

## Marital Satisfaction: Impact of Personality Traits and Anxiety/Depression in Pregnant Women.

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### Abstract

**Background:** The significance of personality characteristics in marital relationship has been severally documented, but only very few have concurrently studied the influence of anxiety/depression and personality in marital satisfaction in our environment. We set out to determine the relevance of personality traits, anxiety/depression in marital satisfaction.

**Materials and method:** It was a cross-sectional study of consecutive attendees of pregnant women in antenatal clinic of Enugu State University Teaching Hospital, who were interviewed with Hospital Anxiety/Depression Scale, Big Five Personality Inventory and Index of Marital Satisfaction.

**Result:** Marital dissatisfaction was positively correlated with Neuroticism ( $r = 0.16$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ), Anxiety ( $r = 0.33$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and Depression ( $r = 0.29$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), but was negatively correlated with Extroversion ( $r = -0.27$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ), Agreeableness ( $r = -0.078$ ,  $p = 0.27$ ), Conscientiousness ( $r = -0.027$ ,  $p = 0.71$ ), and Openness ( $r = -0.24$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). However, only Openness to experience, Neuroticism and Anxiety have predictive value.

**Conclusion:** Hence personality traits and psychopathology expressed by an individual may contribute immensely to the pattern and quality of interactions and perceived marital relationships in the family.

**Key words:** Marital, Satisfaction, Personality, Anxiety, Depression.

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### I. Introduction

Scholars commonly contend that ideal enduring relationships usually require the individuals involved to look beyond the physical appearance and concentrate much more on their personality characteristics. Reasoning along this line, past research has indicated personality traits to be associated with mate selection, relationship satisfaction and marital stability.<sup>1</sup> One of the consistent findings is that neuroticism is problematic to relationships. Spouses with high level of neuroticism are more likely to report dissatisfaction and divorce.<sup>2,3</sup> Sousou 2004<sup>4</sup> defined marital satisfaction as a construction involving a variety of dimensions like quality of communication, leisure interactions, cohesiveness on matters related to the relationship (e.g., child rearing and finances), and family history of distress. Some researchers have perceived marital satisfaction as a multidimensional construction comprised of various components (Sousou, 2004). Many of these studies tried to discover the sources of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. As a number of variables predicted marital satisfaction, investigators have worked on the various elements involved in the way people interact during their relationships. They have paid particular attention to the influence of personality traits on marital satisfaction since marital compatibility is affected by the personality characteristics that the two people bring to their marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Personality includes characteristics which are stable and enduring that reveals themselves across situations and events. Global assessments of personality have shown that the personality characteristics found among satisfied couples are different from those found among dissatisfied couples. The behaviours associated with specific personality characteristics can contribute to tranquility or conflict in the relationship.<sup>6</sup> In comparison to other models of personality, the five-factor model (FFM) encompasses the most basic dimensions of personality.<sup>7</sup> According to McCrae & John (1992),<sup>8</sup> the FFM consists of five aspects of personality (called the Big Five): neuroticism, extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness. Previous research has demonstrated robust relationships between romantic relationship quality, functioning, and outcomes and broad personality traits such as the Big Five.<sup>9</sup>

Extroversion is a measure of sociability and has a positive effect. Research on extroversion and marital satisfaction has shown inconsistent results. Some researchers reported that extroversion was associated with marital satisfaction,<sup>10, 11</sup> while others found non-significant or negative correlations between variables.<sup>12,13,14,15</sup> Also, research suggested that high conscientiousness was associated with greater marital satisfaction.<sup>10,11,12,16</sup> The research results on personality and marital relationship show that the two of the five factors in the FFM, openness to experience and agreeableness, are less strong. Thus, the three remaining personality factors,

neuroticism, extroversion, and conscientiousness, appear to be the most important in determining how couples experience and adjust to situations and conditions in marital relationships.

In a study conducted among 774 married couples from seven states in the United States of America using Minnesota Multi-phasic Personality Inventory (MMPI-2) to assess the partners' level of anxiety and depression. The outcome of the research showed that each spouse's level of anxiety and depression predicted not only their own marital satisfaction but their spouse's as well. The more anxious and/or depressed a spouse was, the more dissatisfied he or she was with the marriage. It was also noted that depression affected both spouses more than anxiety in how satisfied they felt about the marriage. Spouse's depression level had much more impact on marital satisfaction of the other spouse, than when one of them had anxiety.<sup>17</sup>

This study underscores the relevance of evaluating the mental health status of pregnant women such that in the presence of marital dissatisfaction, anxiety/or depression and the prevailing personality profile of the individual may also be properly assessed.

