



Psychosocial Factors Affecting Marital Stability among Middle-aged Couples in Suneka-sub County, Kisii County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to establish psychosocial factors affecting marital stability among middle-age couples in Suneka, Kisii. The study used a descriptive research design. The target population of the research was 1000. Yaro Yamane's formulae was used to obtain a sample size of 285. The data was collected using a questionnaire with 32 items. The data analysis was done using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 20 and the statistics presented using frequency tables and pie charts. The results of the study indicated that contrary to God's desire for couples—man and woman to stay together in their marriage union, there is increased divorce. This is as result of various theories about how marriage ought to be which means for couples to stay together there is need for biblical teachings to clearly state the purpose of home and the family as well as emphasize the importance of marriage, marriage enrichment, and marital commitment. However, as much as communication is at the center of a highly functioning marriage, quality sexual performance by the couples is the main tributary of it—the only key communication which enhances the joyful and thankful relationship.

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Introduction

The evolution of technology, shifting cultural customs, unique priorities, and brand-new ways of communication powered by the Internet has changed our lives so much that one can wonder if the family is still important. However, despite the fact that the family institution is faced by various forces that threaten its very existence, it is as important and relevant as it ever was when it was initiated, if not more and no matter how much life changes, the family institution will probably continue to be needed in one form or another. While couples can unite and face the threat when it is external, when the threat is from within, to be specific from one's partner then the damage caused is much more devastating. Some of the factors that can affect marital stability from within include psychological and psychosocial aspects. While term psychological is used in the sense of the mental behavior of an individual the term psychosocial is used in the sense of the mental behavior of the society as a whole (Aron, 2011). This means psychosocial conditions are dependent on the collective psychological behavior of every individual in the society, hence the need to investigate the psychosocial factors affecting marital stability at Suneka sub-county in Kisii County so as to help in promoting the stability of the marriage institution. According Monyancha (2017) divorce rate in Kisii County is 73% and leads to untold psychological problems and women who are the pillars of the homes are more stressed. This is also against God, the author and perfecter of marriages Malachi 2: 16 declares "For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with wrong," says the Lord of hosts. "So, take heed to your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously". The need therefore to investigate the psychosocial factors affecting marital stability, cannot be overstated.

Despite all the challenges marriages face, a successful marriage is the desire of almost every husband and wife because it is a source of both men's and women's health and happiness. This is because it provides the optimal conditions for bearing and raising healthy and happy children. On the contrary marital instability has a negative effects on children—our future parents, doctors, teachers, faith leaders and politicians, to mention but a few, as it often leads to divorce which leads to a unconducive family environment for raising children. According Monyancha (2017) to marital stability is one of the most significant and unique factors or elements among all human relationships.

Before 1960 men oversaw family operations and they commanded authority but since then this has changed with the adoption of no-fault laws in the late 1960s, which in a nutshell tells us that breaking up a marriage is acceptable and the reasons for doing so is nobody's business (Olson, 2014). With this couples have adopted habits of walking away of marriages without a second thought because even new laws have removed the stigma associated with separation and divorce. For instance, current trend in Europe is that couples do not need to work hard to save a marriage because through mutual consent they can easily secure a divorce (Boele-Woelki et al., 2004). The African culture which had emphasized the stability of marriage has also changed. While in earlier generations couples regarded the marriage institution as sacred and were determined to keep it regardless of the challenges they faced, such African norms have been eroded with time as a result of strong pressure from the West and the marriage institution is no longer treasured.

In Kenyan like other African countries marriages would last for 37 years or more in yester years but nowadays most

marriages are lasting an average of 37 weeks (Baffour, 2001). This observation is echoed by Kabintie (2019) who claims that 50 percent of new marriages end within the first year and the rate is on the rise and if media reports are anything to go by there is an instability case either in the media or in the courts every day. Currently married couples are divorcing faster in Kenya than new couples are getting married, yet the family institution is very important because all other relationships in any society stem from the father-mother relationship which means other relationships thrive most if the family relationship is simultaneously a close relationship. This means stable marriages are the bedrock of strong societies and it is very important to investigate how psychosocial factors such as couples' sense of self, emotional well-being, attitude, and motivation to stay married affect marriage stability. This suggestion is informed by Belasheva and Petrova (2016) who suggested that one's psychological state of mind significantly affects his or her thought pattern which in turn affects his or her feelings, emotions and ultimately his or her relationships including marriage relationships.

