COMMUNICATION, SUSPICION AND STABILITY IN MARRIAGE: EXAMPLES FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF MARRIED WOMEN IN TWO PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN Ogun State, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined communication, suspicion, and stability in marriage from the standpoint experience of married women in two private universities in Ogun State. Two hundred married female respondents were randomly selected using stratified random sampling technique. Family Assessment Device, a subscale of McMaster Family Functioning Scales and Factors Affecting Marital Stability Questionnaire (FAMSQ) were used to measure communication, suspicion, and stability in marriage. Findings from the study revealed that marital suspicion determine stability more than communication and the main implications of these findings are that suspicion in marriage and communication affect stability negatively. It was therefore recommended that government should use the mass media to create massive awareness on the need to improve communication in homes and discourage suspicion, recruit professional counsellors, psychologists and social workers to attend to various needs of couples and intending couples.

Introduction

Marriage is a cultural universal with varying pattern in its presentational form across the world. There are different types of marriages: monogamy, polygamy and polyandry. Monogamy is generally in two ways; strict monogamy where a person is allowed only one spouse per lifetime and serial monogamy where people can be married to more than one person – in succession. There are also several specialized types of monogamous marriages that involve cousins; bilateral, matrilateral, patrilateral and parallel cousin marriages (Kalafut, 2007).
Marital stability is not only a value term, but also a relative term. It implies firmness and strength to endure under hard as well as easy circumstances. This element of constancy, according to Hollingshead (2007), must not be confused with a static condition. Marriage problems represent a unique but common, category of adjustment difficulty that causes people to seek psychological treatment. Problems can develop in a couple’s relationships because of a medical or psychological problem in either person, or in one of their children. Parent-child problems can also create distress within a family. Sometimes, the couple itself is the problem because of poor communication, continuous conflict, alienation, sexual problems, or in-law problems (Donald, 2007).

Marital suspicion is an act of suspecting; the imagination or apprehension of the existence of something (especially something wrong or hurtful) without proof, or upon very slight evidence, or upon no evidence. Marital suspicion has deprived a large number of people their joy and peace; it has even led to cases of battering, divorce, murder and so on. Suspicion could be used interchangeably with cheating, jealousy, distrust, mistrust and doubt.

Gottman’s (1994) theory of marital success versus failure reflects a causal process model that specifies alternative paths that satisfied versus dissatisfied married partners take. Specifically, Gottman argues that marital partners’ negative message behaviour causes a shift in perceptions of each other that lead to unfavorable beliefs about the partner. In particular, negative message behaviour (e.g., sarcasm, accusations) predicts relational instability; conversely, the ratio of positive-to-negative messages indicates stability. Whereas stable couples have a 5:1 positive-to-negative message ratio, unstable couples enact a 1:1 positive-to-negative message ratio. Unstable couples, however, exhibit an equal number of positive and negative messages. According to Gottman (1994), negative conflict behaviours lead to negative emotional reactions. Differences between stable and unstable couples also are evident in the attributions made regarding partners’ negative behavior (Gottman 1994). For example, stable partners rely on positive or benign attributions to explain negative behaviours (e.g., he is tired; she has been under a lot of pressure). Unstable partners, on the other hand, explain the causes of their problems using hostile attributions, or explanations that reflect internal, stable, global, and intentional features of the partner (e.g., he is self-centred, which also explains why he never calls when he is late). Once hostile attributions are in place, partners tend to distance
themselves from one another, re-cast the history of the marriage, and, finally, separate.

**Communication**

Effective communication is an important characteristic of strong, healthy families. Research identifies communication as an essential building block of strong marital, parent-child, and sibling relationships. Family communication is the way verbal and non-verbal information is exchanged between family members (Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller, & Keitner, 1993).

