

## ***Influence of Personality Traits and Communication Styles on Marital Satisfaction of Couples in Lagos State, Nigeria***

**<sup>1</sup>Fowowe Praise**

*praisefowowe@gmail.com*

**<sup>1</sup>ThankGod Ocheho**

*ochehothankgod@gmail.com*

**<sup>1</sup>Blessing Eburnlomo Alao**

*talk2ebunlomo@gmail.com*

**<sup>1</sup>Ben-Ekechukwu Nnenne**

*nnennebenekechukwu@gmail.com*

**<sup>1</sup>Aameenah Yunus-Ali**

*aamyali2014@gmail.com*

**<sup>1</sup>Ogochukwu E. Nwosu**

*goldencounselor@gmail.com*

*<sup>1</sup>Institute of Family Engineering and Development  
Lagos, Nigeria*



### **Abstract**

*Personality traits and communication styles can be used to predict an individual's behaviors in different life situations, including marital satisfaction. This present study examined influence of personality traits and communication styles on marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos state, Nigeria. The study utilized a correlational survey design. 245 couples were purposively sampled using a non-probability sampling method. Instruments used for the study include the Short Big Five Inventory ( $r = 0.83$ ), Couples Communication Styles Scale ( $r = 0.70$ ) and Relationship Assessment Scale ( $r = 0.78$ ). Results show that personality traits are not related to marital satisfaction while couples' communication styles are related to marital satisfaction. Also, it was discovered that none of the variables (sex, religion and years in marriage) has any significant influence on marital satisfaction. Further research is recommended to extensively study the variables.*

**Keywords:** Personality, traits, communication, styles, marital, satisfaction, couples

## **Introduction**

The institution of marriage has over the years been revered as a committed relationship between men and women practiced across several global cultures each with its own peculiarities. Over the years, the ideology of what marriage should be has evolved; so are the reasons people stay or opt out of marriages. Nevertheless, one of the unifying purposes of marriage that cuts across most cultures is the purpose of relationship. This stems from the need to find some level of satisfaction from the relationship.

However, marital satisfaction seems to have become a herculean task and in recent times the number of troubled marriages in Nigeria has increased for variety of reasons such as safe and pleasurable sexual satisfaction (Ziaee et al, 2014). Finance, quality of life and gender power are also reasons for marital troubles. Sexual satisfaction, according to Lawrance and Byers (1992), is defined as an affective response arising from one's subjective evaluation of the positive and negative dimensions associated with one's sexual relationship. Lichter and Carmalt (2009) opined that low income or material hardship is associated with a serious threat to marital quality and stability.

Marital satisfaction is simply the degree of contentment regarding certain aspects of marital relationship as well as the whole relationship. According to some previous researches, marital satisfaction refers to a subjective and global evaluation of the relationship (Marcaurette, Bélanger & Marchand, 2003). It is a situation in which couples have satisfaction and feel happy living together (Shakerian, 2010). Sander (2009) however noted that communication is a skill that can be learned, but it is after a level of trust and commitment has been attained and that a well mastered and good communication based on commitment and trust can help a couple have satisfaction in their marriage irrespective of the challenges. Communication is also described as love in action, and love is defined as learning the other person's love language (Karl, 1990). Life stresses and communication difficulties can break down a sense of trust in a relationship, but if both parties are committed, trust can be restored (Sander, 2009).

Some extensive researches done by scholars in related fields, especially in developed countries on what makes for a satisfying marriage, have attempted to explore factors that promote marital satisfaction. Fowers, Montel and Olson (1996) linked marital satisfaction with communication, while Sayehmiri et al. (2020) cited that spouse's personality could be adduced as the most frequent source of satisfaction or dissatisfaction in a marriage relationship. However, Janati, Mehrdad and Leila (2010) found that couples experience marital satisfaction when their marital relationship is consistent with what they had expected before getting married, away from what their personality dictates. Also, length of marriage has been considered a factor relating to marital satisfaction. Researchers who studied the effect of long time marriages found evidence for the eventual upward turn in marital satisfaction, which also tended to

coincide with children leaving home (Glenn, 1990; Gagnon, Hersen, Kabacoff & Van Hasselt, 1999). These studies were concerned with the qualities of long-term marriages and older couples' relationship. There is no doubt that the length, durability and/or the success of a marriage depend on the nature of the person a partner chooses and how well they are both able to communicate with one another

Personality refers to individual differences in the way people feel, think, and behave. As such, personality is both fundamental for understanding of and engagement with the world; while communication is a broad term for getting points across to another person. It involves making a statement and being heard, and both parts are essential. Communication in marriage is a very important ingredient to the relationship. For instance, some couples find it difficult to express themselves before their spouse or say what they have in mind because the other partner may not like what his or her spouse is saying or not saying (Cohn, 2009). That is why Steven (2009) suggests that participating in programmes that teach effective communication before marriage helps build a marriage with a high level of positive communication.

