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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### EFFECTS OF LENGTH OF MARRIAGE AND NUMBER OF CHILDREN ON MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG BAPTIST COUPLES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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#### ABSTRACT

The present study investigated the effectiveness of assertiveness training and marital communication skills. The moderating effect of length of marriage and the number of children were also examined. The study adopted pre-test-post test control quasi-experimental design with 3 x 2 x 2 factorial multistage sampling technique was used to select 84 participants; representing married couples who were selected from the three local Baptist churches of the Baptist conferences in Lagos. The comprehensive marital satisfaction scale  $r = 0.98$  was the research instruments used. Two (2) hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance using Analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) and Duncan post hoc test. The study revealed that there was significant main effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction ( $F_{1, 31} = 4.90$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) it was also revealed that there was significant main effect of the number of children on marital satisfaction ( $F_{1, 31} = 6.24$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). Based on these findings, married and would-be-couples are encouraged to give birth to a small size of children they can manage as that would reduce stress associated with parenting.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

Marriage is perceived by Waite and Gallagher (2001) as a social institution under which a man and a woman establish their decision to live as husband and wife by legal commitment and or religious ceremonies. One ultimate thing that must be born in mind is that marriage institution is not accidental, but meant to achieve certain purposes. Marriage is also a socially acknowledged and approved sexual union between two adult individuals (Amato & Deboer, 2001). It is a unique institution that affirms and supports a distinct sociology in human culture; bridging of the gender gap, facilitates the generation of life through the fusion of sexes; and promotes the birthright of children to know, to be connected to, and to be in stable relationship with their natural parents (Papeboes & Whitehead, 2001). Marriage is a legal union between a man and a woman as husband and wife, which further connotes matrimony, wedlock, alliance, association and union (Ariyo, 2005). Deducing from the definitions given above, certain purposes that constitute marriage are unveiled as follows: companionship; social integration of persons, approved sexual union; mutual commitment; mutual growth, bridging of the gender gap; and promoting the birthright of children. National polls showed that what people consider being very important in marriage (that is, love, sexual fidelity and ability to talk about feelings) have been fairly similar over the past two decades (Roper Organization, 1990). It was also found that a person's beliefs about marriage and how marital satisfaction was achieved might significantly affect one's expectations and

readiness for marriage (Larson, 1988a, 1992; Larson & Holman, 1994). Marriage as a matter of fact can be defined as a legal term describing certain relationship concerning individuals in order to fulfill three different types of needs: material, sexual and psychological (Saxton, 1992). According to Thomas (2002), marriage is more than physical attraction, biological union and social integration. It involves total commitment, self-donation to one another, and taking responsibilities that lead to mutual well-being. Marriage celebration may differ from culture to culture and from religion to religion. However, most people enter into it with the right expectations, joy and happiness with the full sense of accomplishing the purpose for which marriage is established. This is corroborated by Esere (2002) that marriage is usually contracted amidst joy, happiness and merry-making for the couple, family members and friends. Findings suggest that a happy marriage is conducive to a long, healthy life (Waite & Gallagher 2000). The researcher wonders why the joy of marriage could turn soar suddenly. This experience by couple may be because they lack the ability to face the challenge and problems that arise and, or they are yet to understand factors that favour marital joy. The reality of it is that each marriage has its own unique challenges and problems. The question is not whether they will arise but how to face them when they do (Powell, 2005). The unfortunate thing, according to Ariyo (2004) is that when these challenges occur, many marriages become disestablished. Many marriages become disestablished when couples are not able to manage challenges such as challenges of resolving their conflict, sexual fulfillment, good communication, mutual commitment, child bearing and rearing. The phenomenon of marital problem is world wide, not limited to Nigeria alone. The statistics released by National Centre for Health, Marriage and Divorce (2003), revealed that

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divorce rate in Canada, England and Wales Greece, the Netherlands and United States have more than double since 1970. The source also showed that divorce around the world has nearly quadruped since early 1960 in Britain. Divorce affects about a third of marriage in Canada and Japan, couples getting married have not more than 50-50 chance of staying together in United States. Divorce ends about two out of every five marriages in Zimbabwe. The situation could be worse in Nigeria particularly Lagos where marital relationships are being broken on a daily basis. Some divorce cases in 2005 at Grade "A" customary court, Somolu Local Government Area, Lagos also showed that Five (5) of the eight (8) cases i.e. 62.5% ended up in divorce. One (1) of the eight (8) cases i.e. 12.5% did not end up in divorce while two (2) of the eight (8) cases i.e. 25% were yet to be decided. This shows that marital relationship is in a serious mess. Spouses are expected to know and practice good interpersonal relationships (Akinade, 1997). The principles that can help marriages grow include increasing marital happiness, understanding, love for each other and a sense of fulfillment; to become respectable models to other couples; to keep unwanted people out of the marital life and enjoying more interpersonal quality time together (Akinade, 1997).