Markman, (1981) has observed that the more positively couples rated their communication, the more satisfied they were with their relationship five and a half years later and to compliment this, Noller & Fitzpatrick (1990) noted a strong link between communication patterns and satisfaction with family relationships. Poor communication is also associated with an increased risk of divorce and marital separation and more behavioral problems in children.

Wuerffel, DeFrain and Stinnett (1992) and Wilcox (2002) viewed the scientific literature on humor and found that humor can be used in many different positive and negative ways. Humor can reduce daily tension, facilitate conversations, express feelings of warmth and affection, lessen anxiety, point out mistakes made by others, and entertain. It can also help put others at ease and help maintain a positive outlook on life. The study found positive correlations between the use of humor and how strong the families were, based on their responses to a family strength inventory. The stronger families in the study reported negative effects, however, when humor was used to put down other family members. Put downs and sarcasm (an attempt to mask anger; it is rarely used out of love) were used less often by the stronger families. However, families do not benefit from humor that places someone in a superior position or from sarcasm aimed at demeaning a family member.

In a study carried out by Burgoon, Buller, and Woodall (1994), it was observed that adults place more reliance on nonverbal cues than verbal cues to determine the meaning of the verbal message. For example, Burgoon et al. (1994) noted, “The absence of a hug at bedtime may be more telling to a spouse about the intimacy of the
marriage than any other present cue.” While nonverbal communication is a multi-channel and complex phenomenon, tactile communication is an important starting point for further research in marital relations. Tactile communication is not the only factor related to marital satisfaction, nor will tactile communication solve all of the problems in unsatisfactory marriages. However, this study is an attempt to help decrease the uncertainty among the various factors that lead to marital satisfaction by examining (spouses’ perceptions of tactile communication in their marriage) women’s perception on communication pattern as it affect family stability.

Willis and Briggs (1992) focused on tactile communication between men and women as a function of their relationship. Their results indicated that couples who have been married for one year or more were less likely to touch one another and suggestions were made that the findings may provide a sign of trouble in the relationship. Touching behavior among married couples and serious dating couples should be similar. According to Guerrero and Andersen (1994), touching behavior among partners in relationships increases as the relationship develops. Their findings support research positing that nonverbal communication becomes more similar and synchronized as a relationship moves from an impersonal to a personal level (Knapp & Vangelisti, 1992). This study posits that if touching behaviors among married couples are similar as the relationship continues to develop, marital satisfaction will increase. If a partner does not engage in touching while the other does, the non-touching partner is viewed negatively. Zuo’s (1992) findings provide a strong indication of the possible relationship between touching behavior among married couples and marital satisfaction.

Body contact is a means of expressing liking and acceptance. Withholding touch, on the other hand, communicates an assortment of negative feelings such as resentment, hostility, anger, or mistrust. Touch will continue to be important in the lives of humans. Whether it is the loving caress of a mother, or the warm embrace from a spouse, touch has the innate power to communicate and strengthen relationships. According to Thayer (1988), couples stay together and break apart for many reasons, including the way each partner expresses and reacts to affection and intimacy. For some, feelings and words are enough; for others, touch and physical intimacy are more critical. Helping couples understand the tremendous power touch maintains will ultimately enable them to manage and maintain a satisfying marital relationship.
Suspicion

Marital suspicion (cheating) is not alien to the institution of marriage. Thus, it is not surprising that they occupy an important role in various efforts to account for the stability or instability of a wide variety of human relationships. Perceived marital cheating (suspicion) is the act of suspecting something, especially something wrong, on little evidence or without proof. (A belief to the disadvantage of another, accompanied by a doubt).

The seeds of emotional cheating are sown when couples misunderstand the fundamental rules of marriage (Laurie, 2007). It was stated that communication is not the problem (communicating often is stated as the best way to build a successful marriage). Marital cheating involves personal intimacy with someone other than your spouse or partner. Marital unfaithfulness can be harder on a marriage than adultery. Marital cheating includes: Flirting "harmlessly" with people of the opposite sex, having lunch or drinks after work with members of the opposite sex, discussing your work problems thoroughly at work; and leaving nothing to talk about with your spouse at home, sharing jokes and gossip with colleagues or friends of the opposite sex, not with your partner, spending as much time buying the right gift for a colleague of the opposite sex as you do for your spouse and sharing intimate issues with people other than your partner. "When a spouse places his or her primary needs in the hands of someone outside the marriage, it breaks the bond of marriage just as adultery does."