Related Literature

A few decades ago couple relationships were referred to as heterosexual partnership ending in marriage but presently that spectrum has exorbitantly increased, and more and more couples are living together without tying the knot, which is leading to the marital instability being investigated in this study. Almost every other couple in a committed long-term relationship cohabitates without getting involved in the formalities and obligations that come with the institution of marriage. This disturbing situation is linked to both psychological and psychosocial factors, hence the need to first understand some of the psychological theories which seem to inform contemporary couple relationships:

Trait theory

Psychologist Gordon Allport was among the first to come up with a personality trait theory. He came about with an astonishing discovery in 1936. In psychology, trait theory also called dispositional theory is an approach to the study of human personality which deals with habitual patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion. Trait theory is only one scientific paradigm for personality research (Boyle et al., 2008). These traits vary from person to person and are highly responsible for intra and interpersonal relationships which point to instability in marriages. These traits are genetic that work in harmony with hormones to regulate the mood patterns of either wife or husband. And in most cases, their impact is absolute that disorients communication in marriage if either one the couple has experienced the episodic attack which is the focus of this study.

This theory is interested in predicting behaviors based on an individual's score within segments of the trait range. The trait approach is built on two important assumptions: that personality characteristics are relatively stable over time and characteristics are stable across situations. The study of this approach leads to personality formation which is the basis of mental wellness upon which a character is built. It is against this background that intra and inter-personal relationships are key players in marriage, and they cut across marital experiences. However, the trait theory is criticized for its generality because the theory does not believe traits change over time. The theory believes traits do not change from situation to situation, so people are always the same. The trait theory is also hard to judge using personality tests because

behaviors change in situations. It generalizes people by putting them into groups based on their results in personality inventories which are often too general for a full understanding of the person and their traits. The trait theory uses group results to judge individuals, which can cause people to appear different from what they are being judged compared to others.

Cognitive behaviour theory

Cognitive behavior theory is based on the idea that how we think (cognition), how we feel (emotion) and how we act (behavior) all are related. Our thought pattern affects how we feel and hence bring out the behavior we display. This theory was pioneered by Becker in the 1960s. Becker discovered in his research that depressed people experienced streams of negative thoughts that seemed to arise naturally. The behavioral therapist has lately become aware that people not only act but think and feel. The belief of the cognitive approach is that our interpretation of other people's behavior affects the way we respond to them. We interact with the world through our mental presentation of it—where our mental presentations are inaccurate then our emotions and behavior become distorted. For example, husband comes home late from work the wife concludes he has been having an affair, a child spends a night out parents conclude he or she is up to no good. Cognitive theory is an approach to psychology that attempts to explain human behavior by understanding their thought processes. Cognitive theory is rather a consistent and coherent orientation to understanding human functioning and human change that includes the ideas and contributions of many different individuals (Turner, 2008).

The basic assumption of cognitive theories is that maladaptive behavior results from the irrational or distorted way of thinking emphasis are on internal thought processes. this cognition distorts in the way we see things. Becker (1960) proposed that this is negative thoughts about self the world and the future have significant effects of people's relationships. He emphasis on "here and now" principles asserting that it is usually more fruitful to focus on current processes rather than the past-plaque. However, critics of cognitive theory claim that it ignores all other factors that have been shown to influence behavior. It focuses basically on cognitive process that cannot be directly observed and heavily relies on inferences—things that cannot be easily measured.

Attribution theory

The attribution theory is mainly about achievement. According Winkler (2013), the most important factors affecting attributions are the ability to lead to stability amid instabilities caused by changing circumstances. As such, attribution theory deals with the formation of individual opinions about the reasons for events or observations. It is concerned with how individuals interpret events and how this relates to their thinking and behavior. Winkler (2013) adds that attribution theory assumes that people try to determine why people do what they do, i.e., attribute causes behavior. A person seeking to understand why another person did something may attribute one or more causes to that behavior.

