

**CONFIDENTIALITY AND FORGIVENESS AS DETERMINANTS OF
MARITAL STABILITY AS EXPRESSED BY RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN
KWARA STATE**

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Abstract

The main focus of this study is to investigate confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability as expressed by religious leaders in Kwara State. The population of the study comprised all religious leaders in Kwara State from Christianity and Islamic faith. The sample of the study comprised 600 randomly selected religious leaders from the three senatorial districts in Kwara State. They responded to a questionnaire titled Confidentiality and Forgiveness as Determinants of Marital Stability Questionnaire (CONFORDEMASQ) Responses from the questionnaire were analysed using t-test statistics. The results showed that the religious leaders agreed with all the identified items on confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability. The result also revealed that there is no significant difference in the perception of religious leaders on the influence of confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability based on religious type. It is recommended that couples who are experiencing instability should try to exercise confidentiality and forgive each other alongside visiting professional marriage counsellors in order to enjoy stability in their marriages.

Keywords: *Confidentiality; Forgiveness; Marriage; Religious leaders*

Introduction

Marriage is a very important event in man's life. However, many challenges are facing marriages today that several scholars are worried about its future stability. Religious leaders and adherents of different faiths are also concerned. In order to achieve stability in marriage, there are some ingredients that must be put in place are mainly certain factors that promote mutual understanding and enhance marriage stability. The term marriage is defined by Burke (2000) as both a personal relationship and an institution while some religious leaders see marriage as an institution which promotes intimate interpersonal relationship whereby the couple are both teachers and learners at the same time, they can still learn from others and each other on how to make the marriage stable and work effectively.

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Every reasonable partner in marriage desires to have a long lasting and enjoyable relationship with his/her partner. For this to be accomplished there should be cordiality and mutual love and understanding. Burke (2000) opined that marriage is to be understood as a covenant, which in Jewish tradition is an agreement, which forms a relationship. However, this covenant does not cease, even if the consent of one of the parties is withdrawn. Therefore, marriage should not be rushed into without counting the cost. Adekeye (2010) observed that many couples today enter marriage union as singles with emotional and infatuation drives without true love, acceptance of partner and marriage courtesy. In a situation like this, marriages break up very early while others struggle to stay for few years.

In the recent past, there have been lots of crisis in religious settings (Adewale, 2009). These crises have caused instability in homes of many worshippers. Religious leaders have been settling many family misunderstanding and resolving conflicts brought by their worshippers. For instance, cases of husbands and wives who prefer to confide in the third party like parents, friends or relatives rather than their spouses show that they have little or no confidence in each other. One observes that when the other gets to know about the leak in confidentiality, he or she may also want to retaliate. Confidentiality has to do with keeping of secret information between two or more parties. In a marriage context, the husband and wife should keep private information between each other, they should not reveal their secret to another person. Confidentiality, in Akinade's (2010) view, is keeping a reasonable and rational verbal or written secret or information between two or more parties. It is a thing that is very essential in keeping marriage stable. It entails that when secret or private issues are discussed between the parties involved, such issue should not be discussed outside the parties. Nwoye (1991) also saw confidentiality as a legal issue between or among the particular people concerned in which it becomes an illegal case if revealed. In the same vein, when a spouse exposes or reveals his/her partner's secret information to another person (a third party), there will be a lot of crises and quarrel in the home. Confidentiality plays many roles in marital stability. Hence, there is a need for exploration and documentation of confidentiality as a determinant of marital stability.

Retief (2001) observed that some men are still under the power and influence of their mothers. When this happens, the husband's confidence for the wife will be automatically shared with the mother and this may cause unnecessary stress for the wife. This does not only cause stress for the wife but it also hinders the husband from cleaving to the wife. Confidentiality goes a long way in keeping families together but the absence of it does not only affect the couple but also the children, the religious settings as well as the society at large.

Forgiveness is another determinant of marital instability that this study is focusing on. The word forgiveness is defined as the ability to stop being angry when one feels offended and try to overlook the wrong done by another person. In Yahaya (2008), forgiveness is described as the willingness to pardon others for their wrongs and readiness to accept or relate with the offender without intentionally being wrong in return. The implication of this is that the offended should be willing and ready to overlook the offence (s) even before the offender apologizes. In his own view, Samuel

(2012) noted that without forgiveness, life will be full of life long resentments and retaliation. Many crises will emerge and peace will cease when there is no forgiveness. Therefore, couples who forgive will leave together in peace while those couples who do not forgive may not experience peace of mind and their marriage may experience instability.

