



Influence of Spousal Ethnicity and Locus of Control on Marital Instability of Post-Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the influence of spousal ethnicity and locus of control on reported level of marital instability among post-graduate students in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study was guided by two research questions and two corresponding null hypotheses. The study adopted the ex-post-facto research design using a population of 400 post-graduate students. A researcher-developed instrument was used for data collection which was shown to be valid and reliable as a data collection tool. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while independent samples t-test was used to test the corresponding null hypotheses. Result showed that students with intra-ethnic spouse reported significantly lesser level of marital instability than those from inter-ethnic marriage. Similarly, it was shown that students who reported external locus of control had a significantly higher level of marital instability than those who reported internal locus of control. On the basis of the result, it was recommended that during the orientation programme for post-graduate students, effort should be made to notify students of the support system available to them which can improve their marital relationship.

Keywords: Marital instability; ethnicity, locus of control, post-graduate students.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a socially sanctioned union, typically between one man and one woman usually called husband and wife. It is for this reason that this institution is often regarded as the oldest social union in human history and one of the most important social institutions of the human race (Ebiai & Bumba, 2004); although the type and function of marriage varies from culture to culture. Legally sanctioned marriages are generally conducted between heterosexual couples, although there are a few countries that recognize same-sex marriage (Broude, 2004). The prevailing view towards marriage is that it is based on emotional attachment between the partners and entered into voluntarily.

Nwoye cited in Ordu (2006) explained that marriage in itself is a sacred and permanent contract which is assumed to be enacted when two people (usually a man and a woman) decide of their own accord to exchange the formal consent to live together. This agreement is believed to include a life of love and caring for each other for the purpose of promoting their mutual growth and welfare as persons in the journey through life as husband and wife. Odedele and Egotanwa (2002) asserted that marriage is a legal union between a man and a woman to become husband and wife. They further explained that the process of uniting a man and woman could take place in the church, mosque, court or traditional institution.

But this union is under threat, especially during this 21st century where a large number of persons spend time outside the home due to different reason including education (Sylder, 2008). The researcher has observed with dismay that most post graduate students in Nigeria, especially those within where she currently studies, finds it difficult to cope with their marital and educational challenges which have most times led to one form of marital problem or the other. These perturbations in marriages are increasing at an alarming rate in the area under observation. Close interactions with some married postgraduate students have informed the researcher that some events and processes are negatively influencing their marriages. While some of these married students do not

feel comfortable in marriages, some are inexperienced in marital issues and others have inherent behavioral and psychological dispositions which their spouses probably feel uncomfortable about.

Marriage could be stable or unstable. Marital stability occurs when there is mutual and cordial relationship between a couple which involves love, faithfulness, good communication and respect to each other. When these variables are lacking in marriage, it may become unstable (Ofoegbu, 2002). Anikpeh (2007) opined that marital instability is the degree to which couples fail to provide adequate continuity, cohesiveness and stability for their children, themselves and other significant relatives. Ajai and Ipaye (1997) defined marital instability as a high degree of interpersonal tension that exists among couples that can be attributed to a wide variety of factors. This implies that marital instability is the degree to which tension arising from nagging, suspicion, fighting, unfaithfulness, cruelty causes failure of marital stability among couples.

Ofoegbu cited in Amadi, (2010) explained that when there is marital instability, there is disorganization, disruption, misguiding, separation, lack of communication in the home and even separation and divorce. The children take important life decisions without consulting their parents properly; the husband and wife do things independently without communicating with each other. He added further that the consequences and implications are always severe, mostly on the children who may not have attained maturity. Stressing on its effects, Selier (1996) posits that it may continue to be a significant risk factor during early adolescence. That it increases children's risk for developing psychological pathologies such as pessimistic appraisals of the family which may be rigidly used as prototypes for approaching new or challenging social tasks and relationships that typically demand flexibility and openness to emotional experiences, for example failure to have adequate resources and skills to successfully resolve other developmental tasks.

A lot of other factors have been attributed to the causes of marital instability among couples such as economic (Ambakederemo & Ganagana, 2006), religious (Maciver & Dimkpa, 2012), and the developmental history of the spouse. Despite the seemingly exhaustive attention given to the causative factors of marital instability, the researcher feels that psychosocial factors contribute in no small way to marital instability especially among married post graduates students. Psychosocial factors are those variables or elements within our environment as well internal characteristics of individuals or couples which influence their outward behaviour towards their spouses, children and other family relations, that may negatively or positively influence their marriages such as ethnicity of spouse and locus of control.