This may not be so these days when everybody, especially marriage partners, are struggling to get money to the detriment of their relationships. The absent – father syndrome has now been extended to include the absent – mother as both parents struggle to keep jobs as well as maintain marriage and families. They wake up at around 4.00am leave their homes at around 4.30am to return home at around 10.30pm or more when the children with either one or non of the spouses must have slept. No time for the family members. The more they have no time for one another the more the gap in their relationships is widening, creating problems the money they are struggling to get may not solve. Money is good and it is needed in the home but should not be sought for at the expenses of marital relationship. In a similar vain, Gottman (1995), Holman and Li (1997), submitted that romance was the most important ingredient in the newly wed relationship and was kept alive by frequent interactions, spending time together, and openly disclosing one's thoughts and feelings.

Individuals who admire, support, and are proud of each other in their respective endeavours and achievements openly express appreciation and fulfill emotional needs, build a satisfying and enduring relationship (Bell, Daly & Gonzalez, 1987). Judging from the above, it is evident that marital satisfaction is characterized by joy and happiness; love; respect; mutual commitment; conflict resolution skill; sexual fulfillment; good money management; openness and effective communication and spending quality time together among others. In Nigeria, evidence from the literature indicates that the factors that favour spousal happiness and marital joy are yet to be understood by couples (Osiki, 1997). The researcher observed that up till now a good number of couples are yet to understand that good communication skills, a genuine sense of assertiveness, ability to resolve conflict harmoniously, mutual commitment, sexual fulfillment, love, respect, spending time together are factors that favour marital satisfaction. Considering the above attributes of marital satisfaction and the deteriorating nature of marital relationship then there is need for quick intervention on enhancement of marital satisfaction among both young and old couples. Younger married couples

are couples below ten (10) years in their marriages while older married couples are couples above ten (10) years in their marriages (Amao-Kehinde, 1998). Perhaps one or both spouses entered marriage with high expectations but lack the skills that are necessary for long-term relationship; such skills include communication and conflict resolution (Ariyo, 2003). To achieve a measurable level of success in marital relationships, counselling and counselling psychologists have to pay more attention in enhancing marital satisfaction. There is also an urgent need to enhance couples' ability in doing all that will make their marriages work. It is on this note that this study becomes highly necessary in examining the efficacy of Assertiveness Training and Marital Communication Skills in enhancing marital satisfaction among couples in Lagos State, Nigeria. Assertiveness is defined as a combination of appropriate, timely, verbal and non-verbal behaviour that are exhibited in an interpersonal encounter such as marriage (Akinade, 1997).

Counsellors have identified the following elements as constituting an assertive behaviour: congruent eye contact, appropriate gestures, adequate body posture and facial expression, timing of responses, content of speech, voice tone, inflection and volume (Akinade, 1987). Indeed, it has been observed that body language has a huge part when it comes to being assertive (Lee, 2008). Assertiveness is actually the ability to stand up for yourself, tackle issues face to face, state your own personal views, and defend others when they are being taken advantage of without being bossy and overbearing (Lee, 2008). According to Lee (2008), being assertive is not only about being confident, it is also about understanding your spouse and other members of the family and the empathy that you give them. Assertiveness Training is a behavioural therapy technique which prepares an individual to stand up for himself or herself, to know and achieve his or her rights, and also take cognizance of the need to strike a balance between assertiveness and aggressiveness (Morse & Watson, 1979). Marital Communication Skills focus on the abilities of the spouses to pass across information or message from one to the other person in such a way that what is meant by the speaker (husband or wife) is also interpreted by the listener (wife or husband).

