

## **Traditional Marriage Customs and Marital Stability among Married People in Yoruba Ethnic Group**

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**Abstract:** Recent high rate of marital instability is not only dishearten but also worrisome; attracting the concern of several social health professionals. Nonetheless, traditional marriage customs as being used in the olden days are norms that could influence people's dispositions and values place on marriage and invariably the quality of that marriage. This study therefore examined the influence and contribution of traditional marriage customs to marital stability. It further investigates whether traditional marriage customs would contribute to marital stability. Three hundred and sixty married men and women were selected from three Local Government Areas in Ondo State using a Multi-Stage Sampling Technique. The research instrument titled "Marriage Customs Questionnaire" was validated and administered by the researchers to respondents at their various places of worship, markets, works and schools. Three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data collected were analysed using correlation and regression. The results of the findings showed that there exists a significant relationship between variables of traditional marriage customs and marital stability among Yoruba. Furthermore, traditional marriage customs will significantly contribute to marital stability. Process of conflict settlements will significantly predict marital stability among the Yoruba ethnic group of Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Traditional, Marital Stability, Married People, Marriage Customs.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Family as a unit of social system appears to have come under serious attack. This poses a lot of concern to social health professionals like psychologists, counsellors, and sociologists. . Consequently, there have been various studies by researchers on the determinants, patterns, differentials of marital stability and instability.

Animashaun and Fatile (2011) ascribed the increase in marital instability to educational, social, economic and cultural changes in the marriage system. Owuamanam (2003) mentioned incompatibility, unfulfilled expectations and childlessness as part of the reasons why marriages go through crisis. Marital instability may affect every aspect of life of the victim and the society in general. Dimkpa (2010) asserted that marital instability is a serious problem which interferes with women's output at work, emotionally, educationally and socially. Recent increase in divorce rate makes someone to wonder if people really understand the concept of marriage.

Odejebi (2013) described marriage as a social institution that unites people in a special form of mutual dependence for the purpose of finding and maintaining a family. It is a culturally sanctioned union between two or more people that establish certain rights and obligations between them, their children and their in-laws. Havillard, Prins, WalrathMc, Bride (2011) noted that when viewed within the entire range of the past and present societies, marriage is more or less a durable union sanctioned by society. However, it is necessary that the relationship be formed and conducted in accordance with written customs and taboos as in primitive societies or in accordance with the established laws as in more sophisticated societies. (Encyclopaedia Americana, 1988)

Marital stability is harmonious relationship between the husband and the wife which is depicted by the presence of joy, love and peace in a home or marriage. Ngugi (2014) defined marital stability as a state in which couples in marriage continue to live in a harmonious way despite their marriage facing challenges. Gottman (1999) viewed marital stability as the extent to which a spouse considers dissolving the marriage or has already begun taking steps toward getting a divorce.

Larson and Holman identified three general domains of important predictors of marital stability and quality as; background and contextual factors, individual traits and behaviour and also couple's interactional processes. Positive individual traits include; extroversion, flexibility good self-esteem, assertiveness, commitment and love. Also, couple's trait, include communication skills cohesion, intimacy, power-sharing and agreement.

In the olden days, marriage seemed to be more stable, divorce was not common despite the fact that parents were the ones selecting marriage partners for their children which was called arranged marriage.

According to David &Defrain (1999) divorce was not common in arranged marriages except for the reason of infertility. Overtime, as a result of modernization and individualization, the situation has changed. Young people have gained considerable freedom from parental supervision and choice in marriage.

The question is; what would have brought about the current changes being experienced in the marriage institution today? In order to trace the problems of marriage, one has to go back to the root and check people's customs and see those things that were being done in the past that tended to make marriages stable but are no longer practiced or are fading away.

Equally important is the need to examine the factors that contribute to variation in the stability across culture.

On account of cultural diversity, given the multiplicity and variations of cultural groups in Nigeria some authors have alluded the general notion that marriages in Africa is a process rather than an event. (VandeWalle 1968, 1992; Isivgo-Abenihe 1994).

According to Isiugo-Abanihe (1994) there are a number of processes and procedures involved in the formation of marital unions among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria. A man does not just meet a woman and take her home as a wife. Indeed, this rarely happens in any culture. Rather, a man sees or get introduced to a lady, and then, the process of inquiry into her background starts.

