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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOSITY AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG COUPLES IN SOKOTO STATE, NORTHWESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This research aims to determine the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction among couples in Sokoto State, Nigeria. A cross-sectional study was conducted among 498 randomly selected participants (249 husband-wife dyads) residing in the four metropolitan Local Government Areas in Sokoto State, Northwestern Nigeria. Data were collected using a standardized structured interviewer-administered electronic questionnaire and were analyzed using the IBM SPSS version 23 computer statistical package. The ages of the 498 respondents ranged from 20 to 69 years, with a mean age of 39.7 ± 12.4 years. The majority of the 498 respondents had high levels of religious commitments (54.0%), religious practices (61.0%), and religiosity (55.6%). Most of the respondents (75.1%) were satisfied with their marriage. Although marital satisfaction was positively correlated with religiosity and its sub-scales (i.e., religious commitment and practices), it was solely predicted by having high levels of religious commitment (aOR = 2.132; 95%CI: 1.221 – 3.870; p = 0.046). These findings underscore the need for couples to leverage the mediating role of religiosity in facilitating marital satisfaction, thus enabling them to navigate the challenging terrains in their marital environment.

KEYWORDS: Religiosity, marital satisfaction, relationship, couples

INTRODUCTION

As a fundamental social institution, marriage is intricately intertwined with various cultural, societal, and individual factors that contribute to the dynamic nature of this union. One particularly salient influence is religiosity, the manifestation of religious beliefs through rituals, practices, and spiritual convictions. In the context of Northern Nigeria, where cultural traditions and religious adherence hold profound significance, exploring the link between religiosity and marital satisfaction becomes a compelling avenue for understanding the foundations of enduring marriages.

The importance of religiosity in shaping marital dynamics is underscored by extensive research highlighting its multifaceted impact on individuals and communities. Within the realm of marriage, religious beliefs and practices often serve as guiding principles, influencing decision-making, communication patterns, and coping mechanisms during challenging times (Silverstein *et al.*, 2022; Sullivan, 2001). Despite the global recognition of the influence of religiosity on marital relationships, a nuanced exploration within the specific context of Northern Nigeria remains underexplored. This research has implications for counseling, community development, and policymaking beyond scholarly investigation. This study will provide valuable insights to counsellors working with couples in Northern Nigeria by illuminating the complex relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. It also hopes to inform the development of culturally sensitive interventions that support robust and happy marriages.

Additionally, by providing a nuanced viewpoint based on the sociocultural setting of Northern Nigeria, the findings may advance the conversation about how religiosity shapes family dynamics in general. This study was conducted to determine the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction among couples in Sokoto State, Northwestern Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of this study draw on the extensive body of literature exploring the relationship between religiosity and

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marital satisfaction. The prominent theoretical perspectives that inform this research are the Social Exchange Theory (Homans, 1958) and the Religious Socialization Framework (Mahoney *et al.*, 2020). This study considers the role of shared spiritual values as a critical mechanism through which religiosity may influence marital satisfaction. Homans (1958) provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how shared values contribute to the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. According to the Social Exchange Theory, individuals engage in social exchanges to maximize rewards and minimize costs within their relationships. In the context of marriage, shared spiritual values can be viewed as a form of shared currency in the social exchange, fostering a sense of mutual understanding, support, and shared purpose (Nickerson, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2022).

The Religious Socialization Framework (Mahoney *et al.*, 2020) posits that individuals develop their moral and ethical values through religious socialization, which, in turn, influences various aspects of their lives, including marital relationships. The teachings, beliefs, and practices acquired through religious socialization are expected to shape individuals' behaviours and attitudes within the context of their marriages. A lens through which to view how religiosity may contribute to marital pleasure is provided by the Religious Socialization Framework, which is especially applicable in the unique cultural setting of Northern Nigeria, where religion frequently plays a significant part in daily life.

