Olawale & Ayeni, 2023). Other variables, such as gender, age, religious beliefs, and conflict resolution strategies, also play significant roles (Adeniran & Olatunji, 2022). While previous research has addressed some of these variables, there is still a need to further investigate specific contributors. Therefore, this study aims to explore how childlessness may contribute to marital dissatisfaction, particularly among married teachers in Delta State.

Childlessness may sound like a peculiar condition but in reality, this is common, just that it represents itself in different ways and is also perceived in several ways. Childlessness may be a result of delaying reproduction, medical problems, or personal choice. Some women tend to delay their marriage even during the early centuries as they prioritize their careers, thus their biological clock runs out and often they are left, unable to bear children. Some tend to choose to remain childless, although this is not commonly and openly discussed because having children is seen as an integral part of having a family (Chrastil, 2019).

Involuntary childlessness is a life condition most frequently caused by infertility-the biological term for inability to bear children. 10% of women in the United States from age 15

to 44 are unable to have children due to this condition (Espinol, 2021). Even with this number it is still worth noting that men also experience infertility. For men, low sperm count, sperms' inability to move, and sperms' shape are the leading factors for infertility. In women, absence of ovulation or inability to produce mature egg cells is the primary reason for infertility. In both cases, physical problems with the reproductive system, such as cysts in the ovaries or blocked tubes also result in infertility.

Childlessness may be stressful but it can also make for closer mutual affinity in the couple's thought and feeling. The experience can stress a couple's personal relationship, diminish sexual satisfaction, deplete financial resources, and threaten perception of masculinity and femininity and cause psychological stress. Problems with psychological distress of married couples without children also affect other factors in their lives including their marital dissatisfaction.

Apart from the influence of childlessness, the researcher is also interested in the moderating impact of duration of marriage on marital dissatisfaction. The duration of marriage refers to the period of time with respect to days, weeks, months and years of marital existence/relationship among couples often calculated in years. The period that partners have spent together has been shown to associate with marital dissatisfaction. The influence of marriage duration on marital dissatisfaction is negative (it decreases with a relationship length) or U-shaped (it decreases in the beginning and increases after some time) (Karney & Bradbury, 2023). The duration of marriage may moderate the influence of childlessness on marital dissatisfaction among married teachers by impacting the couple's emotional resilience, communication patterns, and adaptability to stressors. Long-term couples may have a more profound sense of shared history and commitment, providing a shield against dissatisfaction when facing childlessness, as they might have already explored and accepted alternative sources of fulfilment (Brewster & Tillman, 2020). In contrast, couples in shorter marriages may experience more acute dissatisfaction from these issues, as they are still in the process of solidifying their relationship dynamics and may lack the developed coping mechanisms of their longer-married counterparts (Idris et al., 2023). Therefore, the duration of marriage may play a critical role in moderating how this stressor affect marital dissatisfaction, with longer marriages generally exhibiting greater resilience. In view of this, the focus of this study is to examine the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State.

1.3 Research Questions

The following research question guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level:

1. There is no significant relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

2. There is no significant moderating impact of duration of marriage in the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

Methods

The study adopted the correlational research design. The population for the study comprised all married teachers in Delta State. There are 8,526 married teachers in Delta State. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to pick out a sample of 879 married teachers from the population stated above. The choice of 879 married teachers as a sample size was based on the recommendation of Gill, et al. (2010) that a sample size of 879 is suitable for a population of between 5,000 and 9,999 at a 97% confidence level. The sample was selected from the three senatorial districts in Delta State. In the initial phase, the researcher chose two schools from each of the 25 Local Government Areas spanning the three senatorial districts of Delta State. This selection process employed a simple random sampling technique. The researcher jotted down the school names on pieces of paper and place them in a container. Afterward, two pieces were drawn and unveiled, and this procedure was repeated until two schools from each of the 25 Local Government Areas in Delta State have been identified. Moving on to the second phase, the researcher then proceeded to select teachers from the two chosen schools within each Local Government Area. This selection process followed the principles of proportionate stratified sampling technique. Specifically, the researcher chose 10% of the married teachers in each local government area, based on a sample size of 879 as recommended by Gill et al. (2010). The rationale behind opting for the proportionate stratified sampling technique lies in the fact that the local government areas possess varying numbers of married teachers. Thus, to ensure a representative sample of married teachers from each of the selected schools, the proportionate stratified sampling technique was employed.