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, assertiveness training and communication skills have not been frequent application used as packages to enhance marital satisfaction among Nigeria couples. Marital satisfaction referred to an individual's subjective evaluation of the marital relationship (Taylor, Peplau and Sears, 1997). Satisfaction may be used interchangeably with happiness, lack of distress, quality. Perhaps, assertiveness training technique has not been applied as a treatment package either to enhance or to improve marital satisfaction. Akinade, (1987) used assertiveness training to treat shyness among adolescents, Asuzu, (1998) also made use of assertiveness technique to treat promiscuity among adolescents in Ibadan. Similarly, Akponye, (1999) used assertiveness training to increase self esteem of female adolescents from divorced homes. Hammed, (1999) in a similar vain applied Assertiveness Training and Transactional Analysis in fostering interpersonal skill among selected Bank workers. This was why the researcher was motivated to use the two variables (Assertiveness training and Marital Communication Skills) in order to fill the existing gap and see to how the two variables can be used to enhance marital

satisfaction among Baptist Couples in Lagos. On length of marriage and marital satisfaction, literature abounds with respect to the age of marriage of married couples. Rabin and Rahav (1995) investigated the similarities and differences between older and younger couples and between couples of different ages and cultures. Data on 25 Israeli and 33 American couples over 65 years of age were compared with data on younger couples from a sample. Results showed the older Israeli and American samples to be more similar to each other and different from both the Israeli and American younger couples. Older couples had significantly lower levels of distress, less desire for change in their marriage and better perceptual accuracy of the changes desired by their partners than younger Israeli and younger Americans. The types of changes desired by the older samples include more desire for social contact with family and friends than do younger couples in both cultures, whose desire is for more of husband's attention to appearances, and less sex-role stereotyped.

In a similar study by Osiki (1995) in which he investigated marital duration, age and childlessness as they affect marital happiness, using a sample size of 300 married undergraduate students of the University of Ibadan, who were randomly drawn from the Faculty of Education, Social Sciences, Arts, Agricultural Science, and Medicine. The findings from the above pair-wise comparison indicate that marital duration of married couples does not have any direct relationship to the level of marital satisfaction to be derived. This means that whether couples are long-married (that is, 11 years and above) or recently married (0 - 10 years), their levels of marital adjustment is significantly the same. The findings are, however, at variance with several studies. Awe (1986) opined that the difference is occasioned by the fact that the first few years are periods of active adaptation to one's spouse. According to Awe (1986) couples usually spend the first few years of their marriage adjusting to their individual differences and other external factors affecting their marriage. The first two to five years are the most critical for couples in marriage since after the first five years of marriage couples begin to tolerate each other and to understand each other better, especially when children start coming.

The results of past studies that have examined the relationship between duration of marriage and marital satisfaction have been inconsistent, so there is still some debate in the literature as to the exact nature of the relationship between duration of marriage and marital quality (Elements & Swensen, 2000). However a well-documented fact about marriage is that marital relationships have a strong tendency to decrease in satisfaction over the first twenty years of the marriage. Most newly married couples report very high satisfaction and any change from that point would probably be in a downward direction (Broderick, 1988). A longitudinal study conducted by Huston (1986), found a substantial decline in reported marital satisfaction during the first year of marriage and a study by Glenn (1990) estimated that marital satisfaction as indicated by the percentage of people who claim their marriages are "very happy" decreases steadily for at least the first 10 years and maybe for 25 years or longer (Glenn, 1990). From the above, the researcher is of the opinion that the number of years couples have spent in marriage could determine the level of satisfaction but it depends on the two lovers, the levels of their maturity, how assertive they are, good communication,