Empirical Review

Several studies have established associations between religiosity and marital stability. According to a poll by Bozhabadi*et al.* (2020), there is a good and robust correlation between sexual and marital satisfaction and religious orientation. It was also observed that religious commitment was predictive in promoting sexual pleasure and marital satisfaction, increasing religious commitment, sexual satisfaction, and marital satisfaction. A study among Pakistani Muslim couples found that religious commitment and practice strengthen and promote marital satisfaction (Aman *et al.*, 2019). The authors concluded that religious commitment and approach are vital for a happy married life. According to a study on married Seventh-day Adventist couples who cohabitate, family worship and spouse congruence on religious beliefs and church attendance are the best indicators of marital satisfaction (Dudley & Frederick, 1990).

A thorough comprehension of the correlation between religiosity and marital contentment requires an investigation of the various facets of religiosity, from religious practices and beliefs to the social support networks ingrained in religious societies (Bahnaru et al., 2019; Khodayari et al., 2013). It is crucial to recognize how religiosity may be a source of strength and possible stress in marriages as couples negotiate the challenges of married life in a culturally diverse and religiously active setting. To comprehensively explore the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction, it is essential to consider the various dimensions of religiosity, including religious beliefs, practices, and community involvement. Religious beliefs encompass theological convictions that influence marital relationships' moral and ethical foundation. For example, adherence to religious teachings on fidelity, forgiveness, and altruism may contribute to higher levels of marital satisfaction (Sauerhebe r*et al.*, 2021; Jafari *et al.*, 2015).

Religious practices such as prayer, rituals, and participation in religious events represent another dimension of religiosity with implications for marital satisfaction. Studies have suggested that couples who engage in joint religious activities may experience a more profound sense of connection and shared purpose, positively influencing their marital satisfaction (Bahnaru et al., 2019; Hollinger & Makula, 2021). Understanding how specific religious practices manifest within the cultural context of Northern Nigeria is crucial for discerning their impact on marital relationships in this region.

Although most studies show a positive correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction, it is essential to recognize the subtleties and complexity of this relationship. Research has indicated that specific facets of religiosity, such as religious dogmatism or discrepancies in religious convictions between partners, could potentially hinder marital contentment (Jafari et al., 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2019). Furthermore, religion may interact with other elements, such as cultural norms and societal expectations, to impact marital dynamics in ways that must be carefully considered. Community involvement within religious settings adds another layer to the complex relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction.

Religious communities often provide social support, guidance, and a sense of belonging that can buffer against marital stressors (Theodore & Robinson, 2019; VanderWeele, 2017). In Northern Nigeria, where communal ties are deeply woven into the fabric of daily life, exploring the role of religious communities in shaping marital satisfaction is particularly pertinent.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area and Population

A cross-sectional study was conducted among couples residing in the four metropolitan Local Government Areas in Sokoto State, Nigeria (i.e., Sokoto North, Sokoto South, part of Wamakko, and part of Dange-Shunni Local Government Areas).

The sample size was statistically estimated at 498, based on which 249 husband-wife dyads were selected by a stratified two-stage systematic sampling technique with enumeration areas (EAs) as primary sampling units. All couples who have lived in these LGAs for at least one year and consented to participate in the survey were considered eligible for recruitment into the study. At the same time, those who were too ill to participate were excluded.

Data Collection

A standardized structured interviewer-administered electronic questionnaire was used to collect data on the participants' religiosity (and its subscales, namely religious commitment and practices) and the quality of marital relationships. The questions on religious commitment and practices were adapted from the "Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)", which has been found to have good psychometric properties (Worthington *et al.*, 2003). The questions on the quality of marital relationships were

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adapted from the "Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale." It has been demonstrated to have favourable psychometric properties in earlier investigations (Maoufizadeh *et al.*, 2020; Busby et al., 1995; Crane et al., 2000). Couples' dyadic adjustment measures the degree to which couples are satisfied with their relationship in domains such as cohesion, satisfaction, consensus, and affective expression, with high levels of dyadic adjustment reflecting better adjustment and better quality of couple relationship (Robles *et al.*, 2014; Brandão *et al.*, 2020).

