Psychological Factors Fostering and Affecting Marital Stability

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Abstract: When peaceful atmosphere is replaced with chaos in marriage, the consequences are usually grievous. It results in marital instability, marriage separation, divorce or even death of the couple. This has serious effects on the home, family, children of the marriage, society and the nation. This paper is focused on Psychological factors that could foster marital stability. The paper explained the concept of marital stability, examined and discussed several factors that could be adopted to aid and enhance marital stability by couples. It is stated that such factors as communication between spouses, intimacy, emotional bonding, commitment, affection, parental roles, spouse’s employment, job and sexual satisfactions as well as religious orientation are some of the factors that could affect or enhance marital stability. Based on these, it is recommended that couples should ensure and cultivate the habit of effective marital communication, affection, intimacy etc to enhance their marital stability.

Key words: Psychological factors, fostering, marital stability.

Introduction
The marriage institution and marital stability have attracted many interests in several disciplines and amongst people. Marital stability allows spouses’ desired satisfaction that includes marital harmony, health, marital adjustment, marital security, marital protection and marital fulfillment (Broadury, 2008). Marital stability is manifest in a situation in which two people, husband and wife, man and woman love each other, get along together and think alike on
important issues, share human goals and interests, enjoy each other’s company and have fun together (DeGenova and Rice, 2002). A stable marriage therefore is that in which spouses enjoy healthy relationship; one in which a spouse is a source of emotional support, companionship, sexual gratification and economic support for the other (Adesanya, 2002).

Marriage is not merely a private relationship; it is a public good. As marriage weakens, the costs are borne not only by individual children and families, but all of us (Waite & Gallagher, 2002). It has been widely acknowledged that married individuals have higher psychological well-being (Kim & McKanry, 2002), dependent child outcomes, economic status (Setzger, 2000), and Physical health (Carrere, Buehlman, Gottman, Loan & Ruckstuhl, 2000). It follows therefore that identifying the factors that help marriages survive has implication to marital stability (Carrere et al, 2000). Thus, it is of great importance to stress that if couples desire life long marriage, it is imperative to discover the variables or factors that may hasten, enhance or contribute to dissatisfaction and dissolution of marriages. Variables or factors that can help describe the source of the variance in couples’ dissatisfaction can be useful in helping couples to determine aspects in their marriage that may need attention.

However, studies have indicated that factors that enhance or foster marital stability are yet to be understood and established (Sokan and Adeyemo, 1996, Osiki, 1997, Edide, 1998; Ama O-Kehinde, 2002, Okon, 2008 and Okorodudu, 2010). A careful analysis reveals that there are many extraneous variables impacting on this. To explore these issues, a look at what researchers have done and said in this area in the past will help throw more light in this regard. The aim of this paper therefore is to review some research findings that have been identified as fostering or enhancing marital stability. In doing this, major findings or what researchers have said with regard to variables or factors fostering marital stability will be highlighted and underlying contributions to marital stability discussed.

**The Concept of Marital Stability**

Studies examining marital stability vary in design, measurement and outcomes leading to a number of explanations accounting for marital stability (Bradbury, 2000). Marital stability is an important topic from the theoretical and practical point of view. It is needless to elaborate on how important it is for both society and individuals to understand psychological processes going on in marriage and family and especially the spouses’ perception of those processes. Major studies in this area reported that individuals who enjoy happy and stable marriage live longer and healthier lives than either divorced individuals or those who have unhappy and unstable marriages (Santrock, 2006).

The literature on marital stability is quite closely related to that on marital happiness, adjustment, quality and satisfaction. The literature cannot be clearly separated, since some marital quality scales mix elements of adjustment with spouses’ evaluation of their marriage (Noller and Feeney,
2002). Understanding the individual traits of the spouse is an ongoing process in marriage, because even if two people know each other before or at the time of marriage, there is possibility that people change during their life cycle. In agreement with this, Mackey and O’Brien (1993) described marriage as a developmental process that occurs in adulthood and within this process, the establishment of marital interaction and processes take place. Marital stability therefore calls for maturity that accepts and understands growth and development in the spouse. If this growth is not experienced and realized fully, death in marital relationship is inevitable.