understanding about self and what marriage actually demands. A third variable that can affect family strength is duration of marriage. However, studies also reveal substantially on number of children and marital satisfaction as Chan and Halpin (2001) saw that the children effect might depend on their age and number. Morgan, Diane and Gretchen, (1988) also pointed out that children create a web of obligations and attachment between parents and children, between the parents themselves, and also between the nuclear family and the wider kinship group. Studies reporting such counter-evidence are in the minority. But they are consistent with research on marital satisfaction which shows that children are a stressor in marriage. Couples consistently report lower marital satisfaction with the arrival of children (VanLaningham, Johnson and Amato 2001) and higher marital satisfaction when the children leave the parental home (White and Edwards 1990). Studies have shown that families with fewer of children tend to provide higher quality home environment (Menaghan & Parcel, 1991; Luster & McAdoo, 1994; Ritcher, Ritcher, Eisemann, & Mau, 1997; Rozumah & Zoolilawati, 2003). For example, Ritcher *et al.* (1997) found an association between number of children and parental rearing practice, mainly in terms of a reversed relationship between emotional warmth and number of children. Parents will give more supportive and attention to their children when they had lesser number of children (Amato, 1990). Menaghan and Parcel (1991) noted that large family size will stretch available resources in the families. Downey, (2001) affirmed that larger families will have lesser materials for a given income level and parents have lesser time spent on each child. Hess, (2008) found that negative relationship existed between mothers' marital satisfaction and her overall parenting stress suggests that as a mother's level of marital satisfaction increases her level of parenting stress decreases and visa versa. That negative correlation between mother's and father's marital satisfaction and parenting stress shows that parents who are more satisfied in their marriage are less stressed in their parenting roles or that lower marital satisfaction correlates with higher parenting stress. From the above submissions on the number of children, it is conspicuously clear that the presence or the absence of child/children can have negative or positive effect on marital relationship of couples, which may reflect on the levels of their marital satisfaction. Though, in African content, the arrival of a child in a home usually brings joy to the parents and members of the extended family, the more children in the family the wider the gap between the couples and more responsibilities on the children. These definitely would have impact on the existing satisfaction between the couples.

### Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria where marital stability is generally, culturally and religiously supported, research cannot be overflogged on marital satisfaction. This is because a little few of research shows a high prevalence of marital dissatisfaction among couples. The issue of marital happiness and joy which suddenly turn soar often constitute the subject of discussion all over the world. This is due to the fact that more than ever before marriage institution is being confronted with all kind of problems such as infidelity, poverty, spousal battering, and unwillingness to take responsibilities. Evidences have shown some cases of infidelity, separation, unresolved conflicts, threat of divorce and eventual divorce among Baptist pastors (N.B.C,

*Book of Reports* 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011). If these are happening among the Baptist pastors who are leaders then that of their members, the followers could be worse. This dangerous trend is noticed as marital relationships continue to break down at an alarming rate among married Baptist couples. Veroff, Kulka, and Douvan (1981) buttressed that married couples experience an erosion of positive qualities such as life long companionship, romance, sexual fulfillment and commitment, over time and, for some, marital relationship satisfaction erodes to the point where relationship is terminated. For others, the barriers to separation, or perceived absence of alternative, may result in remaining married despite being unhappy with the relationship. Due to the researcher's experience and observation among Baptist couples in Lagos on how some newly wedded couples and those who have married long ago lack enough reasons why they should remain in the union, engaging in unresolved conflicts, abandoning their matrimonial homes, threat of divorce and eventual divorce, the resultant effects on the children rear in such home atmosphere and the negative impacts on the society and the entire world. The researcher therefore examined Assertiveness Training and Communication Skills in Enhancing Marital Satisfaction among Baptist Couples in Lagos.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to experimentally investigate the relative effectiveness of two psychological strategies (Assertiveness training and marital communication skills) in enhancing marital satisfaction among Baptist couples in Lagos Nigeria. The study however specifically examined the moderating effects of number of children and length of marriage in enhancing marital satisfaction using the two therapies.

### **Rationale for the Study**

Though, there are other religious organisations in Lagos, Baptist couples are considered for this study because the researcher felt that the denomination is a virgin land to explore for academic purpose regardless of the fact that the organisation is the primary constituency of the researcher who has been deeply involved in marriage counseling, seminars and workshops among couples in Lagos, even before he came to counseling professionally. This research work was therefore motivated owing to the observation of the researcher that couples in Lagos needed to acquire certain skills required to handle marital issues. The study was also necessitated due the rate at which marital relationships are collapsing among couples in Lagos.

### **Significance of the Study**

The outcome of the findings of this study would be of immense significant to marriage partners, male and female, old and young, as it would sensitise them to see themselves as responsible individuals who could live together amicably and satisfactorily in their marriages. The expected findings of this study would also increase the volume of therapies that could be used by counselling psychologists in enhancing marital satisfaction. This would therefore further establish the veracity of MACOS in the treatment of marital dissatisfaction or instability. It would also add to the empirical supports already available in favour of MACOS. The same thing is applicable to AST. It would also prove a basis for the development of a

