



## **Crisis and Factors Influencing Spouse Choice among Christian Youth in Southwest Nigeria**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A major challenge confronting the youth in general in the Southwest Nigeria is the difficulty in choosing the right suitor at the time they desire to do so. This constitute serious crisis for the youth concerned. This study was conducted among Christian youth in Southwest Nigeria to determine whether or not the youth concerned were really aware of the crisis. It was also to find out gender differences in the perception of Christian youth on the factors must that influence marriage proposal and response to same among the youth concerned. Descriptive survey design was used and questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. A sample of 830 youth was randomly taken after the instrument was trial-tested through a pilot study and was discovered to be reliable as the reliability coefficient value of 0.85 was obtained. Findings showed that the youth were aware of the crisis among themselves. It was also discovered that proximity of residences of the youth, complementarity of needs and social exchange, among others influence the kind of person the youth would marry. One of the recommendations is that the youth should be encouraged to participate in retreats, seminars seminars and related programmes that could bring them close to possible suitors regularly. Pastoral counsellors should be sensitive to gender differences in perspectives on factors influencing marriage mate choice.

**Keywords:** Crisis, Factors, Spouse, Choice, Youth

### **INTRODUCTION**

A lot of research has been carried out on the concept of marriage because the issue is important to an average Nigerian. For instance, Oyinlola (2003), Adeniyi (1999), Omojola (1994) and Oghenekevwe (1996) among others, have focused on purpose of marriage, courtship, in-law relationship, communication, finance, childbearing and rearing, sexuality and family planning. Efforts have also been geared towards choice of marriage-mate by Akanmu (2003), Adedeji (2002), Adams (2002) and Oladeni (2003) to mention a few. There is however, little or no reference to the crisis aspect of the choice that grown up Christian youths face within the Southwestern Nigerian context. When discussing the issue of marriage, the oversight of the crisis that the choice of marriage mate brings and awareness of the factors influencing mate selection by male and female Christian youth have created a serious vacuum in scholarship.

The oversight of the crisis and its awareness among the youth has left some pertinent matters unresolved. For instance, what is the magnitude of the present day delay in mate selection among Christian youth in southwestern Nigeria? Are the youths sufficiently aware of the crisis? How do male and female Christian youth differ in their views on the factors influencing choice of marriage partners? Empirical study in these areas from counseling perspective is required to contribute to knowledge about this important aspect of marital issues at present.

The objectives of this research were to:

1. assess and compare the level of awareness of male and female Christian youth on the magnitude of involuntary delay in marriage mate selection across age-range.

2. examine and compare across gender nearness, similarity, complementarity needs and social exchange as factors influencing proposal and response in marriage mate selection among Christian youth in southwestern Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

What is the present magnitude of the crisis of involuntary delay in marriage mate selection among Christian youth in Southwestern Nigeria as viewed by male and female youth on the basis of age range?

### **Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the ratings of male and female Christian youth on the extent to which nearness in residence, similarity, complementarity needs and social exchange influence marriage mate selection among Christian youth in southwestern Nigeria.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study is significant on the basis of the fact that its result will help pastoral care-givers to appreciate the intensity of the crisis of involuntary delay in marriage-mate selection. It will further broaden their horizon in the area of strategies that could be used in helping the young people before, during and after selecting future spouses. Also, the study is significant because the result will expose young people to the critical age range in mate selection which should spur them to decide on persons to marry in time. The youth concerned will also be encouraged to seize opportunity of their knowledge of the factors influencing mate choice to get engaged in time.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research is an empirical one with descriptive survey design option using *expo facto* variables. Stratification method was applied to group the churches into zones. Proportionate sampling method was applied to get 874 samples. The instrument used to gather information from the generality of the chosen sample was a questionnaire. The questionnaire had two sections, Section A was on demographic data while Section B was on mate selection related questions. Effort was as well made to see that instructions were clear and detailed for the respondents to understand and give clear answers. Validity and reliability of the instrument were tested. The questionnaire was given to experts to check the contents and construction of the questions. To ensure reliability, the questionnaire was trial-tested through a pilot study with 30 youths. Split-half method was applied which led to a correlation co-efficient value of 0.84, indicating that the instrument was internally consistent to address the objective of the study.

Regarding procedure for data collection, enumerators were engaged and were trained with the objectives of the study. Distribution of the questionnaire was directly to the chosen samples and several call backs were done to enhance good response. The data were analyzed through the use of Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) with ANOVA and t-distribution as relevant statistical tools.