There is a saying that if you change the way you relate to your spouse, then you are concretely changing the relationship. One can reduce the likelihood of perceived marital cheating (suspicion) by focusing on building a strong marriage through the following: Avoid close friendships with members of the opposite sex, foster co-dependence (need for one another), have clear, realistic goals and a specific plan, define your roles, put your marriage before your kids, jobs, and anything else, appreciate your partner: don't just tolerate him or her. Understand the connection between your childhood and your marriage, share your deepest, most vulnerable self during intimate moments (deal with your fear of intimacy), accept the many stages of love in a marriage or partnership, and focus your energy on building a strong marriage (and you'll have no energy for suspicion).

Some marriages are stronger after marital infidelity. It depends on many factors: why one person strayed, how long it continued,
whether it is over, how it was discovered and the type of extramarital affair. Once the problem of perceived cheating is resolved, it's important to keep these “five steps to surviving a supposed or an actual extramarital affair” fresh in the mind: recognize your role, be open to change, limit your questions, don't keep bringing the suspicion up and resolve to move on.

Marital Stability
The importance of marital stability cannot be over-emphasized; the stability of each marriage is eventually the stability of the nation at large. This study identified two factors (communication and marital suspicion) and it is against this backdrop that the research was being conducted in order to find out whether the identified factors could predict marital stability.

Marital stability has been defined in many ways; traditionally, many researchers defined marital stability in terms of factors related to marital structure while scholars have defined marital stability as limited problem or challenges in marriage. Going by a standard definition of stability, it is defined as “the capacity to return to equilibrium or to the original position after having been displaced” the statement contains the important notion of resilience “to maintain and strengthen married life, to attain or return capability for the maximum self-support and personal independence”. For example, parental mental health, stable relationships among couple, and positive parenting are cited as markers of marital stability (Ackerman, Kogos, & Youngstrom 1999, Azar 2002). Characteristics of the home environment, such as warmth, emotional availability, stimulation, family cohesion, and day-to-day activities, have also been implicated in the notion of marital stability (Corwyn, Burchinal, & Roderick, 2002).

The primary strategies for maintaining stability would be to use cooperative messages, avoid negative reciprocity, and attempt to explain the partner's negative behavior using benign attributions. If one cannot alter defensive beliefs about the partner, then the assistance of a marital counselor, therapist, or spiritual leader would appear to be in order.

Fitzpatrick and Ritchie (1993) discovered that marital success is usually defined as “marital stability” or “marital satisfaction”. Marital stability is interpreted as whether a couple in a marriage remains together, instead of separating or divorcing. Marital satisfaction, in contrast, refers to how marital partners evaluate the quality of their marriage. It is a subjective description of whether a marital
relationship is good, happy, or satisfying. Various names are used to identify satisfaction in marriage: the most frequently used are marital happiness, marital quality, and marital adjustment.

Researchers over the years agree that the key factor determining feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction for both male and females, is the stage of life that they are passing through; more specifically, whether or not they have children and if those children have left the parental home (empty nest) (Bird and Melville 1994). Marital satisfaction begins to decline after the unscripted spontaneity of the newly wed period. As the marital partners become more involved in parenting and take on expanded job responsibilities, companionship declines along with common interest and demonstrations of affection. Eventually, marital satisfaction increases after the children are launched and the parents have the house to themselves again. Glenn (1990) pointed out that when couples have children, the level of spousal interaction decreases, family finances are strained, and the division of labour becomes more traditional as husbands share fewer of the household tasks.