more effective theory and technique which will be useful for guiding and counselling married couples in Nigeria and other parts of the World with a view to enhancing marital satisfaction. The anticipated findings would at the same time be of great benefit to Marriage Counselors, Ministry of Social Welfares, Community Development and Women Affairs, who are frequently confronted with marital issues such as divorce, separation, unresolved conflicts among couples. It is believed that an enhancement of marital satisfaction of the target population may increase readiness of married couples thereby making counselling enterprise uncomplicated and establish the success of counsellor at work. The outcome of this study would also provide Nigerian Government and the policy makers the need to readdress the number of children a couple should bear as it has been proven by this study that families with high number of children experience low marital satisfaction compare their counterparts with few number of children. Counseling programme for potential couples and newly wedded couples in order to experience satisfaction. The expected reduction in the number of children and enhanced marital satisfaction would serve as eyes opener to people in authority that married couples with large size contribute to some antisocial behaviour in the society. Hence, the needs for population control.

### **The Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to Baptist couples in Lagos State. The participants include all Baptist couples, young and old; in Lagos State.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a pre-test, post-test, control quasi experimental design using a 3 x 2 x 2 factorial design. The participants of the study were divided into three groups A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub>, and A<sub>3</sub>. Two of the groups (A<sub>1</sub> and A<sub>2</sub>) were treated while the third group (A<sub>3</sub>) served as control. So, the two experimental and the control groups made the three rows – A<sub>1</sub>, A<sub>2</sub> and A<sub>3</sub> while the young and old participants were constituted into columns – B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>. Number of children (0-3) and (4 and above) constituted into column C<sub>1</sub> and C<sub>2</sub>. The first and second experimental groups were pre-tested and subjected to the behavioural treatments (Assertiveness Training and Marital Communication Skills). The control group was equally pre-tested before they were exposed to a counseling talk on 'parenting Styles'. This served as placebo for the members of the group so as not to feel redundant in the programme. They were post tested at the end of the sessions held with the two experimental groups.

### **Population**

The target population of the study consisted of all married Baptist couples in Lagos State, Nigeria. Three Local Baptist Churches were randomly selected out of the 404 churches that formed the 22 Baptist Associations which made up of the three Baptist Conferences in the State. Baptist couples formed the population of this study.

### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample of the study comprised eighty four (84) participants who were randomly chosen from three Baptist

Churches in Lagos State. Multistage random sampling technique was used to choose the sample. Multistage Random Sampling Technique allows for the concurrent usage of sampling methods such as simple sampling technique, systematic sampling technique, stratified sampling technique and purposive sampling technique in order to appropriately satisfy the sampling requirements in the study. Multistage random sampling allows for random samples when a population is terribly heterogeneous (Akinboye & Akinboye 1998). Though the population of this study is homogeneous in nature, multistage random sampling technique was still applicable because selection of participants was in stages. At stage I, simple random sampling was used to select 1 Association each from the three Baptist Conferences in Lagos State. The names of all the Associations in each Conference were written on a small, properly folded paper out of which one (1) was picked respectively. New Life Baptist Association was selected from Lagos Central Baptist Conference; The Good Herald Baptist Association was chosen from Lagos West while Gideon 2 Baptist Association was selected respectively from Lagos East. This was done in order to give equal chance of being picked to all the associations.

At stage II, simple random sampling technique was used to select 1 church each from each of the three Associations. The names of all the churches in each of the Associations were written on a small, properly folded paper out of which one church was picked respectively. First Baptist Church, Afromedia-Ajangbadi, was chosen from New Life Baptist Association; Winners Baptist Church was picked from Gideon 2 Association while First Baptist Church, Ipaja was selected from The Good Herald Association. This was done in order to give equal chance of being picked to all the churches in each association. At stage III, purposive sampling technique was used to select young and old married couples. 13 couples were selected from First Baptist Church, Ipaja; 15 couples were selected from Winners Baptist Church, Bariga while 14 couples were selected from First Baptist Church, Afromedia-Ajangbadi. This was done in order to ensure that couples who were qualified suit the purpose of the study were selected. The use of intact participants is suggestive of one man, one wife relationships who are and still remained within the institution of marriage. Furthermore, 42 couples which formed the eighty four (84) participants needed for the study were selected from the three conferences in Lagos State. More also, participants were assigned to the experimental groups based on the three groups for the study, which are the Assertiveness Training, Marital Communication skills and the control group. The distribution of the participants in this study is as shown in matrix table above. A total of 30 young and old married participants were used in the treatment group I while 26 young and old married participants were used in treatment group II; and 28 young and old married participants in control group.