From research by scientists in developed countries (Park, Park, & Kim, 2007), it has been revealed that couples from mixed ethnic, racial or cultural groups experience more conflicts, lower marital quality, and are at greater risk for divorce than endogamous couples. This has been attributed to a number of factors including differences in cultural values, attitudes, and norms; conflicts that stem from differences in social, cultural, and ethnic identity; and negative attitudes of the society toward intermarriage.

In another dimension, locus of control is the extent to which people believe they have influence over the events or actions in their lives. The foundation of this concept was laid by psychologist Julian Rotter in 1954. He defined locus of control as the degree of personal control we have in our lives. Locus of control is divided into two domains; internal and external. Internal locus of control is a situation where individuals believes that they have control or influence over the event in their lives, while external locus of control is an individual's attribution of event to external locus of control (Burger, 2004). Individuals with internal locus of control believe that their behaviour is guided by their personal decisions and effort, on the other hand, individuals with external locus of control believe that their actions and the result from it is guided by fate, luck or some other external circumstances.

Some studies have been carried out in order to understand what marital instability is all about and the factors influencing it, but no study to the best of this researchers' knowledge has been carried out on psychosocial factors interacts, as correlates of marital instability among married post graduate students in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State. It is against this background that this study will be conducted to understand how the chosen psychosocial variables of ethnicity of spouse and locus of control influence the marital instability of married post-graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The global aim of this study is to examine if psychosocial factors have any influence on the marital instability among married post graduate students in the University of Port Harcourt. Specifically, the objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the influence of ethnicity of spouse on marital instability of married post graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
2. Determine the influence of locus of control on marital instability of married post graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

Research questions

The following research questions were used as a guide for this study:

1. To what extent does ethnicity of spouse (same or mixed) influence marital instability among married post graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education?
2. To what extent does locus of control (internal or external) influence marital instability among married post graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses which were tested at 0.05 level of significance were formulated to guide this study:

1. Ethnicity of spouse does not have any significant influence on marital instability among post-graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.
2. Locus of control does not have any significant influence on marital instability among post-graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design: This study adopted an ex post facto study design. Therefore, the study is an ex post-facto research study because it was aimed at understanding how the selected psychosocial variables of ethnicity of spouse and locus of control influences the level of marital instability among married post graduate students in the Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Furthermore, none of the above mentioned variables were manipulated in the course of this study.

Population of the Study: The population of this study comprised of all the post graduate students who are married in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education during the 2019/2020 academic session. The specific number of the students could not be ascertained from the office of the graduate school officer as at the time of this study.

Sample and sampling technique: A sample of 400 post-graduate students was drawn through purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Convenience sampling technique was used because a specific number of married post graduate students in the institution was not available as at the time of this study. The technique was also purposive because the researcher is only interested in identifying how the selected psychosocial variable influences marital instability, thus only married students were used for the study.

Instrument for data collection: The instruments for this study are researcher-developed questionnaires titled "Psychosocial Determinants of Marital Instability Inventory (PDMIS). The instrument is divided into three sections; A, B, and C. The section A consists of personal data such as type of family, ethnicity of spouse, level of stability. Section B of the instrument consists of 10 items designed to elicit response on locus of control with a four-point Likert rating scale of strongly agree (SA), agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). While section C is a 20 item instrument aimed at assessing marital instability of couples also developed to be assessed on a four point Likert scale as the above two sections. For Sections B, a mid-point of 25 was used to determine those with an external or internal locus of control. This value of 25 was obtained by multiplying the average possible value of an item by the total number of items. On this basis, any individual who scores less than 25 on this section has external locus of control, while a respondent with above 25 has an internal locus of control.

Validity of instrument: To ensure the face and content validity of the instrument, copies of the instrument were given to two experts in Guidance and Counselling in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling in the University of Port Harcourt. Their suggestions, corrections and modification were integrated into the final version of the instrument.