There are three-stage process which underlies an attribution as noted by Pappas (2016): first, the person must perceive or observe the behavior, second, then the person must believe that the behavior was intentionally performed, and third, then the person must determine if they believe the other person was forced to perform the behavior in which

case the cause is attributed to the situation or not in which case the cause is attributed to the other person. As such, the theory assumes that all people are rational thinkers that use internal and external cues to help explain what is going on around them in their environment and that the goal of all people is the mastery of their environment and control over their actions. The Attribution Theory explains how people use internal cues (their perception of their environment) and external cues (observations of their environment) to attribute causes to outcomes of different events that occur around them. However, attribution theory is often used by couples to blame one another and avoid personal convictions that more often than not leads to marital instability and sometimes separation or divorce. The blame game can also lead couple in disgruntled relationships to avoid engaging in activities that might expose their weaknesses out of fear of rejection.

The discussed theories seem to undergird most contemporary couples' thinking with regards to how they understand and relate with their spouses in marriage. This observation is in line with Lederman & Lederman (2015) who argued that one's mental frameworks justify the importance and significance of his or her relationships, hence the need for a more holistic perspective towards marriage and the family.

Couple's Sense of Self and Marital Stability

One's sense of self implies the consistency and stability of someone who scores high on a specific trait like extraversion and reflects his or her characteristic patterns of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Those with good sense of self are sociable in different situations and over time (Gaines, 2017). People's sense of self emerged as significantly associated with marital satisfaction (Claxton et al., 2016). The two studies identified at least two aspects as determinants of people's sense of self: affectionate and conventionality. A convention is a set of agreed, stipulated, or generally accepted standards, norms, social norms, or criteria, often taking the form of a custom which is expected to be practiced by couples towards each other. While getting to know the correct or proper behaviour in marriage can be a challenge as each person came from a different family of origin with diverse behaviour and norms because each person has been socialized according to their different culture and belief system which makes couples sometimes feel that there is something wrong in their relationship, those willing to work at it can save their marriage.

Some of the areas that could be posing challenges because of one's sense of self are how to develop areas of closeness in their marriage. Some of the examples include doing things together which can enhance physical closeness like holding hands or hugging each other, sharing emotional issues, and discussing their sexual closeness (Mike et al., 2015). Standard features of sense of self include high levels of thoughtfulness, good impulse control, and goal-directed behaviours. People with high sense of self are highly conscientious and tend to be mindful of details. They plan and think about how their behaviour affects their partners. Such couples spend time finishing important tasks right away, pay attention to detail, enjoy having a set schedule and have positive attitude to saving and tend to save more (Webley, 2008).

A More Holistic View (Theory) to Marital Relationship

As highlighted in the 4 discussed psychological theories currently informing contemporary marriages, there are major gaps that might be leading to current trend of marital instability in the world. Hence, the researcher sought to

provide a more holistic theory based on God's word which teaches that God created marriage for life which means He did not create it with an 'exit.' Jesus came to earth to repair all that had been broken by the fall of man into sin, including the broken institution of marriage. This means only Jesus Christ's redeeming work can make the restoration of the marriage institution possible. His Holy Spirit whom He gave the church as helper provides necessary grace for the husband and wife to live together in unity: the husband doing what he can to lead his wife and the wife doing what she can to be the helpmeet for her husband. Unfortunately, many societies across the globe have nurtured a mentality that divorce comes as easily as marriage.

This observation is in line with (Santrock, 2015) who argued that an average of one in three marriages these days results in divorce. Sadly, not only are we seeing more marriages breaking down but also a swelling number of young people getting married with the idea that marriage comes complete with an escape door. However, as attractive, and 'normal' as that might sound to the 'throw-away-mentality' of our day, God's word teaches that the Lord has not built within the institution of marriage an escape exit door which one of the marriage partners may use when the pressure within the marriage gets too great. This does not mean marriage is not eternal because Jesus' words to the Sadducees in reply to their question about the woman with seven successive husbands (Matthew 22: 27-30) suggest that in the resurrection they neither marry nor are they given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven." But according to scriptures marriage can only be terminated when God calls one spouse from this life through death. Paul says: "the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives. But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband" (Romans 7:1, 2). This means understanding scriptural basis for the permanence of marriage, the psychological factors influencing its stability as well as psych-educating parents to impress God's view of marriage upon their children as they contemplate marriage, is likely to save some marriages, if not all the marriages.