Many couples stay together “for the sake of the children” (The Guardian 2006 & Duerksen 2007). They balance the needs of the family against their own personal needs and persevere out of a faith in the future that things will get better overtime as the children mature, finances improve, and they have more time to spend together. As the years go by, personal satisfaction with the marital relationship comes to depend less and less on one’s partner. It may not be because of a lower estimate of the spouse but because there are alternative sources of satisfaction both inside and outside the marriage—children, kin, colleagues at work, and so forth.

Children who experience marital stability have caregivers who remain constant, consistent, and connected to them over time; caregivers who are mentally healthy and engage in appropriate parenting practices; a cohesive, supportive, and flexible family system; and a nurturing and stimulating home environment. This definition of marital stability is not offered as a standard by which one evaluates families in the child welfare system, but rather as an essential goal of child welfare intervention with biological, foster, and adoptive families.
According to research conducted at the Brigham Young University (BYU) Family Studies Centre, an increase in the number of first marriages contracted over age 22 has made a major contribution to marital stability and thus the declining divorce rate. However, after age 22 the relationship between age at marriage and marital dissolution is not large. Thus, while increasing the age at marriage from 18 to 22 improves marital stability, increasing the age from 22 to 30 would not have much effect.

Brigham Young University (BYU) Family Studies Centre (Heaton 2002) documented a second factor contributing to increased marital stability. Although not as strong as the rising age at first marriage, improvements in education have also played a role. A wife’s education can have a positive impact on her marriage. A woman’s improved educational status provides her with the tools to promote equality within the relationship and enhance her marriage. Although her improved status may allow flexibility to leave an undesirable relationship, it may also assist her in avoiding such relationships altogether through greater confidence and wider options. More educated women may be better able to enter marriage under circumstances that promote stability. Improved educational status promotes unity within a relationship, and recent evidence (Alisa & Sloan 2005) suggests that women’s economic contributions can enhance marital stability.

Religious faith, affiliation, and participation are not the only, or even the most significant factors influencing marital stability (Larson & Holman, 1994; Heaton, 2002; Teachman, 2002). Several other factors interact with the influence of faith. For example, some of the behaviors that have been found to put people at greater risk of marital dissolution are actions churches seek to prevent, like initiation of sex before marriage, premarital parenthood, and premarital cohabitation.

In the western world, the rate of divorce is mostly the yardstick of measuring marital stability. While Heaton (2002), found that age at marriage significantly influences the likelihood of divorce, Teachman (2002), identified the level of education as a determinant factor of marital stability (i.e. people with at least some college education are less likely to divorce than those with less education while people with family incomes greater than $50,000 are less likely to divorce than those with less than $25,000 (The National Marriage Project 2004).
The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which psychosocial factors predict marital stability among women in private Universities in Ogun State; and which of the psychosocial factors would predict marital stability most.

The Objectives of Study is to: examine marital stability among married women in private universities in Ogun State, explore the factors that are capable of predicting marital stability, investigate the role of communication as a contributory to marital stability, examine the effect of suspicion on marital stability and provide solutions that will assist individual to avoid marital instability.

In order to achieve the stated objectives, the following research questions were raised: Will communication and marital suspicion in a combined form predict marital stability among married women in private Universities; will communication predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities and will suspicion predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities? From the research questions raised, the following null hypotheses were posited for testing at 0.05 level of significance: Hypothesis one states that communication and marital suspicion will not predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities. Hypothesis two states that communication will not predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities. Hypothesis five states that marital suspicion will not predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities.

The design used for this study is descriptive. The descriptive survey is the method through which opinions are obtained from a cross-section of target respondents. Respondents were randomly selected from the target population.