Ten research assistants comprising Community Health Extension Workers (CHEWs) were recruited to collect data. They were trained for two days, lasting two hours each, on the study's objectives, use of the research instruments, data collection with the Open Data Kit (ODK), and interpersonal communication skills. The questionnaire was pretested among 25 purposively selected couples in one of the Enumeration Areas (EAs) not chosen for the study to check for the appropriateness of the survey instrument and to familiarize the research assistants with its use. Appropriate modifications were made to the questionnaire based on the observations made during the pretesting.

Data Analysis

Completed forms were downloaded from the principal researcher's Ona server as an SPSS file and analyzed using the IBM® SPSS version 23 statistical computer package. Exploratory data analysis was done. The procedure involves running descriptive statistics of all variables and using graphs like histograms and box plots (for continuous variables) to identify missing values, outliers, and distribution/ skewness of the data.

Scoring and grading of responses on religious commitment and practices

The Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) consisted of 10 items in which the respondent is required to specify how true each of the statements is true for them regarding certain aspects of their religiosity on a 5 points scale and assessed it under two subscales, namely, Intrapersonal Religious Commitment (or Religious Commitment) and Interpersonal Religious Commitment (or Religious Practices) subscales (Worthington *et al.*, 2012). The score for each item on the scale ranged from 1-5 on the Likert scale concerning the extent to which the statement is true of the respondent(Not at all = 1; Somewhat = 2; Moderately = 3; Mostly = 4; Totally = 5). The scores on the ten items make up the "Overall Religious Commitment" score (or Religiosity score), which ranges from 10 to 50. Higher scores indicate a high level of religiosity, while lower scores indicate a lower level of religiosity. The level of religiosity was graded as low or high, with scores below the median score of 38 being graded as "low religiosity" and scores ≥ 38 being graded as "high religiosity" (Rahman *et al.*, 2008).

The scores for the two subscales were computed as follows:

- **Intrapersonal Religious Commitment** (or **Religious Commitment**) comprised items 1,3,4,5,7 and 8, with total scores ranging from 6 to 30
- **Interpersonal Religious Commitment** (or **Religious Practices**) included items 2,6,9, and 10 with total scores ranging from 4 to 20.

Higher scores on each subscale correspond to higher levels of religious commitment, whereas lower values for each scale suggest a lesser level of religious commitment. Also, the level of interpersonal religious commitment (or religious commitment) was graded as low or high, with scores below the median score of 23 being graded as "low religious commitment" and scores≥ 23 being graded as "high religious commitment" (Rahman *et al.*, 2008). Similarly, the level of interpersonal religious commitment (or religious practices) was graded as low or high, with scores below the median score of 15 being graded as "low religious practices" and scores≥ 15 being graded as "high religious practices" (Rahman *et al.*, 2008).

Scoring and grading of responses on the quality of marital relationships

The Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) consisted of 14 items in which the respondent is required to rate their agreement or otherwise with each of them on some aspects of their relationship on a 5 of 6 points scale and assessed seven dimensions of couple relationships under three primary subscales including consensus, satisfaction, and cohesion (Crane *et al.*, 2000).

The score for each item on questions 7 to 10 ranged from 0-5 on the Likert scale as follows: All the time = 0; Most of the time = 1; More often than not = 2; Occasionally = 3; Rarely = 4, and Never = 5. The score for the item on question 11 ranged from 0 to 4 on the Likert scale (Never = 0, Rarely = 1; Occasionally = 2; Almost Every Day = 3, Every day = 4).

The score for each item on questions 12 to 14 ranged from 0-5 on the Likert scale (Never = 0; Less than once a month = 1; Once / twice a month = 2; Once / twice a week = 3; Once a day = 4; More often = 5).