Adewale (2007) expatiated that unforgiveness is the second most potent weapon of the devil against marriage. To forgive means to decide not to blame someone or be angry with him/her when the person has done something wrong. It is observed that when lack of confidentiality sets in, in marriage, it raises the issue of unforgiveness among couples. One observes that despite the oath that couples take when they are joined together by their religious leaders, lack of confidentiality and forgiveness still persist in marriages. Thus, this study is aimed at investigating confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability.

Statement of the Problem

There has been increase in marital instability in recent times. According to Adewale (2007), many marriages are in disarray. Adewale (2007) reported some statistical proof of the marital instability among couples. Adewale's study showed that 67% of women would have loved to quit their marriages, one out of every five men confessed to have beaten their wives at least once and two out of five men could have married another woman.

Researches have been carried out on some determinants of marital stability. Yahaya, Esere, Ogunsanmi and Oniye (2008) conducted a study on determinants of stability in marriage. Their study found out that sex, commitment, and effective communication are factors that enhance marital stability. Kore (2009) stressed the place of financial maturity as a key determinant affecting stability of marriage. Oniye (2004) also viewed religious compatibility as a determinant of marital stability and satisfaction. Oniye (2004) observed that couples who have similar religious beliefs and ideologies have shown increase in the rate at which they stay together satisfactorily.

Confidentiality and forgiveness could be missing links in stable marriages. Researches have been done in the area of factors that enhance marital stability. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, the area of confidentiality and forgiveness have not been properly explored and documented. The purpose of this study is to bridge the gap in research by investigating confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability as expressed by religious leaders in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions evolved to guide the conduct of the study.

1. Is confidentiality a determinant of marital stability?
2. Is forgiveness a determinant of marital stability?
3. Is there any difference in the expression of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on the influence of confidentiality as a determinant of marital stability?
4. Is there any difference in the expression of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on the influence of forgiveness as a determinant of marital stability?

Research Hypotheses

For the purpose of this study, two null hypotheses were stated in the null to avoid any bias thus:

1. There is no significant difference in the expression of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of confidentiality as a determinant of marital stability.
2. There is no significant difference in the expression of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of forgiveness as a determinant of marital stability.

Methodology

The descriptive survey method was chosen for the conduct of this study, which investigated confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability as expressed by religious leaders in Kwara State. The population for this study comprised all religious leaders from the Christian and Islamic faith in Kwara State, while the target population comprised religious leaders in selected religious organizations from two local governments each from the three senatorial districts of the state. The study sample comprised 600 religious leaders which were selected using multistage sampling technique. The instrument employed in gathering data from the respondents was a researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Confidentiality and Forgiveness as Determinants of Marital Stability Questionnaire". The face and content validity of the instrument was ascertained by five experts in the Counsellor Education Department of the Faculty of Education in University of Ilorin. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used by the researchers to analyze the data that was collected for the study. Frequency count and percentage were used for the biodata in section "A" while the t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the respondents and to test the null-hypotheses. The t-test procedure is considered appropriate in this work because it is a parametric test often used by researchers to compare the mean of two

Results

Demographic Data: This section presents the summary results of data obtained from the study in frequency count and percentage in a tabular form below:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents by Religion

| Religion | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| Christianity | 310 | 51.7 % |
| Islam | 290 | 48.3% |
| Total | 600 | 100.0% |

Table 4 indicates that 600 respondents participated in the study in which 310 representing 51.7% of the respondents are Christians while 290 representing 48.3% of the sample are Moslems.

Table 2: Rank order of confidentiality as Determinant of Marital Stability

| Items | In my opinion, marital stability is enhanced when married couples: | Mean | Rank |
|-------|--|------|------------------|
| 7 | have free mind with one another. | 3.80 | 1 st |
| 8 | are honest to one another. | 3.79 | 2 nd |
| 9 | are truthful to one another. | 3.77 | 3 rd |
| 5 | see one another as one. | 3.76 | 4 th |
| 1 | confide in one another. | 3.71 | 5 th |
| 2 | have trust for one another. | 3.71 | 5 th |
| 20 | plan together. | 3.63 | 7 th |
| 12 | are open to one another. | 3.62 | 8 th |
| 17 | believe in one another. | 3.61 | 9 th |
| 3 | do not betray one another's confidence. | 3.58 | 10 th |
| 16 | are honest in their communication. | 3.58 | 10 th |
| 6 | live as friend with one another. | 3.56 | 12 th |
| 11 | are one another's best confident. | 3.56 | 12 th |
| 13 | have free flow of intimate communication. | 3.53 | 14 th |
| 10 | have no hidden agenda. | 3.52 | 15 th |
| 15 | keep one another's secret. | 3.50 | 16 th |
| 14 | share their secrets with one another. | 3.36 | 17 th |
| 18 | do not allow fear in their communication. | 3.35 | 18 th |
| 19 | do not hide their past from one another. | 3.07 | 19 th |
| 4 | confide in their parents. | 2.76 | 20 th |

Table 7 indicates that the item that rated highest is item 7 with a mean score of 3.80 which states that marital stability is enhanced when married couples have free mind with one another. This is followed by item 8 at the mean score of 3.79 which states that marital stability is enhanced when couples are honest to one another. The least rated item is item 4 with a mean score of 2.76: This item stated that confidentiality can be enhanced when couples confide in their parents.