Factors Fostering Marriage Stability

Effective Communication between Spouses and Marital Stability

Many authorities contend that good and effective communication is the key to intimacy and family interaction and is the lifeblood of marital stability (Filanli, 1984; Allen and Olson, 2001). Mutual efficient and effective communication and sharing are the backbone for adjustment in marriage. A study by Edward (2001) among married couples in Metro Manila show a high level of marital adjustment among those who communicated well. He pointed out that there is positive correlation between communication and adjustment. Couples who communicated more regularly adjusted themselves better to interpersonal and situational problems while others found it difficult. Communication is the life breath of love, awareness of each other’s feelings, needs, problems and expectations (Arowolo, 2014).

In a good and stable marriage, the requirement of affective, open and rewarding communication whether verbal or non-verbal is essential for marital stability (Schwartz and Scott, 1994). Positive, efficient and effective communication patterns are needed by spouses to discuss problems and to listen to each other’s point of view with respect and in order to have a high level of marital stability. It follows strongly that couples who long for marital stability should ensure that they make effective and efficient use of communications among them.

Intimacy and Marital Stability

Intimacy refers to feeling of togetherness, bondedness or closeness in loving relationship (Sternberg and Banes, 1988). An intimate relationship provides warmth and emotional support to the partners. The lack of intimacy is one of the major reasons why couples break up their marriages. In a marital relationship where intimacy reigns supreme, couples desire to promote the welfare of each other, experience happiness and with love, one have high regard for the loved one. Couples also count on the loved one in times of need, express mutual understanding with the loved one (Sternberg and Barnes, 1988). Intimacy in marital relationship ensures sharing one’s self and one’s possessions with the loved one as well as giving and receiving emotional support from the loved one. Marital relationship that maintains intimacy reaps marital stability (Ojukwu, 2013).
Emotional Bonding and Marital Stability
Emotional bonding refers to how close each partner in the relationship feels towards each other (Craddock, 1991). This shows cohesion. Cohesion refers to how connected or separate the partners are in the marriage system (Saxton, 1999). Mace (1996) stressed about three kinds of involvement in a marriage relationship viz minimum, limited and maximum involvement. Minimum involvement is seen in the traditional marriages that are aimed at safeguarding the structures to serve utilitarian ends. Limited interpersonal involvement in marriages gives reasonable comfort and security to the couples. Maximum involvement in marriage gives the couples a sense of satisfaction and confidence in the relationship. To have maximum involvement, the couple has to grow in their understanding of each other and adjust in different factors that affect the core of the family life. A Marriage where the spouses ensure emotional bonding allows for the thriving of marital stability. Couples who desire to enjoy marital stability should ensure that they cultivate emotional bonding.

Commitment and Marital Stability
Commitment is a factor that fosters marital stability. Commitment, which involves the decision to maintain a love relationship over time, is closely associated with marital stability (Wolf, 2006). Commitment is a foundation for any successful marriage. Marriages that are both happy and enduring are characterized by the partner’s commitment to each other as individual and to the institution of marriage. High commitment to a marital relationship is associated with high marital stability when couples have effectively dealt with relationship disillusionment in the beginning of marriage (Davidson and Moore, 1996).

Affection and Marital Stability
Expression of affection in marriages ensures marital stability. Expression of affection pertains to demonstration of affection and sexual relations. Fulfillment of sexual needs in terms of quantity and quality is very important in the well-being and happiness of a marriage (Davidson and Moore, 1996).