### Research Instrument

The researcher used Comprehensive Marital Satisfaction Scale for the study. The Comprehensive Marital Satisfaction Scale developed by Blum and Mehrabian (1999) was adapted for this study. Blum and Mehrabian (1999) reported a large scale study bearing on the comprehensive marital satisfaction scale (CMSS) and its reliability and validity. The comprehensive marital satisfaction scale (CMSS) has a highly satisfaction internal consistency (reliability) coefficient of .94 and a

satisfactory test-retest reliability coefficient of .83 over a six week interval (Blum & Mehrabian, 1999). The CMSS has content validity because items of the scale constitute clear descriptions of the many varied aspects of satisfaction in a marital situation. The instrument is divided into two sections. Section 'A' is the demographical data while section 'B' has forty three (43) items lumped together. The forty three items addresses general aspects of marital satisfaction. However, re-validation of Comprehensive Marital Satisfaction Scale on twenty (20) couples from intact homes in Ibadan (not part of the proposed population) yielded a reliability co-efficient of  $r=0.98$ , using cronbach alpha method, indicating that the instrument is reliable and can be used on Nigerian populace. Therefore, the instrument (CMSS) is good for use in this study.

### Procedure for research

This study was carried out over a period of eight weeks among participants who willingly showed interests to participate in the training programme. Therefore, voluntary participation was solicited as only those participants who felt a need for such a programme came forward and participated meaningfully. There were four phases of interaction with the participants: recruitment, pretest, treatment and post treatment evaluation. An appropriate place where the treatment was administered was secured. Moreover, trained research assistant that assisted in distributing and collecting the questionnaire only was used. The researcher spent one hour thirty minutes each day, one day in the week when therapeutic sessions for each experimental group were held for the period of eight weeks. The first experimental group ( $A_1$ ) was treated using Assertiveness Training. This method involved helping the participants to be assertive and how this behaviour could enhance marital satisfaction in their relationships. This group was subjected to eight lessons. The second experimental group ( $A_2$ ) was subjected to marital communication skills which involved listening, self-disclosure, verbal and non-verbal behaviours. This group was also exposed to eight sessions. The control group ( $A_3$ ) was not treated but a talk titled "Parenting Styles". This made the group not to feel total rejection. Specifically, the treatment package on Assertiveness Training by Hammed (1999) and the treatment package on Marital Communication Skills by Amao-Kehinde (1998) were adapted as treatment packages in this study.

## RESULTS

### Hypothesis One

There is no significant main effect of the length of marriage on marital satisfaction of the participants. Table 4.1 shows that length of marriage has significant effect on participants marital satisfaction ( $F_{1,31} = 4.90$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). This means that there is significant main effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction of the participants. Hence hypothesis one was not statistically confirmed. To find the level of significance, table 4.2 shows that participants with small length of marriage obtained higher mean score ( $X = 376.807$ ,  $SD = 8.465$ ) than their counterparts with high length of marriage ( $X = 366.744$ ;  $SD = 6.701$ ).

### Hypothesis Two

There is no significant main effect of number of children on marital satisfaction of the participants.

**Table 4.1. Is presented showing the Summary of post-test marital satisfaction of couples by Treatment, Number of children and length of marriage**

Source	Type III sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	P	Remark
Prescore	9657.483	1	9657.483	12.814	0.001	S
Treatment	30087.124	2	15043.562	19.960	0.00	S
Marriage Length	3693.543	1	3693.543	4.901	0.034	S
Number of Children	4702.482	1	4702.482	6.239	0.018	S
Length of marriage X Treatment	1544.940	2	772.470	1.025	0.371	NS
Length of Marriage X Number of Children	2945.925	1	2945.925	3.909	0.057	NS
Treatment X Marriage Length	1086.352	2	543.176	0.721	0.494	NS
Treatment X Marriage Length X Number of Children	0.000	0	0.00	0.00	0.07	NS
Error	23364.208	31	753.684			
Total	104278.119	41				