The scores for the three subscales were computed as follows (Crane *et al.*, 2000):

- **Consensus** in decision making (questions 3 and 6), values (questions 1 and 5), and affection (questions 2 and 4) with total scores ranging from 0 to 30
- **Satisfaction** in the relationship in terms of stability (questions 7 and 9) and conflict regulation (questions 8 and 10) with total scores ranging from 0 to 20; and,
- **Cohesion** was demonstrated through activities (questions 11 and 13) and discussion (questions 12 and 14), with total scores ranging from 0 to 19

The higher the scores on any of these subscales, the greater the stability and satisfaction in the relationship, while lower scores indicate distress. The total score on the RDAS ranged from 0 to 69, and high scores indicate greater relationship satisfaction, while lower scores indicate more significant relationship distress. Also, those with total scores ≤ 47 were graded as having marital/relationship distress, while total scores ≥ 48 indicate non-distress (Crane *et al.*, 2000).

Quantitative variables were summarized using mean and standard deviation, while qualitative variables were summarized using frequencies and percentages. Pearson chi-square analysis was used to test for association between the respondents' religiosity variables

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and their experience of marital satisfaction. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to test for a correlation between religious commitment/practices/religiosity scores and marital satisfaction scores. Binomial logistic regression analysis was used to determine the religiosity variables that predict marital satisfaction. All levels of statistical significance were set at $p < 0.05$.

RESULTS

Respondents' Sociodemographic Characteristics

The ages of the 498 respondents ranged from 20 to 69 years, with a mean age of 39.7 ± 12.4 years, but the males were significantly older (mean age = 45.6 ± 11.8 years) than the females (mean age = 33.9 ± 10.1 years), $t = 11.829$, $p < 0.001$. The 30-39 years age group had the highest proportion of respondents (31.1%), followed by the 20-29 years age group (23.3%), while only a few (8.8%) were aged ≥ 60 years. Males and females were of equal proportions (i.e., 50.0% each) since they were recruited as husband-wife dyads. Most respondents (71.5%) practiced Islam as a religion and had the same faith as their spouses (97.4%). A more significant proportion of respondents were of Hausa ethnic group (47.8%) [Table 1].

Table 1: Respondents' sociodemographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency (%) n = 1,179
Age group (years)	
20-29	116 (23.3)
30-39	155 (31.1)
40-49	106 (21.3)
50-59	77 (15.5)
≥60	44 (8.8)
Gender	
Male	249 (50.0)
Female	249 (50.0)
Religion	
Christianity	142 (28.5)
Islam	356 (71.5)
Practiced same religion with husband	
Yes	485 (97.4)
No	13 (2.6)
Ethnicity	
Hausa	238 (47.8)
Fulani	73 (14.7)
Yoruba	77 (15.5)
Igbo	65 (13.1)
*Others	45 (9.0)

*Others include, Igala, Idoma, Nupe, Tiv, etc.

Respondents' Religious Commitment, Practices and Religiosity

The majority, 269 (54.0%) of the 498 respondents, had a high religious commitment; about two-thirds, 304 (61.0%), had a high level of religious practices, while the majority, 277 (55.6%) had high religiosity (Figure 1).

Quality of Marital Relationship among Respondents

The majority, 374 (75.1%) of the 498 respondents, had marital satisfaction, while about a quarter (24.9%) experienced marital distress. The respondents enjoyed the highest stability and satisfaction in their marriage in having a consensus in decision-making, values, and affection (mean score = 25.22 ± 4.11), followed by being satisfied in their relationship concerning stability and conflict regulation (mean score = 15.82 ± 2.81), while the lowest strength was in cohesion as demonstrated through activities and discussion (mean score = 9.93 ± 4.58) [Table 2].