The process of inquiry helps to uncover common ancestry or blood relation and unfavourable traits in the family. After such thorough inquiry has been done and such traits were not discovered then, processes such as courtship, formal introduction engagement, bridal negotiations, payment of bride price or wealth and eventually, the traditional and customary marriage takes place. (Isiugo-Abanihe 1994).

There are some aspects of the customs that appear to influence marital stability of couples. Alwolodu (2016) listed some factors these include; family involvement in marriage, period of courtship, bride price, dowry and financial independence, value placed on virginity and process of conflict settlement.

Traditional marriage customs place great importance on parental consent and family involvement in the choice of couple's marriage partner. This could have accounted for the relatively fewer divorces in the past because elders could be assumed to see through their noses more clearly than the young people that would have been blindfolded by love.

Courtship, which is the time spent by people intending to marry to study themselves appears to contribute to marital stability. Owuamanam (2003) observed that long period of courtship played an important role in traditional Africa marriage. Fagun (1999) described courtship as a character study stage in which most teething problems that ought to be encountered in marriage would have been solved within the period.

Another factor that tends to influence marital stability is bride price. Bride price is an essential requirement of a valid customary marriage in Nigeria. Falola (2001) described bride price as a custom that ensures marital stability. In Yoruba land, bride price places a legal bound on the wife. In the olden days in Yoruba custom, bride price was held in high esteem without which marriage consummation was impossible. However, nowadays bride price in the Yoruba custom is low, and not much importance is attached to it as in Igbo custom. Moreover, most Yoruba parents usually return the bride price to the couple with the claim that they do not want to sell their daughters. Therefore, since acquiring a wife does not cost much, most men may not think twice before considering divorce in case of strong disagreement.

Most marriages seem to break up today due to infidelity of all kinds. Traditional virginity test which helps to check indecency and pre-marital sexual relationships seem to have been abandoned. Oyebola (2001) pointed out that attitudes toward pre-marital sexual relationship is becoming more liberal. In Yoruba traditions, virginity test used to be conducted by spreading a white cloth on the matrimonial bed on the night of marriage consummation. In the morning, the cloth would be examined for blood stains. The husband would send a gift of money and kolanut to the bride's parent if the new bride was found to be a virgin, this tended to build trust and a long lasting relationship later in the future.

Conflict resolution is an aspect of customs that influence marital stability among couples in Yoruba ethnic group. Elders with wisdom and experience were usually engaged to settle discord between spouses. Traditional resolution techniques such as mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, and negotiation as well as cross examination which were employed by Africans in the past, offer great prospects for peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships. Olaoba (2001) submitted that elders, within the culture of the Yorubas, are the power house of wisdom and knowledge. Since all family members are deeply involved in the marriage,

they tend to be committed to see to the success of the marriage. Whenever there is problem, dispute and disagreement, it becomes easier for family members to intervene because they were part of the whole process in the first instance. Adeyinka&Buhari (2014) posited that conflict resolution in traditional African societies provides opportunity to interact with the parties concerned; it promotes consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions and enactment of order in the society. In Yoruba customs, owing to the cordiality developed during the suitor's visit to the wife's home or female's visit to the bridegroom's family during courtship, it could be easy to settle discord between the spouses if such arises later in their marriage. Also in the olden days spouses tended to endure each other because of the shame of constantly involving kinsmen to settle disputes. Adeyinka&Buhari (2014) further noted that elders were saddled with the responsibility of handling cases such as lack of good care for women and children by the husband and infidelity while fighting among adolescents or young people were in the past accorded an impromptu settlement by the passers-by who normally ensured restoration of peace and harmony by scolding.

The ability of the husband to provide for his home or to meet up with the responsibility goes a long way to foster love and peace in a marriage. In situation where the husband is not able to meet the needs of his family, there tends to be problems and incessant quarrels in such homes. According to Babatunde (1982) Yoruba people will say "atigbeyawokekereowoobe lo soro" that is "it is easy to get married but what is difficult is to provide daily food for the wife" in the traditional settings in the olden days, people used to learn one trade or the other or get involved in farming and craft in order to be financially independent but nowadays due to unemployment and high cost of living, it seems that achievement of financial independence has become difficult for young men who consider themselves as being of age. They therefore rush into marriage without being financially independent.

The aforementioned factors have therefore led to increasing concern on how to ensure stability in marriage.

### **Objective**

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of traditional marriage customs on marital stability in Yoruba ethnic group.