R Square = 0.776 (adjusted R Square = 0.704) †

**Table 4.2. Marital Satisfaction by Treatment, Length of Marriage and Number of Children**

Grand Mean = 370.769					
Variable + Category	N	Unadjusted		Adjusted	
		Deviation	ETA	Deviation	Beta
Assertiveness Training	15	11.623		10.523	
Marital Communication Skill	13	25.517		23.715	
Control	14	-27.856	0.60	-27.568	0.51
Length of Marriage					
Young Couple	21	6.038		5.308	
Old Couple	21	-4.025	0.01	-3.521	0.07
Number of Children					
0 – 3 Children	33	+6.361		5.124	
4 and above	9	-4.242	0.01	-4.216	0.02
Multiple R Square					0.704
Multiple R					0.839

The result Table 4.1 shows that there was significant main effect of number of children on marital satisfaction ( $F_{1,31} = 6.23$ ;  $P < 0.05$ ). This means that marital satisfaction of participant with few numbers of children and those with high number of children differ significantly. Hence hypothesis two was rejected. Further, table 4.2 shows that participants with few children obtained higher marital satisfaction mean score ( $X = 377.13$ ,  $SD = 10.32$ ) than their counterparts with large / higher number of children ( $X = 366.74$ ,  $SD = 6.70$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

The effects of length of marriage and number of children on marital satisfaction among married couples in Lagos State, Nigeria were examined in this study. The results of the study were therefore discussed hypothesis by hypothesis after the other, based on the scores of the participants on the measure of marital satisfaction as stated here under.

**Hypothesis One**

The first hypothesis tested in this study states that there is no significant main effect of the length of marriage on marital satisfaction of the participants. The hypothesis was not accepted because the result in table 4.1 shows that length of marriage has significant effect on participants’ marital satisfaction. This means that there was significant main effect of length of marriage on marital satisfaction of the participants. To find the level of significance, table 4.2 showed that participants with short length of marriage obtained higher mean score than their counterparts with high length of marriage. The fact that could be deduced from the outcome of the finding is that those in 1-10 years young couples benefited more than the old couples that is those in 11 years and above.

The outcome of this finding corroborates the earlier findings of Gottman (1995) and Holman and Li (1997) whose studies reveal that romance was the most important ingredient in the newly wed relationship and was kept alive by frequent interactions, spending time together, and openly disclosing one’s thoughts and feeling, build one another’s self-esteem and fulfill emotional needs build a satisfying and enduring relationship. In the same vain, Broderick (1988) found and affirms that most newly couples report very high satisfaction and any change from that point would probably be in a downward direction. The fact that couples are different suggests the manifestation of their difference on the long run. The findings of Awe (1986) seem to corroborate that the differences is occasioned by the fact that the first few years are periods of active adaptation to one’s spouse. That couples usually spend the first few years of their marriage adjusting to their individual differences and other external factors affecting marriage. He further opined that the first two to five years are the most critical for couples in marriage since after the first five years of marriage couples begin to tolerate each other and to understand each other better, especially when children start coming. The reason that could be identified in support of those who were in short length of marriage could be that they are yet really know one another as their love may still be blind. They have less financial commitments as some of their children were in nursery / primary schools with less financial responsibilities compare the children of their counterparts with long length of marriage who displayed low level of satisfaction were saddled with more financial responsibilities to their children in secondary and tertiary institutions.

**Hypothesis Two**

The second hypothesis which states that there is no significant main effect of number of children on marital satisfaction of the participants. The result of finding in table 4.1 shows that there

was significant main effect of number of children on marital satisfaction. This means that marital satisfaction of participants with few children and those with high member of children differ significantly. Hence, hypothesis three was rejected. Further, table 4.2 shows that participants with few children obtained higher marital satisfaction mean score than their counterparts with large number of children. The outcome of this finding confirms the findings of existing studies. For instance, Chan and Halpin (2001) who examined effect of number of children on marital satisfaction found that the children effect might depend on their age and number. The finding also agreed with that of Stevens *et al* (2001) who found that there is a relationship between number of children, particularly preschool children and marital satisfaction. Similarly, Menaghan *et al* (1991), Luster and McAdoo (1994), Ritches *et al* (1997) found that families with fewer numbers of children tend to provide higher quality home environments. The participants with fewer number of could express satisfaction than their counterparts with larger number of children because child bearing and rearing are too demanding. The finding of Richer *et al* (1997) who investigated the association between number of children and parental rearing practice found an association between number of children and parental rearing practice mainly in terms of a reversed relationship between emotional warmth and number of children. This is buttressed by Amato (1990), Menaghan *et al* (1991) who found that parents give more supportive and attention to their children when they have lesser number of children because large family size will stretch available resources in the families. The core explanation in support of couple with larger number of children with low level of satisfaction is not far fetched. Menaghan *et al* (1991), Kurdek (1999) found that higher-order births also create new demands on parent's time and economic resources which, in turn, affect the couple relationship and that couples with a greater number of children are shown to experience a steeper decline in marital satisfaction.