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Table 3: Rank order of Forgiveness as Determinant of Marital Stability

| Items | In my opinion, forgiveness: | Mean | Rank |
|-------|--|------|------------------|
| 12 | brings progress and success in marriage. | 3.77 | 1 st |
| 17 | keeps couples together. | 3.75 | 2 nd |
| 8 | is a wise thing that couples need to keep their marriage stable. | 3.74 | 3 rd |
| 6 | brings peaceful relationship among couples. | 3.70 | 4 th |
| 2 | enhances marital stability. | 3.69 | 5 th |
| 10 | helps couples to be free with one another. | 3.69 | 6 th |
| 9 | helps couples to understand themselves better. | 3.62 | 7 th |
| 4 | enhances confidentiality among couples. | 3.60 | 8 th |
| 3 | encourages mutual understanding among couples. | 3.59 | 9 th |
| 11 | enhances good health of both couple. | 3.54 | 10 th |
| 13 | is difficult when there is no confidence among couples. | 3.51 | 11 th |
| 7 | must flow among couples without limitation. | 3.50 | 12 th |
| 16 | is a religious phenomenon in marital stability. | 3.49 | 13 th |
| 5 | enhances romantic relationship. | 3.44 | 14 th |
| 14 | enhances positive differences in marriage. | 3.40 | 15 th |
| 1 | is sine qua non for marital stability. | 3.38 | 16 th |
| 15 | has to do with temperamental compatibility among couples. | 3.27 | 17 th |
| 19 | is easier for couples who have married for long. | 3.20 | 18 th |
| 20 | is easier for couples who patronize marriage counsellors. | 3.20 | 18 th |
| 18 | is easier for couples who are newly married (e.g 1-5 years). | 3.15 | 20 th |

The results in Table 3 shows that item 12 (forgiveness brings progress and success in marriage) ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.77. It was followed by item 17 (forgiveness keeps couples together in love) with a mean score of 3.75. The least rated item is item 18. It has a mean score of 3.15 and stated that forgiveness is easier for couples who are newly married (e.g. 1-5 years).

Hypotheses Testing

There are two null hypotheses formulated for this study. They were tested using t-test statistical method. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of confidentiality as a determinant of marital stability.*

Table 2: Result of t-test Comparing Respondents' Perception on Influence of Confidentiality as a Determinant of Marital Stability Based on Religion

| Religion | N | Mean | SD | df | Cal. t-val. | Crit. t-val |
|--------------|-----|---------|---------|-----|-------------|-------------|
| Christianity | 310 | 70.9226 | 6.88233 | 598 | 0.59 | 1.96 |
| Islam | 290 | 70.6069 | 6.52310 | | | |

Table 15 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.59 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis 1 which states that "there is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of confidentiality as a determinant of marital stability is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on Influence of forgiveness on Marital Stability.*

Table 3: Results of t-test Comparing Respondents' Perception on Influence of Forgiveness as a Determinant of Marital Stability Based on Religion

| Religion | N | Mean | SD | df | Cal. t-val | Crit. t-val |
|--------------|-----|---------|---------|-----|------------|-------------|
| Christianity | 310 | 70.4968 | 7.14471 | 598 | 0.96 | 1.96 |
| Islam | 290 | 69.9448 | 6.6980 | | | |

Table 16 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.963 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 alpha level. Hence the null hypothesis 2 which states that "there is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of forgiveness as a determinant of marital stability is accepted.

Discussion of Findings

Analysis of the items on the questionnaire revealed that confidentiality and forgiveness are good determinants of marital stability as contained in Tables 2 and 3. The findings revealed that the religious leaders agreed with the 20 identified items on confidentiality as a determinant of marital instability (in varying degrees) with items 7, 8 and 9 ranking 1st, 2nd and 3rd respectively.