Research Methodology

The research employed descriptive research design which seeks to describe phenomenon or a situation systematically and accurately in terms of what and when. According to Joynson (2020) "the descriptive research focuses on describing the nature of a demographic segment, without focusing on "why" a particular phenomenon occurs—in other words, it "describes" the subject of the research, without covering "why" it happens." Hence, it was deemed as the best design for this research because the researcher aimed at identifying characteristics and trends of marital instability among middle aged women in Suneka sub-county in Kisii County and the role played by psychosocial factors. Target population was about 1000 middle aged couples—between 40-59 years. The researcher employed Yaro Yamane formulae in determining the sample size. From a population of 1000 the sample size was 285 and after adding 10% due to drop-out rates the sample size was 314 respondents. The data collection instrument consisted of 32 items its internal consistency was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient which gave a total alpha scale alpha of .80. All the 314 distributed questionnaires were returned and determined fit for analysis. However, 4 questionnaires were not returned. The researcher used SPSS program version 20 to analyze collected data.

Research results and Discussion

The researcher distributed a total of 314 questionnaires and 310 questionnaires were turned which translated to a 99% response rate. This response rate was counted as very high because almost all the participants participated in the study. Figure 1 gives a summary of the questionnaire return rate.

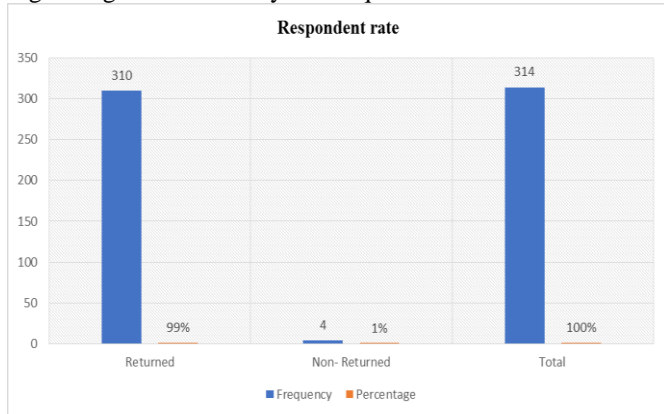


Figure 1. Respondent rate

The findings in figure 5 indicated that respondents in the study were 40-49 years (49.7%), followed by 50-59 years (45.5%) 60 and above (4.8)%.

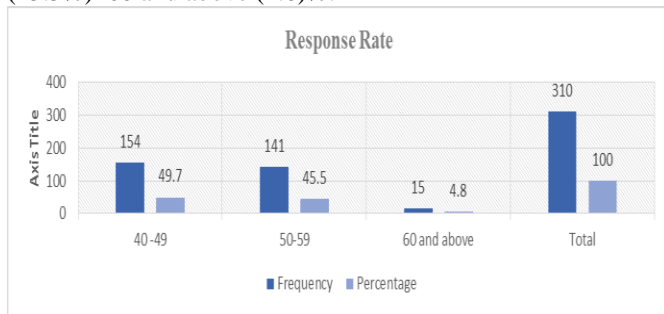


Figure 2. Age of Respondents

The years in marriage were as follows the highest were those that have been in a marriage for more than 15 years at 38%, followed by those 5 - 10 years at 26%, then those who have been in marriage 10-15 years at 22 years, and the last group was for those who have less than five years.