The research instrument that was utilized for data collection was a questionnaire. The questionnaire contains two sections. Section A provides information on gender, educational level, duration of marriage and presence/absence of children. Section B measures marital dissatisfaction. The Marital Dissatisfaction Rating Scale is a 33-item self-report measure of an individual's subjective experience of marriage. It was adapted from the Marital Disharmony and Disaffection Scale, developed by Snyder and Regts (1982). The response format is based on a modified Likert-type scale, with responses ranging from "Strongly Agree" (4) to "Strongly Disagree" (1). Higher scores reflect a greater amount of marital dissatisfaction. The face validity of the instrument was estimated by the experts in the Department of Guidance and Counselling. A copy of the instrument was printed and handed to the lecturers who went through it and made suggestions in terms of wording and sentence structure in order for the items to be aligned with the objectives of the study. The suitability of the instrument to the objectives of the study was therefore estimated by experts' judgement. The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 100 married teachers in Edo State outside the area of study. The content and construct validities of the instrument were estimated using Factor Analysis. The principal component analysis of the extraction method was used to estimate the content validity of the instrument. It yielded a total cumulative variance of 57.97% for the Marital dissatisfaction Rating Scale. The rotated factor loading of the varimax method was used to estimate its construct validity. It yielded the following range of values of 0.51-0.81 for Marital dissatisfaction Rating Scale. The Cronbach alpha was adopted to establish the internal consistency of the instrument. This yielded a coefficient of 0.81 for Marital dissatisfaction

Rating Scale. These figures indicates that the instrument is both valid and reliable (Jessa, et al., 2023).

The research instrument was administered to participants by the researchers and three trained research assistants. It was given to the married teachers to respond to in their offices. This was done after explaining purpose of visit and obtaining permission from the principal of the schools and informed consent from the teachers. On the spot collection was done to avoid loss of data. At the end of the exercise, a total of 879 copies of questionnaire were administered and a total of 879 were returned, indicating 100% retrieval rate. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Moment Correlation and regression statistics. The coefficient of determination was used to answer the research question while regression statistics was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State?

Table 1: Pearson's correlation coefficient and coefficient of determination on childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

Variable	N	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i> ²	<i>r</i> ² %	Decision
Childlessness					
Marital Dissatisfaction	879	0.13	0.02	2	Positive Relationship

Table 1 indicates the r-value of 0.13 as the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. The coefficient of determination (*r*²) was 0.02 and the amount of contribution of childlessness to marital dissatisfaction was 2%. This shows a low positive relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

Table 2: Regression analysis of childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

Model	Sum of Square	<i>df</i>	Mean Square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Regression	2122.972	1	2122.972	14.556	.000 ^b
Residual	127904.955	877	145.844		
Total	130027.927	878			
Variables in Equation					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficient <i>B</i>	Std. Error	Standardised Coefficient Beta	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Constant	93.411	1.224		76.340	.000
Childlessness	-3.362	.881	-.128	-3.815	.000

$\alpha = 0.05$, $R = 0.128$, $R\text{-Square} = 0.016$

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Dissatisfaction

b. Predictors (Constant): Childlessness

The result in Table 2 shows the regression output of a relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State, with an F-value of 14.556 and a p-value of 0.000. Testing the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of 0.000 was less than the alpha level of 0.05, hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This revealed that there is a significant relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) for predicting marital dissatisfaction from childlessness is -0.128. The standardized coefficient (β) is -3.362, $t = -3.815$. Hence, childlessness was significant at an alpha level of 0.05.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant moderating impact of duration of marriage in the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

Table 3: Multiple regression analysis on the moderating impact of duration of marriage in the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State