In Table 2, item 7 is ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.80 which says, "Marital stability is enhanced when married couples have free mind with one another." This confirms with Adedayo (2011) who observed that, in a marriage where the husband and the wife feel free to confide in each other, they will also have free mind. Item 8 which states that, "marital stability is enhanced when married couples are honest to one another" is ranked 2nd with a mean score of 3.79. Pelt (2008) confirms this when he notes that, without honesty and trust, there can be no effective marriage because there will be no openness between the couple and every conversation will be inhibited. The third ranked item is item 9 which states that "marital stability is enhanced when couples are truthful to one another." This item has a mean score of 3.77. According to Adekeye

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(2010), couples' truthfulness to one another is foundational to a highly effective marriage. Items 5, 1 and 2 rank 4th, 5th and 5th (item 1 and 2 fall in 5th rank) with mean scores of 3.76, 3.71 and 3.71 respectively with the statements, marital stability is enhanced when couples, "see one another as one", "confide in one another" and "have trust for one another." This is in line with Pelt (2008), Adedayo (2011) and Adewale (2008) who are of the opinion that: couples should see themselves as one body; couples have no basis for relating as husband and wife when they cannot confide in each other and without honest and trust there can be no openness between the couples and every conversation will be inhibited.

In Table 3, item 12 is ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.77. It states that, "in my opinion, forgiveness brings progress and success in marriage." This is in confirmation with Adewale (2007) that observed that lack of forgiveness also inhibit family progress, encourages hatred and destroys love. Item 17 is ranked 2nd with a mean score of 3.7500. The item states that, "forgiveness keeps couples together in love", Eggerichs (2004) confirmed this when he writes that there should be no limit to couples forgiving each other if love should reign in the home. Item 8 is ranked 3rd with a mean score of 3.7400. The item states that, "forgiveness is a wise thing that couples need to keep their marriage stable." This confirms Adewale's (2008) work that highlighted that, one of the wise things to do in marriage is to forgive generally. Items 6 (3.70), item 2 (3.69) and item 10 (6.90) follow the first 3 ranked items above. The items show that, forgiveness, brings peaceful relationship among couples, enhances marital stability and helps couples to be free with one another respectively. These confirm the work of Adewale (2007) who affirms that the peace in a marriage will be removed when couples do not forgive one another. Sheri and Bob (2000) also observed that lack of forgiveness easily kills marital stability. The last ranked item here is item 18 with a mean score of 3.15. The item reveals that forgiveness is easier for couples who are newly married (e.g. 1-5 years). Adewale (2007) commented on this that couples (even at the beginning of marriage) should make room for offences in their heart; avoid keeping of offences records or repeating it verbally.

Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested. There is no significant difference found in the perception of respondents on confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability based on religion. The findings show that the two hypotheses were accepted which means that there is no significant difference in the perception of all categories of respondents on the variables compared. There is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of confidentiality on marital stability. This fact is also in line with Burke (2000) who noted that, marriage in Jewish tradition is an agreement which forms a relationship. Adekeye (2010) supports this fact when he writes that couples need to trust and confide in each other (irrespective of their religious affiliation) in order to have a stable home.

There is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of forgiveness as a determinant of marital stability. Since the findings show that this hypothesis is accepted, it means that there is no significant difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of forgiveness on marital stability. This is confirmed by Adewale (2007) who stated that

when couples do not forgive, their prayer to their Creator may be hindered. Kore (2009) also affirmed that marriage relationship is second only to our relationship with God, so it should not be treated lightly by anybody. Adewale (2000) confirmed this when he emphasizes that "to err is human but to forgive is divine." This confirms Burke (2000) that marriage should be understood as a covenant which should not cease even if the consent of one of the parties is withdrawn.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed confidentiality and forgiveness are determinants of marital stability. That there exists no significant difference in the expression of Christian and Muslim religious leaders on influence of confidentiality and forgiveness as determinants of marital stability.

Recommendations

- The study reveals that confidentiality and forgiveness are very essential in a marriage relationship and the absence of any of them can cause problems in a home. It implies that professional counsellors have a lot to do to ensure that confidentiality as well as forgiveness are included and emphasized in counselling their clients who are married in order to enjoy stability in their marriage. This will help marriage counsellors to also give singles who will like to marry the necessary factors needed to put in mind. This implies that Guidance and Counseling professionals will play more vital roles in pre-marital counselling of intending couples and even in the lives of married couples.
- Religious leaders can also help their members by organizing seminars for married couples and intending couples on how they can keep their homes stable. Hence confidentiality and forgiveness should be emphasized. This could be effective if professional marriage counsellors are involved.
- Couples should bear in mind that confidentiality is very important to keep the family together as one. Husband and wife should relate with each other with free mind in everything they do. Couples who are facing instability should try to pardon their spouses' wrongs for complete forgiveness. Couples and intending couples should endeavour to seek counsellors' assistance.

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