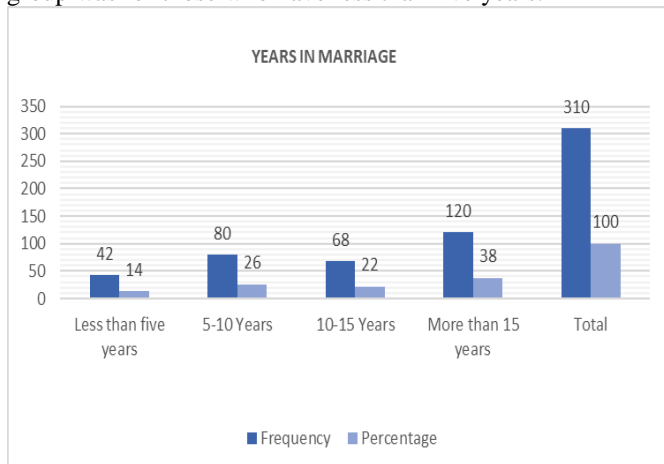


Figure 3. Couples' years in marriage.

The response on the educational level was as follows. A significant number of respondents were those with primary level education at 32%, followed by those with secondary education level at 26%, followed by those with diploma education at 18%, followed by those with bachelors level education at 10%, then those with masters level education at 8% and the last group was those with Ph.D level education at 6%.

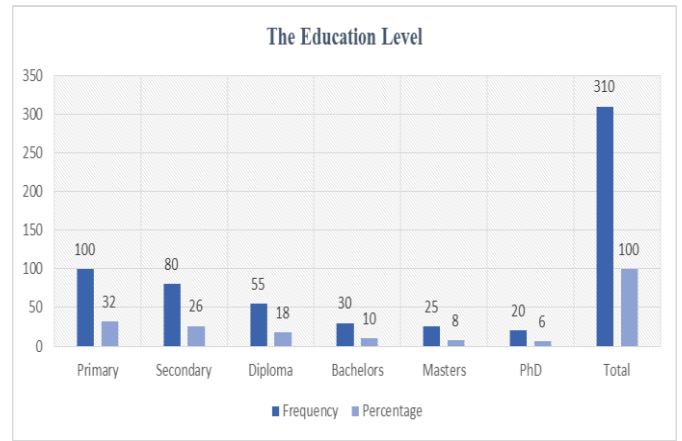


Figure 4. Educational Level.

The response on the respondent's employment status as revealed in figure 4.5, indicated that 70% were unemployed while 30 % were employed.

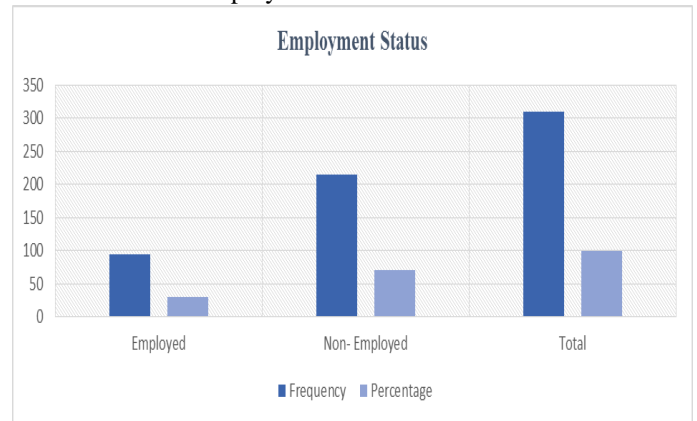


Figure 5. Employment Status

The responses on couple's monthly income as indicated on table 8, revealed that respondents with an income below KES 20,000 accounted for 58% of the 310 who correctly filled and returned the questionnaires followed by those with KES 21,000-40,000 at 22.6%, then those with an income of Kes 41,000 - 60,000 at 9.7% followed those with KES 61,000 – KES 80,000 at 8% and the smallest group was of those who earned KES 81,000 and above with 1.7%.