Apart from personality traits and communication styles, other factors have been found to be associated to marital satisfaction. For example, in the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS), it is stated that some of the characteristics of a satisfying marriage includes ability of the couple to reach a unifying voice in decision making, acknowledging the strengths the union possesses and striving to get better, adjustment, happiness, commitment, affirming and expressing way by which each partner wants to be loved, and also sharing some common interest and activities (Spanier, 2001; Bashiri, Dehghan, Ghazanfari, Dehghan & Abdollahzadeh, 2016). Stability of the marital structure is dependent on the couple's understanding of what sums up an ideal relationship. Marital satisfaction is a mental state that requires the couple's ongoing efforts to realize it and it is also as a result of influence of different and multidimensional concepts comprising of different aspects of marital relationship.

In addition, demographic variables were found to be associated with marital satisfaction. According to Chehreh, Ozgo, Aboiaali and Nasir (2018), different factors such as socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, physical attractiveness are factors that predict higher levels of marital satisfaction in couples. Gender and religious affiliation was also discovered to predict marital satisfaction of couples (Broman, 2005; Braithwaite, Selby & Fincham, 2011; Dabone, 2012).

The reviewed literatures provided evidence on personality traits and communication styles of couples in different countries. However, little or no evidence reveals whether couples' personality traits and communication styles are associated with marital satisfaction in Nigeria, specifically Lagos state. Therefore, the purpose of this study is

to examine the influence of personality traits and communication styles on marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos state.

### **Research questions**

For the purpose of this research study, the following research questions were raised;

1. Is there any relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State?
2. Is there any relationship between communication styles and marital Satisfaction of couples in Lagos State?
3. Is there any difference between male and female on the marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State?
4. Is there any difference between Christians and Muslims on the marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State?
5. Is there any difference between older and younger couples on the marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State?

### **Hypotheses**

In order to fulfil the purpose of this study, the following null hypothesis were postulated to guide the conduct of the study:

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State.

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between communication styles and marital Satisfaction of couples in Lagos State.

**Ho3:** There is no significant difference, based on gender, on the marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State.

**Ho4:** There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim couples on their marital satisfaction in Lagos State.

**Ho5:** There is no significant difference between older and younger couples on their marital satisfaction in Lagos State.

### **Methodology**

The research design employed for the study is the correlational survey method. Correlational design was employed because it is capable of looking at the relationship between two or more variables. The correlational design is considered the most appropriate for this study because the study sought to establish the degree and nature of the relationship between personality traits and communications styles and the marital satisfaction of married couples in Lagos State. This enabled the researchers to ascertain the extent to which variations in one variable is related to variations in another variable.

The population for this study is all married adults in Lagos State. A total of 245 respondents were drawn as a sample to represent the population. Purposive technique was adopted to select the target sample. The study sample consisted of couples living in Lagos state in Nigeria. A total of two hundred and forty-five couples were recruited to participate in the study. These couples range from 18 to 65 years in age including 92 males and 153 females. The reason couples in Lagos state were recruited is due to the high rate of divorce in the state. Also, because it is a city where so many couples are busy and the researchers were interested in understanding their level of marital satisfaction and the factors related to this variable.

The Big-Five Personality Inventory (BFPI) is the most widely accepted model of personality (Woods & Hampson, 2005) and it was adopted for this study. It is the short version with 10 items which measure personality from a five dimension perspectives. BFPI suggests five personality traits: Extraversion (to be sociable, active), Agreeableness (to be soft-hearted, trusting), Conscientiousness (to be organized, reliable), Emotional Stability (to be calm, relaxed), and Openness (to be curious, creative). The first part of the questionnaire requested for demographic information of the participants such as age and sex, while the second part of the questionnaire investigated the five dimension of students' personality. Participants were asked to indicate their responses on a five-point Likert-type scale (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). As indicated in the questionnaire, the Cronbach's alpha for this instrument is  $r = 0.83$ .