## **II. Materials and Method**

The study was done at the Antenatal Clinic of Enugu State University Teaching Hospital Enugu, Nigeria after obtaining ethical clearance from the Ethical Committee of the Hospital. It was a cross-sectional study of consecutive attendees of pregnant women who come for their routine antenatal check-up from May-August 2016, who gave informed consent and, met the inclusion criterion. A total of 200 participants aged 17 years and above were recruited.

**Study design:** It was a cross-sectional study of consecutive attendees.

**Study location:** The study was done at the ante-natal clinic of Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology of Enugu State University Teaching Hospital, Enugu.

**Study duration:** The study was conducted from May-August 2016.

**Sample size:** 200 participants.

**Sample size estimation:** We used the rule of the thumb to estimate a total number of 200 participants.

**Participants and selection method:** Participants were made up of consecutive attendees of pregnant women in the ante-natal clinics.

**Inclusion Criterion:** Pregnant women who consented to participate.

**Exclusion Criterion:** Women with any medical condition like severe malaria that made her indisposed to respond to questions were excluded from the study.

**Procedure methodology:** After obtaining informed consent, recruited participants were interviewed using Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) which was used to assess for the presence of depression-anxiety, while the Big Five Personality Inventory (BFI) determined the personality traits. The Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) questionnaire was used to find out the participants' level of marital satisfaction. In collaboration with other hospital workers adequate measures were put in place to ensure that no participant was interviewed more than once.

**Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS):** It is a 14-item scale, 7 of which relate to anxiety and the other 7 relate depression. Each item of the questionnaire is scored from 0-3, hence an individual may have a total score between 0-21 for either anxiety or depression. Cut-off point has been determined to be 8/21 for either anxiety or depression. For anxiety, this gave specificity and sensitivity of 0.78 and 0.9 respectively while for depression it gave specificity and sensitivity of 0.79 and 0.83 respectively. A score of 8-10 is considered as borderline case, while a score of 11-21 is regarded as abnormal case. This instrument has been validated and used in Nigeria.<sup>18</sup>

**Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS):** This is a 25 item inventory designed to measure current problems which have reduced marital satisfaction. It is a self administered questionnaire. There is direct scoring and reverse scoring of the items. Concerning direct scoring items, the shaded numbers are added as they are without adjustment, while in reverse scoring if the shaded numbers were 2,3,5,4,2,1, the real scores would be 4,3,1,2,4,5 respectively. The direct and indirect scores were added, and scores higher than 30 indicated poor or problematic marital satisfaction while scores lower than 30 indicated normal or adequate marital satisfaction. IMS has been adapted for use in Nigeria, Cronbach alpha internal consistency= 0.96.<sup>19</sup>

**Big Five Inventory (BFI):** This is a 44 item questionnaire that assesses personality from a five-dimensional perspective. The essence is to resolve personality into five broad distinct dimensions. The 5 dimensions or subscales include extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism and openness. Direct scoring is used for all the items and the subscales were scored separately. The scores higher than the norm indicate positive test and scores lower than the norm indicates negative test for each subscale. The Cronbach alpha coefficient=0.80, and the mean convergent validity coefficient of 0.75 and 0.85 with BFI authored by Costa & Mc Crea and Golberg respectively.<sup>20,21</sup> This instrument has been adapted and standardized for use in Nigeria.

**Statistical Analysis:** Data obtained were analysed using Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) version 20. Pearson's correlation test was used to test for association probabilities, while prediction was determined

with multiple regression tests. A p-value of 0.05 was taken to be statistically significant and the confidence interval (CI) was at 95%.

### III. Result

Positive correlations of marital dissatisfaction were observed with Neuroticism, Anxiety and Depressive scores, while Extroversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness and Openness were negatively correlated with marital dissatisfaction; however the correlations of both Agreeableness, Conscientiousness were not statistically significant. Using the multiple regression test, among these correlates, Openness to experience, Neuroticism and Anxiety were predictive.