Reliability of the instrument: The reliability of the instrument was determined through test-retest method for measurement of stability of the instruments. Simple random sampling was used to draw a pilot sample of 30 respondents outside the sample who possessed specific similarities to the study sample from the Rivers State University. Copies of the instruments were administered to the 30 respondents. After an interval of three (3) weeks, the same instruments were administered to the same sample. The initial and the retest scores of the sample were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The reliability coefficient of section B was 0.78, while Section C was 0.75. Therefore the instrument was adjudged suitably reliable.

Administration of the instrument: The researcher developed good level of rapport with the respondents and explain the need for them to respond honestly to the items of the instruments. Copies of the instruments were administered directly to the respondents by the researcher with the help of three trained research assistants who were guided by the researcher about the administration and retrieval of the instrument. Filled copies of the instrument were retrieved by the researcher after completion and used for data analysis.

Method of data analysis: Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions while independent samples t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Table 1: Independent samples t-test of the influence of ethnicity of spouse on marital stability

Ethnicity of Spouse	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Same	291	36.72	5.41	398	15.23	0.0001	Reject HO ₁
Different	109	46.31	6.11				

From the result displayed in Table 1, it is shown that postgraduate students who reported being of the same ethnic group as their spouse reported a mean marital instability of 36.72 (SD = 5.41), while those who had spouse of different ethnic group had a mean value of 46.31 (SD = 6.11). From this mean rating, the result showed that students from homes where their spouse is from a different ethnic group from them had a higher level of marital instability than those with spouse from similar ethnic group.

Furthermore, the result showed that when independent samples t-test was applied to these values, a t-value of 15.23 at 398 degrees of freedom with an associated p-value of 0.0001 was obtained. Since the p-value was lesser than the chosen alpha of 0.05, it therefore indicates that students from different ethnic group marriage had a significantly higher level of marital instability than those from same ethnic group marriage. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

Table 2: Independent samples t-test of the influence of locus of control on marital stability

Locus of Control	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p	Decision
Internal	197	32.91	4.78	398	29.88	0.0001	Reject HO ₂
External	203	50.12	6.57				

From the result displayed in Table 2, it is shown that postgraduate students who reported being of having internal locus of control reported a mean marital instability of 32.91 (SD = 4.78), while those who with external locus of control had a mean value of 50.12 (SD = 6.57). From this mean rating, the result showed that students with external locus of control experience a higher level of marital instability than those with internal locus of control.

Furthermore, the result showed that when independent samples t-test was applied to these values, a t-value of 29.88 at 398 degrees of freedom with an associated p-value of 0.0001 was obtained. Since the p-value was lesser than the chosen alpha of 0.05, it therefore indicates that students with external locus of control had a significantly higher level of marital instability than those with external locus of control. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result obtained in the study showed that ethnicity of spouse is a determining factor influencing the level of marital instability among post-graduate students in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. This result is not surprising to this researcher because there is the possibility that cultural and linguistic differences might result in communication challenges and other conflict in the home. Another explanation for this situation is the reasons provided by Choi (2014) who reported that

couples of similar ethnic groups enjoys greater support from the extended family than those from different ethnic groups. The result from this study is consistent with the findings obtained by Wang, Koa and Joyner (2006) who reported that adolescents in interracial relationships break up faster than those in intra-ethnic marriage.

From research question two and the corresponding null hypothesis, it was revealed that post-graduate students who identified as having external locus of control had a significantly higher level of marital instability than those who identified as having internal locus of control. This result might be attributed to the fact that individuals with external locus of control might be more reactive rather than reflective as posited by Lefcourt in Mark (1998). In addition, people with external locus of control believe that their behaviour has little to change in an environment, as such they might make little or no effort in changing the environment. This study is in agreement with Doherty and Ryder (1979) who showed that internal locus of control has a greater impact on marital stability than external locus of control in the United State. On the contrary, Constantine and Bahr (2008) did not find any significant impact of locus of control on marital stability among males in the United States.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the result obtained, the following recommendations were made:

- Couples in inter-ethnic marriages should be more open to marital counselling so as to identify areas they can work harmoniously to minimize incidences of marital instability.
- Effort should be made to encourage students who are experiencing marital instability to visit the counselling unit of the school where they can provided specific intervention.
- Counselling and psychological services should be provided for all students, irrespective of their locus of control. This is likely to improve students' sense of agency in all relationships, including their marital relationships.

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