Couples Communication Style Scale (CCSS) developed by James, Carol and Dixie (1977) was adapted to suit the researchers' needs. This instrument consists of 20 items, positively and negatively stated. Items 16,17,18,19 and 20 were positively scored (i.e. 5, 4, 3, 2, 1) while the remaining fifteen (15) items are negative statement and score in reversed format. Respondents answered each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). The coefficient value of 0.70 was the reliability.

The Relationship Assessment Scale developed by Hendrick, (1988) is a 7-item scale designed to measure general relationship satisfaction. Respondents answer each item using a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (low satisfaction) to 5 (high satisfaction). Scoring is kept continuous and the higher the score, the more satisfied the respondent is with his or her relationship. Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient for this instrument, as indicated in the scale, is  $r = 0.78$ .

Mean, standard deviation and frequency count were used to summarize the participant's scores for gender, age, religion, years in marriage, personality traits, communication styles and marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction is the dependent

variables in this study while the independent variables are personality traits and communication styles. The analysis of data obtained was carried out using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test the relationship between personality traits, communication styles and marital satisfaction while independent t test was used to analyze the differences that exist among the variables.

**Presentation of results**

From table 1, the average mean and standard deviation are 32.95 and 3.51 respectively for personality traits; 66.89 and 8.39 respectively for communication styles; and 24.36 and 5.71 respectively for marital satisfaction.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistic of Personality traits, Communication styles and Marital satisfaction

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Personality traits	245	32.95	3.51
Communication styles	245	66.89	8.39
Marital satisfaction	245	24.36	5.71

Table 2 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Most of the participants are female 153(62.4%). The age range of the participants is between 18 - 65 years with almost half of them aged between 36-45 years (47.8%). Majority of the participants are Christians 191 (78.0%) and more than half have been married for more than 6 years 161(65.7%). Frequency total across all respondents is 245 while percentage total is 100%.

**Table 2:** Socio-demographic distribution of the respondents

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency (N)</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	92	37.6
Female	153	62.4
<b>Age</b>		
18 – 25	16	6.5
26 – 35	54	22.0
36 – 45	117	47.8
46 – 55	49	20.0
56 – 65	9	3.0
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian	191	78.0
Muslim	54	22.0
<b>Duration in marriage</b>		
5 years and below	84	34.3
6 years and above	161	65.7

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State.

To test the first hypothesis whether there is a significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State, Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics were used. The finding, as presented on table 3, depicts that there is no significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction among couples in Lagos state, Nigeria ( $r = 0.10$ ;  $P = 0.38 > 0.05$ ). That is, the personality traits of couples living in Lagos state are not related to the satisfaction they experience in marriage.

**Table 3:** Relationship between Personality traits and marital satisfaction

	<b>Personality traits</b>	<b>P value</b>	<b>Marital satisfaction</b>
Personality traits	1		-0.10
Marital satisfaction	-0.10	0.38	1

**Ho2:** There is no significant relationship between communication styles and marital Satisfaction of couples in Lagos State.

Hypothesis two tested whether there is a significant relationship between communication styles and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State. Summary of the results is as presented on table 4. The results revealed that there is a significant positive relationship between communication styles and marital satisfaction among couples in Lagos state, Nigeria ( $r = 0.61$ ;  $P = 0.01 < 0.05$ ). That is, the more positive the communication styles of couples living in Lagos state, the higher the marital satisfaction of the couples; and the more negative their communication styles, the lower their marital satisfaction.

**Table 4:** Relationship between Communication styles and Marital satisfaction

	<b>Communication styles</b>	<b>P value</b>	<b>Marital satisfaction</b>
Communication styles	1		0.61
Marital satisfaction	0.61	0.01	1

**Ho3:** There is no significant difference, based on gender, on the marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State.

To explore the results further, sex differences on marital satisfaction was tested and it was found, as presented on table 5, that there is no significant difference between male and female on marital satisfaction ( $t = -1.35$ ,  $n = 245$ ,  $P > 0.17$ ).

**Table 5:** Independent t-test of respondents' sex differences on marital satisfaction

<b>Sex</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>p</b>
Male	92	25.00	6.18	243	-1.35	0.17
Female	153	23.98	4.80			

**Ho4:** There is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim couples on their marital satisfaction in Lagos State.

Also, it was hypothesized that there will be no significant difference between Christianity and Islam on marital satisfaction, and the result reveals that there is no significant difference between Christians and Muslims on marital satisfaction ( $t = -0.33, = 245, P = 0.73$ ). Detailed results in respect of this hypothesis are as presented on table 6.