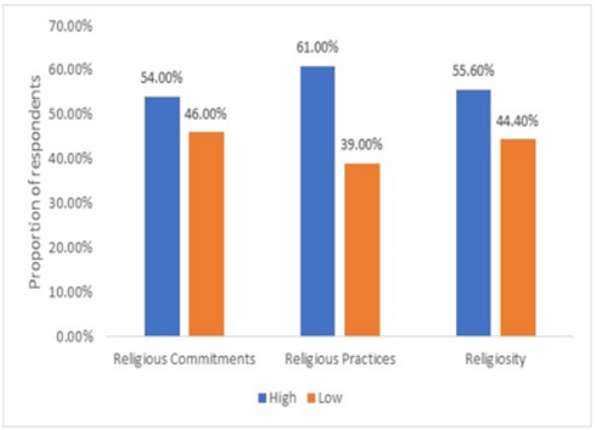

Figure 1: Respondents' religious commitments, practices, and religiosity

Association between Marital Satisfaction and Religious Factors among Respondents

The religious variables associated with marital satisfaction were having a high level of religious commitment and religiosity. The proportion of respondents with marital satisfaction was significantly higher ($p < 0.05$) among respondents who had a high level of religious commitment (81.4%) as compared to those who had a low level (67.7%). It was also significantly higher among respondents who had a high level of religiosity (80.5%) than those who had a low level (68.3%) [Table 3].

Religious Predictors of Marital Satisfaction among Respondents

The religious variable that predicted marital satisfaction among the respondents was having a high level of religious commitment. Respondents with a high level of religious commitment were two times more likely to have marital satisfaction than those with a low level of religious commitment (aOR = 2.132; 95%CI: 1.221 – 3.870; $p = 0.046$) [Table 4].

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Correlation between Religiosity and Marital Satisfaction among Respondents

Pearson's product-moment correlation shows that religiosity and its subscales (i.e., religious commitment and religious practices) were all positively correlated with marital satisfaction, with the strength of the correlation being more with religious commitment ($r = .280$, $p < .001$), as compared to religiosity ($r = .247$, $p < .001$), and religious practices ($r = .154$, $p = 0.001$) [Table 5].

DISCUSSION

This study assessed the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction among couples in Sokoto State, Nigeria. In this study, the males were significantly older than the females. This could be because the traditional gender roles in most countries and cultures portray the male as "the provider" and, as such, he is expected to have a career to contribute financially to the relationship. In contrast, the female is expected to be "the mother" and contribute her fertility to the marital ties (Zuo & Tang, 2000). As a result, females usually get married once they become physically mature, particularly in the study area. At the same time, men have to work for some years to acquire the financial means to meet the needs of a family before getting married, unlike females.

The preponderance of Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups in this study, with most of them being Muslims, is unsurprising because the survey was conducted in Sokoto, Nigeria, where the indigenous Hausa and Fulani primarily practice Islam as religion, and they constitute the leading ethnic group. Almost all the respondents were married, and a substantial proportion of such marriages are polygamous because most respondents are Muslims.

Table 2: Quality of marital relationship among respondents

Variables		
Quality of marital relationship	**Frequency (n = 498)**	**Percentage**
Marital satisfaction	374	75.1
Marital distress	124	24.9
Marital relationship subscales	**Mean score**	**Standard deviation**
Consensus (in decision-making, values, and affection)	25.22	4.11
Satisfaction in the relationship (concerning stability and conflict regulation)	15.82	2.81
Cohesion (as demonstrated through activities and discussion)	9.93	4.58

Table 3: Association between marital satisfaction and religious factors among respondents

Religious variables	Marital satisfaction		Test of significance
	No Freq. (%)	Yes Freq. (%)	
Religious commitment			
Low	74 (32.3)	155 (67.7)	χ^2= 12.465, p < 0.001*
High	50 (18.6)	219 (81.4)	
Religious practices			
Low	56 (28.9)	138 (71.1)	χ^2= 2.674, p = 0.102
High	68 (22.4)	236 (77.6)	
Religiosity			
Low	70 (31.7)	151 (68.3)	χ^2= 9.752, p = 0.002*
High	54 (19.5)	223 (80.5)	