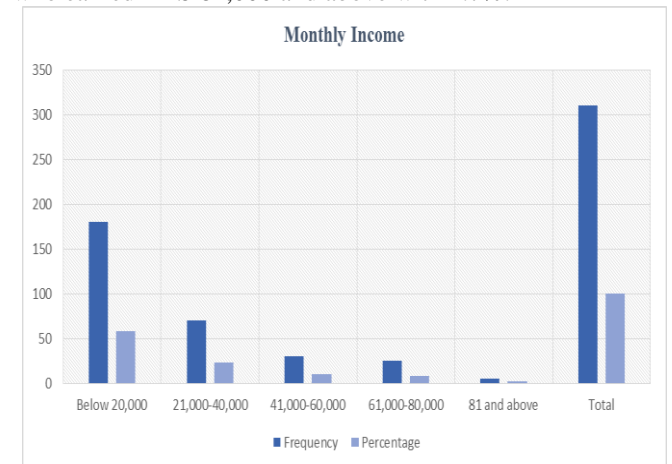


Figure 6. Monthly Income

Results on the couples' family origin as summarized on table 4.7 indicate that 30% of the respondents had both parents, followed by those whose parents had separated at 25%, then those from single parent homes at 23%, while those from divorced and polygamous families had a tie at 11% each.

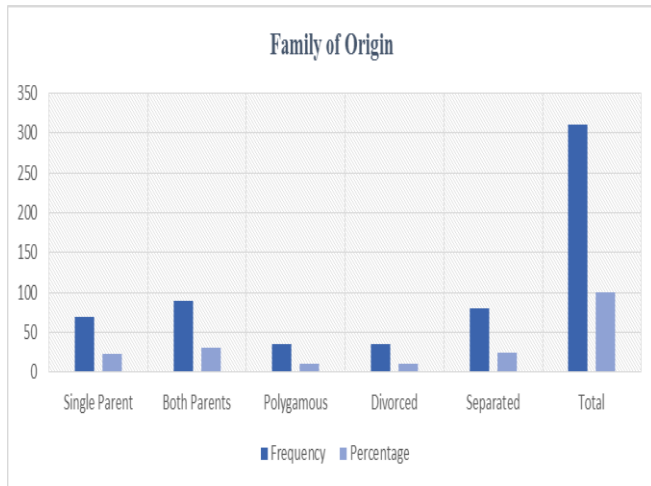


Figure 7. Family of Origin

The findings reported in the following pages in line with one objective that sought to determine how couples' sense of self affects their stability especially among middle-aged couples in Suneka sub-county, Kisii county, Kenya.

Effects of Couples' Sense of self on Marital Stability

Table 1 gives a summary of the descriptive statistics on the effects of couple's sense of self on marital stability among middle-aged couples in Suneka sub-county, Kisii county, Kenya: SA=strongly agree, A=agree, NS=not sure, D=disagree while SD=strongly disagree.

On the issue of couples' having a clear purpose for their marriage a significant number of respondents (200 at 64.5% indicated strongly disagree in relation to having a clear

purpose for their marriage, followed by respondents who disagreed having a clear purpose for their marriage (22) respondents at 7%, then respondents who indicated that they were not sure whether that had a clear purpose for their marriage, (50) respondents at 16% agreed having a clear purpose for their marriage, (10) respondents at 3.2%.) agreed having a clear purpose for their marriage and finally couples who strongly agreed that they had a clear purpose for their marriage all the time (28) at 9.3%. The findings also revealed that a significant number of respondents (180) at 55.5% strongly disagreed that they were rarely stressed by their marriage demands, (56) respondents at 18.1% disagreed that they were rarely stressed by their marriage demands, (40) at 13% of the respondents were not sure if they were rarely stressed by their marriage demands while (33) respondents at 10.6% agreed that they were rarely stressed by my marriage demands. No couples strongly agree that they were rarely stressed by my marriage demands all the time. Further the findings revealed that a significant number of respondents (121) at 39% strongly agreed that they respect their spouse's autonomous decisions, (60) respondents at 19.5% agreed they respect their spouse's autonomous decisions, (61) respondents at 19.6% were not sure whether they respected their spouse's autonomous decisions, (45) respondents at 14.5% disagreed that whether they respected their spouse's autonomous decisions while (23) respondents at 7.4% strongly disagreed that they respected their spouse's autonomous decisions. Regarding whether respondents were socially closely knit with their spouse (168) respondents at 54.2% strongly disagreed they were socially closely knit with

Table 1. Couple's sense of self and their marital stability.