**Table 6:** Independent t-test of respondents' religion on marital satisfaction

Sex	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Christian	191	24.29	5.94	243	-0.33	0.73
Muslim	54	24.59	4.85			

**Ho5:** There is no significant difference between older and younger couples on their marital satisfaction in Lagos State.

The fifth hypothesis proposed that there will be no significant difference between older couples and younger couples on marital satisfaction, and the result, as presented on table 7, shows no significant difference between older couples and younger couples on marital satisfaction ( $t = -0.15, = 245, P = 0.73$ )

**Table 7:** Independent t-test of respondents' years in marriage on marital satisfaction

Years in marriage	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Younger couples	84	24.28	5.94	243	-0.15	0.87
Older couples	161	24.40	5.61			

### Discussion of the findings

The first hypothesis, which states that there is no significant relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State, was retained as the finding depicts that the personality traits of couples living in Lagos are not related to the satisfaction they experience in marriage. This is in line with the findings of Bashiri, Dehghan, Ghazanfari, Dehghan and Abdollahzadeh (2016) where marital satisfaction is seen as multidimensional, comprising of different aspects of marital relationship including adjustment, happiness, integrity and commitment. Chehreh, Ozgo, Aboiaali and Nasir (2018) also described different factors such as socioeconomic status,

religious beliefs, physical attractiveness and attitudes as factors that predict higher levels of marital satisfaction in couples. Couples, according to Janati, Mehrdad and Leila (2010), experience marital satisfaction when their marital relationship is consistent with what they had expected before getting married, away from what their personality dictates.

It was also hypothesized that there is no significant relationship between communication style and marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos State. The result reveals that there is a significant positive relationship between communication styles couples in Lagos state engage with and their marital satisfaction. That is, the higher the positive communication styles of couples living in Lagos State, the higher their marital satisfaction; and the more negative the communication styles, the lower their marital satisfaction. This finding helps to explain the fact that communication is a basic part of all human life including marriage. Simply put, it is love in action and love is defined as learning the other person's love language (Karl, 1990). According to Karl (1990), the personality type of an individual and the marital satisfaction of the individual cannot be discussed without the style of communication that is used in the marriage.

Sex differences on marital satisfaction among couples was tested in hypothesis three and the results showed that there is no significant difference between male and female on marital satisfaction. In regards to gender difference to marital satisfaction, Broman (2005) explained that there is inconsistency among the different studies. Wives are generally seen to report more relationship problem among couples.

In addition, hypothesis four sought to reveal if there is a significant difference between Christian and Muslim on their marital satisfaction in Lagos State. The finding shows that there is no significant difference between Christian and Muslim on marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos. The result of the study provides evidence that Christians and Muslims do not differ in their level of marital satisfaction. This finding agrees with the findings of Dabone (2012) who found that religious affiliation does not affect marital satisfaction. For many cultures, religion is strongly connected to numerous relationship related values and norms and therefore it is correlated with marital satisfaction irrespective of the religion (Fincham, Ajayi & Beach, 2011).

The fifth hypothesis suggests that there is no significant difference between older couples and younger couples on their marital satisfaction in Lagos. This result shows no significant difference between older couples and younger couples on their marital satisfaction. This is however inconsistent with some studies that found that length of marriage is associated with marital satisfaction (Glenn, 1990; Gagnon, Hersen, Kabacoff & Van Hasselt, 1999).

## **Conclusion**

From the findings it is evident that personality trait is not related to marital satisfaction. However, the communication styles of couples in Lagos state are associated with their level of marital satisfaction. Also, demographic variables such as gender, duration of marriage and religious affiliation do not have any significant influence on the marital satisfaction of couples in Lagos state.

## **Recommendations**

With the high rate of marital dissatisfaction which is resulting to a rise in statistics of separation, divorce, and issues resulting in single parenting, communication is one of the major leading challenges in relationships. Consequently, there is the need for every stakeholder to ensure that proper counselling sessions are put in place for soon-to-be couples and also for married couples where effective communication skills such as assertiveness training and marital communication skills are taught. This is because these skills will enable couples to perform proficiently during their interaction with their spouses and they are able to deduce what is said, how it is being said and the way it is interpreted by the other person.

When the communication skills of the individual couple is well handled, the individual will be able to master well their personality power and will be able to engage in relationship maintenance, putting in place actions that support the continuance of the relationship and enjoying satisfaction in their relationship to the highest level. This will also help the individual couple pay attention to and understand their spouse's communication style and how it affects their personality evolution.

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