Parental Roles and Marital Stability
Parental roles play a significant role not only in the marital relationship of spouses but that of their children. In a study of the role of parenting in relationship to marital stability of urban Punjab parents, King and Jaswal (2009) demonstrated that parents with high level of marital stability were more loving, encouraging, accepting, progressive and democratic towards their children as compared to parents having medium or low levels of marital stability. They concluded that marital stability is highly potential and pervasive in promotion of positive parenting patterns. They further opined that high marital stability in parents promote love, democratic behavior, encouragement, acceptance and independence whereas parents having low level of marital stability were unable to provide healthy atmosphere to their children and their children crave for love, feeling neglected, used to being dependent and were submissive.
To lay more credence to King and Jaswal (2009), it was revealed that children from happy and calm homes tend to be less negative than youngsters from the opposite type of home (Mital, 2006). The latter show more signs of emotional disturbance such as jealousy, fear, grumbling, nervousness, sucking and tenseness. From the foregoing, it could be reasonably argued that a satisfying marital relationship could be regarded as the cornerstone of good family functioning which directly or indirectly may facilitate effective parenting, positive sibling relationship and the development of competent adaptive children. Children themselves have been identified (Ojukwu, 2013) as a factor in marital stability. Attitude of children in the family go a long way in establishing a happy home which has effect on the marital stability of couples. Therefore, parental role in ensuring good upbringing for the children have a very serious impact on the future marital stability of spouses.

Spouses Employment and Marital Stability

Research has shown an association between marital stability and married persons' employments. Evidence suggests that a wife’s employment has no effect on her marital stability but may adversely affect that of her husband (Marshai, 1992). Husbands are usually more dissatisfied with their marriages when their wives have higher status occupations and are even more stressed by their wives’ superior salaries (Fendrich, 1984). A study by Thomas (2002) explored on a wide range of contextual factors that influenced the effect of career on marital stability. He found out that the man’s job; the division of labour within the marriage, social support, and health are among factors that affect marital stability. Given that a substantial number of women are now in the labour force and are supposed to be younger than their spouses, and that men increasingly find themselves retiring before their mate, and coupled with the known fact that men persistently resist to perform housework and chores as well as feel threatened by their spouse’s occupational success, it then suggests that homes, in which husband retire first, may have poor marital stability if other factors that enhance stability are lacking. It follows therefore that in family where both spouses are working; there should be division of labor between the husband and wife.

Job Satisfaction and Marital Stability

Research findings have also indicated that there is a link between marital stability and job satisfaction. Rogers and May (2003), investigated spillover between marital stability and job satisfaction among married individuals. Results indicated that increase in marital stability was significantly related to decline in job satisfaction. Also available empirical findings suggest significant relationship between marital stability and job performance (Voydanoff, 2004; Brotheridge and Lee, 2005; Brock and Lawrence, 2008; Mann and Mann 2010). Other studies have revealed that on the job and marital satisfaction of teachers and their family attributes particularly marital satisfaction (Mann and Mann, 2010). Other studies have found that a strong and stable marriage significantly predicted a successful balance
between work and family roles (Akanbi, 2003; Neff and Karney 2004, Karney, Storey and Bradbury, 2005). Spouses should endeavour to create a conducive environment in their work places and where this is not possible they should avail themselves the services of Counselors who should work on their marital happiness.

**Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Stability**

Sexual satisfaction frequency has been found to be associated positively with general relationship satisfaction in married couples’ marital stability (Christopher and Sprecher, 2000). The satisfaction with one’s sexual relationship is associated with feelings of satisfaction for one’s spouse or partner. Mitchel (2002) did a longitudinal study on the relationship between affection, sexual and marital satisfaction. He interviewed 106 couples over the first two years of marriage. He found that wives sexual interest was related to the husband’s satisfaction and this has effect in their marital stability. Sexual satisfaction is related to the existence of a close personal relationship with one’s sexual partner (Mitchel, 2002). For women, the closer the emotional relationship with their partner, the greater the chance of a satisfying sexual relationship (Mackey and O’Brien, 1995)

Sexual marital satisfaction is associated with wives’ life satisfaction rather than husbands’ as well as wives’ and husbands report of global happiness (Glenn, 1998). Proulx, Helms and Buchler (2007) demonstrates that sexual marital quality is related positively with personal well-being. They also reported that gender is a significant moderator of the cross-sectional association between marital quality and personal well-being. They revealed that concurrent association between marital quality and personal well-being is stronger for samples of women than men. Couples should abide by the injunction of the Holy Book which directed that husband, and wife should not deny each other sex except on the condition when they wish to seek the face of God. When they do this they would be strengthening their relationship and marital stability.