### **FINDINGS**

Findings are hereby presented as the research question and the hypothesis are addressed.

*Research Question: Whatever is the present magnitude of the crisis of involuntary delay in marriage mate selection among Christian youth in Southwestern Nigeria as viewed by male and female youth themselves based on age range?*

The present magnitude of the crisis of delay in mate selection is presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Magnitude of the crisis of involuntary delay in mate selection based on age-grades as viewed by the Christian youth**

Age Range (Years)	Number	Range	Mini Mum	Maxi mum	Sum	Mean	SD	% Mean	Rank
20 – 25	830	3.0	1	4	2199	2.65	.97	66.25	3 <sup>rd</sup>
26 – 30	837	3.0	1	4	2645	3.16	.79	79.00	1 <sup>st</sup>
31 – 35	823	3.0	1	4	2447	2.97	1.07	74.25	2 <sup>nd</sup>
36 – 40	815	3.0	1	4	2160	2.65	1.27	66.25	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Total					9451	2.85		71.25	

From table 1, the total magnitude of the crisis in delay in mate selection is determined from the mean score of the four age groups which is 2.85. This amounts to 71.25 percent. The crisis, therefore, is above average, meaning that more than half of the youth sampled perceived that involuntary delay in marriage mate selection is a crisis among the Christian youth.

**Testing the Hypothesis:**

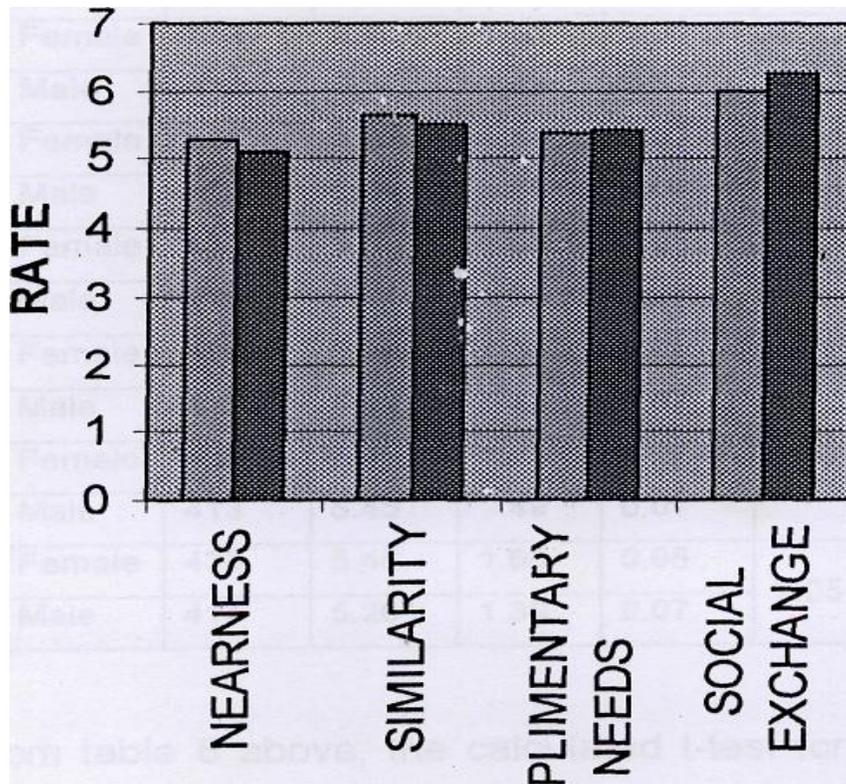
*There is no significant difference in the ratings of male and female Christian youth on the extent to which nearness, similarity, complimentary needs and social exchange influence proposal and response in marriage mate selection among Christian youth in southwestern Nigeria.*

Table 2 below presents the difference in the rating of the factors influencing mate choice by male and female Christian youth in Nigeria.