**Table 1:** Correlation of marital satisfaction with anxiety/depression and personality traits.

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Final IMS	-							
2 Extroversion	<b>-.265**</b>	-						
3 Agreeableness	-.078	.462**	-					
4 Conscientiousne	-.027	.406**	.510**	-				
5 Neuroticism	<b>.161*</b>	.140*	.393**	.324**	-			
6 Openness	<b>-.241**</b>	.539**	.400**	.505**	.249**	-		
7 Anxiety score	<b>.330**</b>	-.170*	-.002	-.162*	.200**	-.128	-	
8 Depressio score	<b>.290**</b>	-.223**	-.154*	-.090	.151*	-.131	.475**	-

\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p \leq 0.01$ .

\* Correlation is significant at  $p \leq 0.05$ .

**Table 2:** Predicting marital satisfaction with anxiety/depression and personality traits.

Variables	B	p	95% confidence interval for B	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Extroversion	-.377	.077	-.796	.041
<b>Openness</b>	<b>-.385</b>	<b>.035</b>	<b>-.742</b>	<b>-.028</b>
<b>Neuroticism</b>	<b>.523</b>	<b>.018</b>	<b>.092</b>	<b>.953</b>
<b>Anxiety score</b>	<b>.923</b>	<b>.009</b>	<b>.236</b>	<b>1.628</b>
Depression score	.599	.110	-.137	1.336

### IV. Discussion

The present study demonstrated positive correlation of marital satisfaction with extroversion and openness to experience personality traits and negatively correlated with anxiety, depression and neuroticism personality trait. However, neuroticism, openness to experience personality trait and anxiety were predictive for marital satisfaction.

Extroversion is associated with positive emotions, and in agreement with the result of this study, reports of,<sup>22,23</sup> demonstrated positive links between extroversion and marital satisfaction, and in addition that extroversion is especially important in a woman's account in marriage.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, some studies have opined that extroversion has association with low marital satisfaction among husbands,<sup>25</sup> while some other scholars have found no association between them.<sup>26,27,28,29</sup>

In agreement with this present study,<sup>30,31,32</sup> replicated the well-documented link between neuroticism and marital dissatisfaction. Husbands and wives who reported high levels of neuroticism, or whose partners reported high levels of neuroticism, described their relationships as more dissatisfying. This may be due to the fact that neuroticism is related to affective instability and negative affect as fear, sorrow, angry, guilt feeling, and embarrassment. In a similar research, Amiri, et al, (2011)<sup>33</sup> found that neuroticism trait had a negative and significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

Other studies based on dating couples gave similar report with this present study that openness to experience is one of the 2 most valued characteristics of personality for mate selection.<sup>12</sup> Also Holland and Roisman 2008<sup>34</sup> demonstrated that partner's openness positively predicted relationship satisfaction. It was attested that similarity in openness quality among the couples was associated with greater satisfaction in the newlyweds<sup>35</sup> and married couples.<sup>36</sup> Certain scholars understood openness as an essential way of approaching the world that affects internal experience, accompanied by interpersonal interactions and social behavior.<sup>37</sup> However, Schaffhuser et al 2014a<sup>38</sup> demonstrated that partner's openness characteristics predicted negative relationship quality.

This present study also demonstrated negative correlation between marital satisfaction and those who had anxiety/depression. This finding is in consonance with what was reported by Odinka et al, 2018<sup>39</sup> in their cross sectional study of 309 randomly selected post-partum women using Hospital anxiety and depression scale and Marital Satisfaction Index to assess them. Those who had co-morbid anxiety and depression had worse marital dissatisfaction. However, the fact that marital dissatisfaction was predicted by high anxiety scores and not depression is not in tandem with what was reported by Whisman et al 2004 where only depression was

found to influence spouse's marital satisfaction. This observed variation in the findings may be due to differences in the methodology of the two studies.

## V. Conclusion:

The relevance of assessing marital satisfaction and associated factors cannot be over-emphasized. Marital satisfaction determines one's personal happiness and self fulfillment in a marital relationship. This goes a long way to affect well-being of children and women especially during pregnancy, and the entire family and society in general. This work has highlighted that neuroticism, anxiety, depression may be risk factors for marital dissatisfaction while personality traits like openness to experience and extroversion may be facilitating factors for marital satisfaction.

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