χ^2= Pearson's chi-square; *Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

Table 4: Religious predictors of marital satisfaction among respondents

Religious variables	Adjusted Odds Ratio (aOR)	95% Confidence Interval (CI)		p-value
		Lower	Upper	
Religious commitment (Low versus ≥ High**)	2.132	1.221	3.870	0.046*
Religious practises(Low versus High**)	0.965	0.565	1.651	0.897
Religiosity (Low versus High**)	1.246	0.576	2.692	0.577

**Reference group; *Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

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Table 5: Correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction among respondents

		Religious commitment	Religious practices	Religiosity	Marital satisfaction
Religious commitment	Pearson Correlation (r)	1	.719	.955	.280
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001*	<.001*	<.001*
	N	498	498	498	498
Religious practices	Pearson Correlation (r)	.719	1	.892	.154
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001*		<.001*	.001*
	N	498	498	498	498
Religiosity	Pearson Correlation (r)	.955	.892	1	.247
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001*	<.001*		<.001*
	N	498	498	498	498
Marital satisfaction	Pearson Correlation (r)	.280	.154	.247	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001*	.001*	<.001*	
	N	498	498	498	498

r = Pearson's correlation coefficient; *Statistically significant ($p < 0.05$)

While Islam permits polygamy, it prohibits people from cohabiting with one another without being married. In addition, even though all the major religions, i.e., Christianity and Islam, prohibit cohabitation without being married, Islam specifically considers cohabiting without being married a significant sin (i.e., engaging in illegal sexual intercourse) and are subject to severe punishment by flogging each of the couples with a hundred stripes (Abdul-Malek, 2016).

The finding of marital satisfaction being predicted by having a high level of religious commitment in this study agrees with those of earlier research by Bozhabadi *et al*. (2020), Aman *et al*. (2019), and Dudley and Frederick (1990). Bozhabadi *et al*. (2020) found a significant positive relationship between sexual and marital satisfaction and religious inclination.

The writers concluded that having a spiritual orientation and dedication is essential for a happy marriage. A study by Dudley and Frederick (1990) among married Seventh-day Adventists who cohabitate reported that family worship and spouse congruence on religion and church attendance were the best indicators of marital pleasure. The findings of this study are consistent with the results of research by Langlais and Schwanz (2017), in which couples who were identified as being religious had happier and more stable marriages than non-religious spouses. The study claims that religiosity fosters intimacy and marital satisfaction in married couples and upholds the value of marriage, which boosts spouse commitment. It concluded that religiosity promotes contentment and happiness in marriage.

The findings of religiosity and its subscales (i.e., religious commitment and religious practices) being positively correlated with marital satisfaction in this study align with existing literature, which majorly reported a positive link between religiosity and marital well-being. According to Hunler and Gengoz (2005), religion establishes the framework of beliefs and values. It provides guidance for life, which might impact married life, and as such, religiosity is an influential element in marital satisfaction. Mahoney (2005) also submitted that religion influences people's beliefs about duties, how to love, creating calm surroundings, and faithfulness, thus illustrating the impact of religion on marriages. The findings of this study, therefore, provide additional evidence in support of the conclusions of previous studies, which demonstrated a positive correlation between religious beliefs and marital satisfaction (Khodayari-Fard et al., 2013; Zulling et al., 2006), and they underscore the need for couples pay special attention to religious matters in their marital environment.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study showed that most respondents had high levels of religious commitment, religious practices, and religiosity. Also, most respondents were satisfied with their marriage. Although marital satisfaction was associated with having a high level of religious commitment and religiosity and was positively correlated with religiosity and its sub-scales (i.e., religious commitment and practices), it was solely predicted by having high religious commitment. These findings underscore the need for couples to leverage the mediating role of religiosity in facilitating marital satisfaction, thus enabling them to navigate the challenging terrains

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in their marital environment.

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