**Table 2: T-test analysis of the ratings of the factors that influence mate choice by male and female Christian youth**

Parameter	Sex	Number	Mean	SD	SE	t	df	Sig 2-tailed	Mean difference	Remark
Nearness	Female	434	5.28	1.61	0.077	1.754	845	0.080	0.191	NS
	Male	413	5.09	1.56	0.077					
Similarity	Female	441	5.65	1.62	0.077	1.292	853	0.197	0.136	NS
	Male	414	5.51	1.45	0.071					
Complimentary needs	Female	431	5.37	1.58	0.076	0.229	839	0.819	0.024	NS
	Male	410	5.40	1.48	0.073					
Social Exchange	Female	434	5.97	1.53	0.074	2.996	844	0.003	0.301	Sig
	Male	412	6.27	1.39	0.068					

From table 2, the calculated t-test for nearness is 1.754 which is significant at 0.080, which is more than 0.05 alpha. This means that there is no significant difference in the way male and female rate nearness in relation to residence and school being attended as a factor that influences mate choice. As regards similarity in religious background and physical appearance, the table shows that the calculated t-test is 1.292 and is significant at 0.197 which is also more than 0.05. From these data, it also means that similarity is considered equally by male and female respondents. Again, complimentary needs whereby an individual seeks for an opposite personality type to compliment his/her own has the calculated t-test of 0.229 and is significant at 0.819, which is more than 0.05. That is to say that male and female youths view complementarity needs as an influencing factor in mate selection equally. The factor of social exchange has the calculated t-test of 2.996 and is significant at 0.003. Male and female differ in this wise. On the whole, the stated hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the extent that male and female rate all the factors that influence marriage mate selection. The ratings of the factors are illustrated diagrammatically with the bar chart in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1. Factors influencing marriage mate selection**

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It is needful to reiterate the fact that the problem of the study is that involuntary delay in marriage mate selection constitutes crisis for the youths concerned, their relations, the church and the society. The discussion in relation to the research questions is based on general findings while the portion on the hypothesis focuses on differences in the views of male and female Christian youth. On the research question which focused on the magnitude of the crisis of delay in mate selection, findings indicated that more than half of the youths are experiencing delay in mate choice. This must be a traumatic situation for such youths. Possible reasons for the magnitude of the crisis are many. A reason is that emphasis on education has been intensified more in Nigeria and it is likely that response to the emphasis is more on the positive side. The improved positive response to the need to be educated could have also been boosted by enhanced pay that is based on the level of educational attainment. The magnitude of the crisis of delayed marriage might be in connection with the fact that while pursuing education youths are neglecting the issue of mate choice completely.

Another reason that could be responsible for the high level of the crisis is the present emphasis on materialism. Some youth seem to be determined (though wrongly) to possess personal car and house before getting married. Madoghwe (2003) shares the same view that financial hardship that hinders some young people from possessing private accommodation at the time they desire it contributes to the magnitude of delay in mate selection (20-27).

Furthermore, it was discovered on research question 1 that the level of the awareness of the youth on the crisis of delay in mate selection, put together, was above average. One of the reasons for high level of awareness by the youths could be that the crisis has to do with their personal life. This being so, they would have been inquisitive to have understanding about the issue thereby attending educative programmes. Another reason might be connected with the intensity of the efforts of pastors towards

exposing members to marriage and family issues. The above average level of awareness could also be due to increase in literature on marriage and mate choice which are more readily accessible to youths.

Again, the extent to which youths are aware of the crisis of delay could have been informed by availability of internet facilities. It might be that majority of the youths avail themselves of the opportunity to browse and gather necessary information particularly since it has to do with love affairs that easily trigger the youth's interest. Also, some of the youths whose awareness on the crisis in focus was below average could be in connection with lack of exposure to teachings and other resources that could expand their horizon.

The hypothesis was tested and accepted. It was discovered that there is no significant difference in the ratings of the extent to which nearness to each other's residence and school, similar qualities and interests in the area of religion and physical body structure, complementarity needs, and social exchange (when the percentage of what will be gained is greater than what one would lose) influence marriage mate selection between male and female Christian youth. It should be mentioned that the significant difference of 0.003 for social exchange as a factor that influences marriage mate selection is noted. It should not however, be used to nullify the other necessary variables considered in the analysis because the significance is minimal.

The fact that the rating of factors like nearness by both male and female youth is not significantly different could be associated with the fact that impression is always created on the mind by what the eyes see – gender notwithstanding. This could be a realistic factor to both sexes because memory is refreshed about someone who is always seen around one's residence or interact together in the same school or church environments. The same view had been expressed by Schell and Hall (1983) who stated that residential proximity allows room for seeing each other frequently which may lead to being attracted to each other (474). It also agrees with the view of Klingberg (1999) who describes the factor as geographical propinquity. He explains that "the 'one-and 'only' may have better than 50-50 chances of living within walking distance!" (728).