### Implications of the Study

This study has grim implication for married couples, potential married couples, marriage counsellors, counselling psychologists, social welfares, government and the society in general. From all indications it is glaring that marriage counselors in Nigeria and other African countries have been so hidden in their operations dissimilar to what obtains in other countries of the world where marriage counseling is valued and recognized by the government and the masses. There is a provision of online and marriage counseling clinics services. The issue of attending to marriage matters is not absolutely reticent for religious leaders alone, yet large numbers of pastors are exposed to skills of counseling psychology. The results achieved in this work have established the uniqueness and certainty of factors affecting marital satisfaction and how a good number of couples' incongruence to these factors help termination of marital relationship. As mentioned above, the findings have huge multi-dimensional implications for marriage counselors, married couples, and singles, counselling psychologists, social welfare, government and all the stake holders. This is due to the fact that the predicament facing marriages are direct worry of the entire society. It has been established by literatures that the arrival of first child leads to decline in marital satisfaction, as disruption is caused in

couples' interaction, conflict and negativity within the family relationship are elevated. As the family members increase in number, the larger family is prone to violence because they experience greater stress associated with the necessity to provide for several children. Hence, less satisfaction is expressed. It is consequently mean that to ensure marital satisfaction, proper parenting, morally sound children and a peaceful society, married couples should be encouraged to make a purposeful decision of meeting a marriage counsellor for their marriage appraisal. The key implication of this study for the whole world is that, if marital satisfaction is enhanced at all levels and areas it would be easy for the government to accomplish her goal, control the numerous emergence of various antisocial, moral decadence and successfully tame the whip of bribery and corruption without much sweat because every child is a product of a marriage.

### Recommendations

The results from this study call for immediate attention by all stake holders, including marriage counselors, religious leaders, counseling psychologists, married couples, would-be couples, government and entire society. The reason for this is apparent as it has discovered and established the certainty of factors against marital satisfaction. Hence, the findings of this work should be of significant concern to the Nigerian populace that counselling therapy should be for both academic exercise and everyday experience of Nigerians, particularly marriage counsellor. It is evident from increasing rate of marital dissatisfaction leading to separation and divorce, issues of single parents and consequent outcome on children and members of the society that the special needs of this category of subjects have been unduly abandoned. Therefore, this unpalatable situation should be quickly corrected through the provision of such programmes as Assertiveness Training (AST) and Marital Communication Skills (MACOS). It is obvious from this study that the use of Assertiveness Training in most marriage and family enrichment programmes has been lacking.

It is therefore recommended that Assertiveness Training is taught to married couples in particular, in order to reduce marital dissatisfaction which is unavoidable. The role of effective communication among married couples cannot be overemphasized. This is because Marital Communication Skills enable couples perform proficiently when engaged the symbolic transfer of messages. What is said, how it is said and the way it is interpreted are very important factors in effective communication. It is therefore recommended that couples are taught in order to enhance self disclosure, identify feelings of the other partner and to find out the actual sources of dissatisfaction through the application of the treatments. It has been observed that most pastors are not skillful enough in handling some marital problems. What they do is spiritualizing everything as if all marital issues should only be handled spiritually. The researcher is of the opinion that religious leaders should be encouraged to make themselves available for training on counselling psychology. The acquired skills would assist them to put in place the right interventions tackling such marital crises upsurge. Similarly, in order to attain marital satisfaction among married couples, it is therefore recommended that more marriage therapists are trained in the use and application of psychological intervention techniques to

help reduce the evils confronting married couples. It high time for counseling psychologists to wake up in their slumbering to make their impacts felt in the society by organizing marriage seminar, couples' retreat at all levels of educational institutions, at churches and mosques so as to sensitise would-be couples and married couples before these factors rear it ugly heads into their marriages. Finally, a manageable number of children, like 0-3 children is recommended for married couples who have not given birth to more than three children and potential couples. This may reduce stress associated with parenting and as a result enhance marital satisfaction.

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