### **Hypotheses**

Three null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant relationship between traditional marriage customs and marital stability among Yoruba ethnic citizen.
2. There is no significant contribution of traditional marriage customs to marital stability in Yoruba ethnic group.
3. None of the traditional marriage customs will significantly predict marital stability among Yoruba.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive design because it would enable the research to relate existing characteristics of the variables of interest in the population. The study population covers all married people in Yoruba ethnic group. The sample consisted of 360 respondents, while multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting participants for this study. Self-constructed questionnaire was the instrument of data collection. Respondents who could not read or write were interviewed using the Yoruba version of the questionnaire. Pearson Moment correlation and Regression analysis were used to analyse the data.

## **II. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Hypothesis I:**

There is no significant relationship between traditional marriage customs and marital stability among Yoruba ethnic group.

**TABLE I:** Relationship of traditional marriage customs and marital stability

<b>Model</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R square</b>	<b>Std. Error of the estimate</b>
1	0.199	0.040	0.023	15.020

Table 1 shows that all the variables of traditional marriage customs jointly explained about 4% ( $R^2 = 0.040$ ) of the total variance in marital stability. The remaining 96% unexplained variance is largely due to variation in other variables outside the regression model.

However, there existed a significant relationship ( $R=0.199$ ,  $P/ 0.05$ ) between variables of traditional marriage customs and marital stability among Yoruba. This result is consistent with that of Owuamanam (2003) who found out that traditional marriage customs of couples goes a long way in influencing marital stability.

Evidence from this study revealed that although there exist significant relationship between traditional marriage customs and marital stability in Yoruba ethnic group. Traditional marriage customs jointly explained only about 4% ( $R^2=0.040$ ) of the total variance in marital stability. This implies that the relationship is very minimal.

Consequently, the possible explanation for the low relationship could be due to the combined effect of urbanization and westernization which must have shifted emphasis of people from the customs and traditions.

In addition, this has led to change in values and orientations which put people in a cultural dilemma and make them to independently articulate their own history, culture and identity.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant contribution of traditional marriage customs to marital stability in Yoruba ethnic group.

**TABLE 2:** Contribution of traditional marriage customs to marital stability.

Model	SS	DF	MS	F-Ratio	Sig.
Regression	3300.652	6	550.109		
Residual	79636.671	353	225.600		
Total	82937.322	359		2.438	0.05

Table 2 shows that the calculated value is greater than the critical value ( $F=2.438$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant contribution of traditional marriage customs to marital stability is rejected.

Based on the analysis above, the study revealed that the length of courtship, family involvement, financial independence of couples, value placed on virginity before marriage, process of conflicts resolution jointly contributes to marital stability.

**Hypothesis 3**

None of the traditional marriage customs will significantly predict marital stability among Yoruba.

**TABLE 3:** Multiple regression showing the prediction of traditional marriage customs.

Model	B	STD Error	BETA	T	Sig.
CONSTANT	34.525	5.399	-	-	-
FIM	0.249	0.162	0.093	1.532	0.126
COURTSHIP	0.221	0.317	0.044	0.698	0.486
BRP	0.580	0.301	0.122	1.928	0.055
FIN	0.361	0.230	0.099	1.565	0.119
VPVBM	0.466	0.336	0.086	1.386	0.167
PCSM	0.897	0.314	0.183	2.857	0.05

Table 3 shows that the single best predictor of marital stability is the process of conflicts settlements with a beta weight of 0.183 (18.3%). This closely follows by bride price with a beta weight of 0.122 (12.2%), financial independence with a beta weight of 0.099 (10%) family involvement with a beta weight of 0.093 (9.3%) value placed on virginity before marriage with a beta weight of 0.086(9%) while courtship with a beta weight of 0.044(4.4%) is the least predictor of marital stability among Yoruba. Only process of conflict settlements among the entire variables will significantly predict marital stability among Yoruba while others do not.

Therefore, by implication, process of conflict settlements is the best predictor of marital stability among the Yoruba.

The result revealed that in Yoruba culture extended family members such as uncles, elders, clan chiefs and siblings are all involved in conflict settlement.

These result revealed that families usually intervene or mediate when there are problems, conflicts between husbands and wives when the marriage relationship is threatened in any way.

**III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study concludes that traditional conflict resolution goes a long way in affecting marital stability .Consequently, traditional resolution techniques such as mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, and negotiation as well as cross examination which were employed by Africans in the past, offer great prospects for peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships in post-conflict periods than the modern method of litigation settlements in law courts.

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