**Sample and Sampling Procedure**

Research was carried out among married women in two private universities viz: Covenant University and Bells University of Technology in Ogun state. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the participants for this study. From the sample, eighty per cent was selected from each strata (Bells University and Covenant University). The total sample for this study was two hundred which comprised one hundred and fifty participants from Covenant University, Ota and fifty participants from Bell University of Technology, Ota. The marital statuses of the participants are: married 180 (90%), divorced 7 (3.3%), separated 8 (3.9) and widowed 5 (2.8%).


**Instruments**

Two instruments were used: Family Assessment Device, a sub scale of McMaster Family Functioning Scales and Factors of Marital Stability Questionnaire (FMSQ) (2007). Family Assessment Device (FAD) was adopted, it consisted of 12 items and the items sought information from respondents on marital stability. Both the internal reliability and validity of the FAD have been demonstrated in prior research with Cronbach’s alphas on the scales ranging from 0.74 to 0.92. The FAD also has adequate test-retest reliability, low correlations with social desirability, and moderate correlations with other self-report measures of family functioning, which provides evidence of concurrent validity of the scale (Miller, Epstein, Bishop, & Keitner, 1985). All odd items were reverse scored. To reverse score an item, the score for that item is subtracted from 5. For example, if the answer to question 1 is given as 2 the reverse score would be 3 (5 - 2).

Factors of Marital Stability Questionnaire (FMSQ) consisted of three sections, A-C. The first section (A) was to elicit information from the respondents about their background with regards to their age, marital status, highest educational qualification, job status, number of years in marriage and number of children. Section B was a communication scale which consisted 9 items on how effectively people/family members communicate. Section C dealt with marital suspicion (cheating) scale consisted of 10 items. The items elicited information on doubts about someone’s honesty or fidelity in a marriage relationship.

Across sections (B and C), there were nineteen items and the scale adopted modified Likert-type format. The scoring format of response for the items in the questionnaire was with corresponding scores strongly agree-4, agree-3, disagree-2 and strongly disagree-1.

The results of the pilot study of thirty participants having the same characteristics as the participants revealed the test-retest reliability after two weeks of r=0.78 and internal consistency (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.82). The face validity of the instrument was ascertained by careful choice and scrutiny of the test items by experts in the field.

**Results**

Hypothesis one states that communication and marital suspicion will not predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities. This was tested using multiple regression statistical analysis and the result is shown in table 1 and 2.
Wayas; S.O.: Communication, Suspicion and Stability in Marriage:

Table 1: Model Summary of Multiple Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>R²-Adjusted</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication and marital suspicion</td>
<td>.886</td>
<td>.7849</td>
<td>.7424</td>
<td>.31167</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. predictors (Constant), Communication and marital suspicion
b. Dependent Variable: marital stability.

In a model summary (Table 1) presented above, there are various information about the regression analysis provided. First, the 'multiple R' column presents the correlation between the actually observed independent variables (Communication and marital suspicion and the predicted dependent variable (marital stability which was predicted by the regression equation). 'R square' is the square of R and is also known as the 'coefficient of determination'. It states the proportion (or percentage) of the (sample) variation in the dependent variable that can be attributed to the independent variable(s). In this study, 0.7849% of the variation in marital stability appears to be accounted for by the combination of communication and marital suspicion. The 'adjusted R square' refers to the best estimate of R square for the population from which the sample was drawn. Finally, the 'standard error of estimate' indicates that on average, observed marital stability scores deviate from the predicted regression line by a score of 0.31. This is not surprising, since it is already known that the regression model explains 78.49% of the variation, it can not account for the other 21.51% which most likely represents both measurement error in factors as well as other factors that influence marital stability that have not been considered. However, in testing the null hypothesis one which states that "communication and marital suspicion will not predict marital stability among married women in private universities" the data was analyzed and the result presented in Table 1.