Model	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	30.737	3.447		8.916	.000
Childlessness	-1.274	.649	-.048	-1.962	.050
Duration of Marriage	.568	.597	.023	.952	.341

Table 3 displays the outcomes of examining moderating impact of duration of marriage in the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. The beta weight of -0.048 with a t-value of -1.962 pertains to childlessness, while the beta weight of 0.023, with a t-value of 0.952, pertains to duration of marriage, signifying the extent of relationship between each variable (childlessness and duration of marriage) with marital dissatisfaction. The results indicate that childlessness is statistically significant at a significant level of 0.05, whereas duration of marriage is not statistically significant. Consequently, the null hypothesis was accepted, suggesting that there is no significant moderating impact of duration of marriage in the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State.

Discussions

The first finding revealed that there is a significant relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. This finding suggests that the inability to conceive and raise children has a profound emotional and social impact on marriages. In many cultural settings, particularly in Nigeria, children are often seen as a symbol of marital success and a source of social and economic security. The absence of children in a marriage can lead to feelings of incompleteness, stigma, and external pressures from extended family and society. The finding also suggests that childlessness may exacerbate marital tension, resulting in emotional strain, communication breakdown, and feelings of inadequacy among spouses. Societal norms often place a higher burden on women in cases of childlessness, which can create feelings of guilt, blame, and isolation, further eroding marital satisfaction. For men, the inability to have children may challenge their male identity and trigger feelings of frustration, particularly when familial and societal expectations are not fulfilled. A major reason for the above finding could be the emphasis on procreation in many cultures, where the success of a marriage is heavily tied to the couple's ability to have children. Additionally, childlessness can result in financial stress due to the costs associated with fertility treatments or alternative

options such as adoption. Another factor is the lack of mutual understanding and coping strategies, which can intensify the emotional and psychological toll on the couple. The finding is consistent with Li et al. (2019), who found that childlessness can lead to emotional distress, with societal pressures disproportionately affecting women. The finding also agrees with Yeshua-Katz (2018), whose study revealed that in cultures where motherhood is closely tied to a woman's identity, childlessness is associated with decreased marital satisfaction and psychological well-being. The finding further agrees with the finding of Buhr and Huinink (2017), which showed that childlessness often exacerbates feelings of isolation, exclusion, and strained spousal relationships. This dynamic can contribute to marital dissatisfaction, especially in societies where family structures prioritize parenthood.

The eighth finding revealed that there is no significant moderating impact of duration of marriage in the relationship between childlessness and marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. This finding suggests that these factors are pervasive across different stages of marriage. This implies that the challenges of childlessness may affect marital satisfaction similarly, regardless of how long a couple has been married. One possible reason for the above finding is that the core issues of societal expectations about childbearing are fundamental to marital stability and do not necessarily diminish with time. For example, childlessness may continue to exert a significant psychological and social strain on couples throughout their marriage due to persistent societal expectations. The finding is consistent with Onyishi (2023), who found that issues contributing to marital dissatisfaction are consistent across different stages of marriage and that factors like infidelity and mistrust significantly affect marital satisfaction regardless of marriage length, as emotional needs and trust dynamics remain critical throughout relationships. The finding also supports Frontiers (2023), who found that while duration may influence marital roles and expectations, its impact on dissatisfaction due to specific stressors like childlessness or infidelity might be negligible. This could stem from the enduring psychological and emotional toll of these issues, irrespective of the duration of marriage.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that childlessness significantly contribute to marital dissatisfaction among married teachers in Delta State. Despite this significant relationship, the absence of moderating effects from duration of marriage suggest that the factor influence marital dissatisfaction uniformly across demographic group. In view of this, the following recommendations were advanced:

- i. Counsellors should provide guidance on coping strategies for couples facing childlessness, including emotional support and alternative family-building options. Married teachers can benefit from support groups or counselling to manage feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction related to childlessness.
- ii. Counsellors should provide support tailored to the specific needs of the couple, regardless of how long they've been married. Married teachers should not assume that time alone can resolve marital issues but should actively work on improving their relationship through open dialogue and joint efforts.

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