**Socioeconomic Factors and Marital Stability**

Studies have revealed that socioeconomic factors are integral to the information and maintenance of marital stability (Smock, 2004). Financial independence and stability are widely viewed as a pre-requisite for marital stability especially for men (Smock, 2004). Socioeconomic status includes education, income and occupation. Education and income are linked to marital stability with greater levels of education and income predicting greater marital stability while economic stress has a negative effect on marital stability and a positive influence on relationship dissolution (Johnson and Booth, 1990). Social disorganization is another factor that may affect marital stability. Social disorganization is a risk factor for violence in rural areas. One study for rural communities found that poverty play a less important role in predicting violence than residential instability, broken home and other indicators of social disorganization (Good and Chamber, 2000). A multidimensional description of urban marriages was
investigated by Imamoglu (2000). It was reported that marital stability was affected by the level of education and socioeconomic status of both husbands and wives. It was also found that spouses’ level of socioeconomic development appear to be directly related with the wives’ marital satisfaction but indirectly related to that of the husbands (Eric and Ergin, 2005). In this regard it is more advisable for prospective spouses to choose life partners within their social status. This ensures more marital relationship, respect and stability.

Parental Background and Marital Stability
Married person’s parental background is closely related to marital stability (Fisiloglu, 2001). It is believed that people whose parents are divorced are more susceptible to divorce themselves. A longitudinal study of the inter-generational transmission of divorce families were 2.5 times more likely to divorce than were those from intact families (Wolfinger, 1999, Amato, 1996). Spouses whose parents divorced are more likely to have problems with anger, jealousy, feelings of hurt, communication, infidelity among others (Amato 1996). As children, they must have been exposed to poor models of behavior and may not have learned the skills and attitudes that facilitate successful functioning with marital roles. Therefore, they may be more likely to become divorced themselves or to have more negative intimate relationship (Amato and DoeBoer, 2001). After examining a longitudinal data that spanned almost 20 years, Amato and DoeBoer (2001) concluded that parental divorce approximately doubled the odds that offspring would see in their own marriages and end in divorce. They suggested that offspring with divorced parents have been on elevated risk of divorcing because they hold a comparatively weak commitment to the idea of any enduring marriage.

Couples who are in marriage should endeavor to at least hide their misunderstanding from their children. Again prospective couples should take a good study of their prospective spouses’ background and determine if they would cope with the partner’s life and attitude. This will reduce cases of separation and divorce in our families and society and thereby strengthen the institution of marriage.

Religious Orientation and Marital Stability
A strong religious orientation in the marriage provides a source of social support and an opportunity for engaging in family activities and religious service together (Dada and Idowu, 2006). It is the opinion of Ebenuwa–Okoh (2008) that couples who were more religious show greater marital stability, resulting from increased give and take, self-sacrifice and altruism. There was also evidence of a contribution to individual and marital growth. Couples who wish for marital stability should develop strong habit for religion and ensure that they devote more time to it.

Recommendation
Based on the fact that marital stability could be aided and enhanced by effective communication between spouses, intimacy, emotional bonding, commitment, affection, religious orientation, and job and sexual satisfactions among others, it is recommended that couples should
endeavor to “cultivate the highlighted psychological factors” to ensure their marital stability.

**Conclusion**

Evidence from studies in marital stability suggest that marriage institution is threatened not only in Nigeria but the world over (Ebigbo, 2002), but the most disturbing threat to marriage stability includes but not limited to high rate of divorce, increase number of single parents, positive response to couples cohabitation and same sex marriage (Ogunsami, 2005, Onwuasonya, 2005, Modo, 2009). These notwithstanding, marriage has so many positive effects on the life of individuals such as living healthier lifestyle in terms of eating, exercise and avoiding harmful behaviors; having satisfying sexual relationship, and having more wealth and economic assets (Waite and Galagher, 2000; Seltzer, 2000; Kim and Mckenry, 2002, and Odebunmi, 2007). Several psychological factors fostering marital stability have been highlighted. It is believe that if the factors are strictly made use of there will be enhancement of marital stability.

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