Regarding the issue of similarity in relation to religious background and physical appearance, the youth's rating might not have been significantly different because both variables have to do with inner and outer beauty. This could point to the premium that male and female Christian youth place on religion and personal hygiene. This rating could have been informed by the widespread of Christian faith in southwestern Nigeria. This is in congruence with the idea shared by Schell and Hall. It is their belief that similarity in values, interest and ways of behaviour count much in the process of choosing marriage partner. It is their considered opinion that similar ethnic and religious background matters to young people (474).

Furthermore, the fact that respondents did not differ significantly on the basis of sex on the issue of complimentary need might not be a tough knot to untie. For instance, it is a general knowledge that one would keep interest in the other as long as ones needs are being met. A similar view is expressed by Klinberg that complementarity of needs influences choice of mate. He believes that a person considers someone who will satisfy his/her needs before concluding a choice. He gave examples of pairs of needs that do complement each other. These include dominance versus submissiveness and nurturance versus receptivity. It is recognized that spouses may differ in these pairs of needs. Yet, the difference will help them to complement each other. Klinberg also pointed it out however, that subsequent studies have not shown reliable support for the theory of complementarity needs as an important factor in mate selection (Klingberg, 728). The latter view, notwithstanding, the Christian youth sampled opined that complementarity needs play a significant role in the choice of a mate for marriage.

Again, the factor of social exchange that showed minimal difference in its rating between male and female should also attract some attention. It should be noted also that the rating by male is higher than that of female youth. The probable reason is that men usually seek for reward in a relationship than cost. This is in agreement with the traditional exchange theory. The theory holds that a relationship will continue between two partners only if each of them receives as much or more from the relationship as it will cost him/her. Take for example, it is a common knowledge that many young men do demand for sexual relationship from their fiancées as a sign of true love. Such men claim not to want to commit

themselves to a relationship that will not bring much reward to them than cost. The men would continue to commit themselves to such a relationship as long as ladies satisfy their sexual yearnings. Moreover, it seems that the difference in the rating of social exchange as a factor that influences male choice could be in connection with the Yoruba view of relationship between a man and his wife . For instance, it is traditionally believed that the husband has the final say in all matters. Female respondents might have succumbed to this view; meaning that the reward and cost in marital relationship are to be defined by men. Regrettably, this view is not in agreement with the Bible records in relation to equality in creation that calls for submission from male and female alike (Ephes. 5:21).

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Many Christian youth in Southwestern Nigeria are experiencing delay in marriage mate selection. These male and female youth are aware of the challenge and many of them view it as a crisis. Also, residential proximity, similar religious background, complementarity needs are the factors influencing proposal and response in the choice of marriage partners among these male and female youth.

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

1. Pastoral counsellors need to take cognizance of the gender sensibility in mate selection in order to be able to respond adequately to the existential crisis of involuntary delay in marriage mate choice among Christian youth. For instance, a proper understanding of the characteristic nature of clients will provide a better approach to crisis intervention. Hence, pastors should equip themselves more in the areas of similarities and differences between male and female on matters of marriage mate choice as found in many of the churches in southwestern Nigeria.

2. In the same vein, provision should be made for avenues like singles' fellowship, excursions, retreats, seminars, symposia and conferences where youths can interact among themselves. It is believed that such gatherings can afford the youth in general opportunity of knowing one another better and may result in proposing marriage to one another. Some of the topics that could be discussed in such fora to address the problem include the following: God's purpose for marriage; How to sustain love-relationship during courtship; Marriage and education - striking a balance; Coping with peer and parental pressure while single; and when to embark on marriage mate selection. As regards frequency of such programmes, singles' fellowship could be monthly while others might be quarterly, biannually or annually. The suggested programmes should be alternated to avoid monotony and seasoned personnel should be used to make the experience enriching.

3. It is also recommended that local churches should form a functional marriage committee that will be under the supervision of the church pastor. Membership of such a committee should comprise mature and reputable Christians with proven marital background and/or training in counselling. The committee should be saddled with the responsibility of taking note of how the youth in the church are faring in relation to marriage. This is however, not a committee of match makers; rather it is to give necessary guidance to the youth on marital issues so that their decisions will be guided.

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