	SA	A	NS	D	SD
Have a clear purpose for my marriage	28 9.3%	10 3.2%	50 16%	22 7%	200 64.5%
Rarely stressed by my marriage demands	0 0%	33 10.6%	40 13%	51 16.8%	185 59.5%
I accept my role as a partner in marriage	0 0%	33 10.6%	40 13%	56 18.1%	180 58.3%
I accept my role as a partner in marriage	28 9.3%	10 3.2%	50 16%	22 7%	200 64.5%
I respect my spouse's autonomous decisions	23 7.4%	45 14.5%	61 19.6%	60 19.5%	121 39%
We are socially closely knit with my spouse	0 0%	71 22.9%	31 10%	40 12.9%	168 54.2%
Constantly appreciate one another's contribution	28 9.3%	10 3.2%	50 16%	22 7%	200 64.5%

Table 2. Pearson correlational Matrix

Correlations		Marital Stability				
Purpose for marriage	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	310				
Stressed by marriage demands	Pearson Correlation	.574**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	310	310			
Accept marital roles	Pearson Correlation	.582**	.853**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	310	310	310		
Respect autonomy	Pearson Correlation	.220**	.341**	.322**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	310	310	310	310	
Socially knit	Pearson Correlation	.324**	.568**	.501**	.632**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	310	310	310	310	310
Constantly appreciate spouse	Pearson correlation	.223**	.332**	.342**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		
	N	310	310	310	310	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Analysis of variance

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	272.317	4	68.079	95.128	.000 ^b
	Residual	218.277	305	.716		
	Total	490.594	309			

a. Dependent variable: marital stability

b. Predictors: (Constant), Marital Trends, Prevalence, Relationship, Personality traits

their spouse, (40) respondents at 12.9% disagreed they were socially closely knit with their spouse, (31) respondents at 19% were not sure if they were socially closely knit with their spouse, (71) at 22.9% agreed that they were socially closely knit with their spouse but no respondent strongly agreed that they were socially closely knit with their spouse. Concerning whether respondents constantly appreciated their spouse's contribution (200) respondents at 64.5% strongly disagreed that they constantly appreciated their spouse's contribution (22) respondents at 7% disagreed that they constantly appreciated their spouse's contribution, (50) respondents at 16% were not sure if they constantly appreciated their spouse's contribution, (10) at 3.2% agreed that they constantly appreciated their spouse's contributions while (28) at 9.3% strongly disagreed that they constantly appreciated their spouse's contributions. The implication here is that couples who participated in current research value their spouses and if given right psychosocial education they can keep their marriages intact. The results of the null hypothesis generated from objective 1 to test if there was no significant relationship between couple's sense of self and their marital stability are summarized in table 2.

The Pearson correlation was conducted at a 95% confidence level 2-tailed. In which the findings indicated that the predictor values under the study had a positive relationship with the dependent variable, as reflected in table 4.13. A strong association was revealed between couples' sense of self and their marital stability since $P(0.000)$ which is less than 0.05 thus indicating signification and positive relationship of ($r = .324^{**}$, $p = 0.000$). The findings lead to the rejection of the third null hypothesis that there was no significant relationship between couple's sense of self and their marital stability hence concluding that couples' sense of self is a key factor in stable marriages.

An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was also conducted based on a 5% level of significance. From which the F was calculated as indicated in table 3.

The findings confirmed the Pearson correlation results as they indicated an F significant a P-Value of 0.000 revealing a positive and significant relationship as P-Value was less than 0.005. The value of F was calculated at 92.128 while F critical (df 9,56). With sig (p-value) = 0.000 less than 0.05 which revealed that the regression was significant.

Conclusion

Since family is the foundation of every society and most valuable gift God has given humanity, it is important if it remains intact. The family is the first classroom for every child and first lesson in relationships with other people and can make people feel secure or insecure, faith leaders and family psychologist are better advised if they offered best psychosocial education to keep families together. This research findings concur with other research findings by researchers like Hamirani, Sultana, Ibrahim, Iqbal, Sultana (2006) and Claxton et al. (2016) claimed that marital

problems are shocking but improving couples' sense of self, motivation to keep their marriages intact, and positive attitude towards marriage can savage the marriage institution. They emphasized that good marital relationships are significantly associated with psychosocial aspects and marital satisfaction.

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