Table 2: Regression Analysis on marital stability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>4.282</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4867</td>
<td>20.50</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>54.391</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>213</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58.673</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows there are three rows. The sum of squares column gives the sum of squares for each of the estimates of variance. The sum of
squares corresponds to the numerator of the variance ratio. The third column gives the degrees of freedom for each estimate of variance. The degrees of freedom for the between-groups estimate of variance is given by the number of levels of the independent variables minus one (\( II - 1 \)). In this study, there are two (communication and marital suspicion) independent variables, so there are \( 2 - 1 = 1 \) degrees of freedom.

However, in interpreting these figures, the independent variables communication, age at marriage, in-laws’ interference and marital suspicion significantly combined to predict marital stability at \( f_{(1, 199)} = 3.389 \), at 0.05 significant level. This implies that the first hypothesis is rejected and alternative hypothesis was retained which means that the psychosocial factors in a combined form will predict marital stability.

Hypothesis two states that communication will not predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities. This was tested using multiple regression statistical analysis and the result is shown in table 3 and 4.

Table 3: Model Summary of Multiple Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>R²-Adjusted</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>.449</td>
<td>.2016</td>
<td>.1994</td>
<td>.2749</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. predictors (Constant) Communication,

b. Dependent Variable: marital stability

Table 4: Regression Analysis on marital stability as predicted by Communication

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>4866</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4696</td>
<td>30.49</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>32754</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>154</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>37620</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a significant contribution of communication in the family to the prediction of marital stability (\( R = .449, R^2 = .2016, F_{(1, 199)} = 30.49; p < .05 \)). By this, communication alone accounted for just 20.16 per cent of the variations in the prediction of marital stability. The null hypothesis two which stated that “Communication will not predict marital stability among married women in private universities” was rejected. The findings imply that communication alone has significant
Hypothesis three states that marital suspicion will not predict marital stability among married women in Private Universities. This was tested also using multiple regression statistical analysis and the result is shown in Table 5 and 6.

Table 5: Model Summary of Multiple Regression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictors</th>
<th>R</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>R²-Adjusted</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>marital suspicions</td>
<td>.509</td>
<td>.2599</td>
<td>.2016</td>
<td>.2720</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6: Regression Analysis on marital stability as predicted by marital suspicions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of Variation</th>
<th>Sum of Squares</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F-ratio</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Regression</td>
<td>4262</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4266</td>
<td>17.48</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual</td>
<td>32336</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>244</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36598</td>
<td>200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was a significant contribution of marital suspicions to the prediction of marital stability ($R=.509$, $R^2=.2599$, $F_{(1,199)}=17.48$; $p<.05$) By this, marital suspicion alone accounted for just 25.99 per cent of the variations in prediction of marital stability. The null hypothesis five which stated that “marital suspicions will not predict marital stability among married women in private universities” was rejected. The findings imply that marital suspicions alone have significant effect in the prediction of marital stability.

In summary, the entire hypotheses presented for testing in this study were rejected. The implication of this is that both the combination and the independent factor of the psychosocial factors predict marital stability.

Discussion

Findings from the study revealed that the combination of all these psychosocial factors predict marital stability of the university women. This result corroborates the earlier findings of Gray (1992) that psychosocial factors are related to sexual relations. Many socio-demographic and intrapersonal factors as predictors of marital stability have been reported. Socio-demographic factors such
as age at marriage, religiosity, socio-economic status, and intrapersonal factors such as neuroticism or trait anxiety have been linked in varying degrees to marital stability (Karney & Bradbury, 1997; Caughlin, Huston, & Houts, 2000). For example, divorce has been found to be negatively correlated with marrying at a later age (35 years). Frequent attendance at religious services, and marital satisfaction is negatively correlated with interference and suspicion in marriage. Even today, socio-demographic and intrapersonal factors can be fruitful predictors of divorce or marital stability (Gottman, & DeClaire, 2001). However, other factors rather than psychosocial factors have been found to predict marital stability.

Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, and George (2001) argue that spouses bring both positive and negative intrapersonal attributes into marriage. These attributes, for instance, family history or personality, endure stably over time. The effects of these attributes are also relatively constant over time, meaning they impact the couple early in the marriage as well as later in the marriage (Karney & Bradbury, 1997). For example, “a personality trait like neuroticism, have been associated with lower marital satisfaction at all times. In contrast, interpersonal processes, reflected in variables such as marital interaction are likely to develop over time as marital stability develops (Karney & Bradbury, 1997).

Huston, Caughlin, Houts, Smith, & George (2001) also found evidence for an emotional contagion process, whereby wives who are married to husbands with high trait anxiety essentially “catch” their husband’s bad moods. In contrast to the present findings, there is a claim that socio-demographic or intrapersonal factors do not fully reveal the actual causes of marital break-up or changes in stability (Gottman & Notarius, 2002).

Also, research has revealed effective communication sustains marital stability. Numerous studies have emphasized the importance of communication in marriage stability. The impact of communication on marriage has been reported (Huston et al., 2001; Caughlin & Huston, 2002; Noller & Feeney, 2004). It was reported that couples who communicate may perceive their spouses to be more supportive, feel less fatalistic about childbearing and more in control of their reproductive decisions, and be less embarrassed about discussing these issues with their spouses than couples who do not communicate (Amato, 2001). Further evidence of the importance of communication for stable marriages comes in the fact that mode or pattern and frequency of
communication between couples was a good predictor of stability, when more often than not lack of communication comes from lack of achievement on the job; (Allen & Burrell, 2002) the fact that husbands’ reported anxiety was negatively related to stability, an anxiety that for men comes from failures or anticipated failures in performance, and from the fact that men’s alcoholism is negatively related to stability. However, some studies have found verbal communication having strong relationship with stability and sexual communication as stronger predictors of stability.

The reason might be that being intimate in relationships requires sound health on the part of both women and men in three areas - emotionally, mentally and physically. Communication is the primary vehicle of intimacy, but it remains the number one absent portion of the relationship quota--missed by both sexes nowadays (Afifi & Guerrero, 2000).

The third hypothesis tested in this study states that marital suspicions will not predict marital stability among married women in private universities. This hypothesis was equally rejected; implying that marital suspicion predicts marital stability. This study supported the findings of earlier studies which emphasized the impact of suspicion in marriage on stability of marriage. The kind of caring of women about their husbands as a positive force for stability can also be seen in the findings that women who trust their husbands, believe he could change for better, and claimed not to be above temptation, are in more stable marriages than women who are suspecting their husbands (Amato & Fowler, 2002). And wives’ expressed trust consistently relates to marital stability, a fact that no doubt reflects wives’ willingness to go the extra interpersonal mile if they are content with what is the general tenor of their marriages (Amato & Fowler, 2002).

Implications
The findings have implications for family interaction, harmonious living and communication. A growing number of studies still debate the dimensions of “marital quality” they are all in agreement that this is a multidimensional phenomenon. Some of these studies have led to theoretical models that include a variety of psychological and attitudinal variables as well as external variables of the social climate, such as pressures around which the marriage is built. Whatever the case may be, the agreement seems to recognize the storm in most marriages which call for skilled marriage counsellors.

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Recommendations of the Study
Professionals like counsellors, psychologists and social workers should be recruited to attend to various needs of couples and intending couples. As a result of the experience acquired from the conduct of this research, the following are hereby recommended for further studies:
As this study is limited to private universities in Ogun state, similar studies could be carried out in other states and other private as well as public universities.
Married women are the sample for this study; similar studies could combine married males and females. Variables such as ethnic group, religion and so on could be considered as predictors of marital stability in future studies.

Conclusion
This study corroborates previous researches that communication and marital suspicion collectively and independently predict marital stability. Communication as the bedrock of stability should be emphasized in all relationship, communication skills can be taught by marriage counsellors. Individuals in relationship are to desist from or guide against suspicion in order to enjoy stability in marriages.
References


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