

## ***Personality Trait as Predictor of Marital Adjustment among Practicing Professional Counsellors in Gombe State of Nigeria***

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the extent to which personality trait predicts marital adjustment among practicing professional counsellors in Gombe State. Two research questions were raised and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. 256 married practicing professional counsellors were selected through the use of purposive sampling technique to participate in the study. Data were gathered using “Personality Trait Assessment Questionnaire” (PTAQ) and Marital Adjustment Scale Questionnaire (MASQ). They had a reliability of 0 .92. The analysis of the data generated from the respondents revealed that practicing professional counsellors with extraversion and openness personality traits are well adjusted in their marriages. Consequently, it was recommended that counselling services should encourage couples to practice effective communication techniques by discussing marital issues freely and share the understanding of the matters as it arises from their relationship.*

**Keywords:** Personality, Trait, Adjustment, Counsellors, Marital, Adjustment

### **Introduction**

Marital relationship is the foundation of family life because it involves the union between a man and a woman as husband and wife. Marriage is a component part of the culture usually formalized by the custom, law and occasionally solemnized by religion. It is a means by which physiological, procreational, social, emotional and security needs are satisfied. The human family has become one of the most widely discussed issues in recent times. Its importance to human existence led to the United Nations declaration of 1994 as the international year of the family.

Marriage is considered one of the most significant elements in the life of human beings. It is a social institution which fosters the coming together of totally different individuals with different personality traits, psychological make up and socio-

economic background to form a family (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2010). Ghoroghi, Hassan and Baba (2015) defined marriage as a formally-written, verbal or traditional long-term agreement between a man and woman for the production of children, food and other commodities in a domestic context. Ghaemian and Gholomi (2010) explained that through marriage, a man and a woman are attracted to each other by the power stemming from instinct; that is compassion and love. They commit themselves to each other freely and wholly in order to establish a dynamic unit.

One can agree that where a couple is compatible, have respect and love for one another, that marriage will no doubt be a happy one. Marriage between adult male and female usually and often starts with expressive friendship or courtship. This marriage relationship results to life partnership which means living together as husband and wife and sharing common lifestyles and resources (National Association of Directors of Religious Education (NADRE), 2012). There is need for both couples to have full knowledge of marriage so as to enable them adjust properly in the society.

Adjustment is therefore the effort people make to meet the demands and challenges placed on them by the world in which they live. Adjustment plays a central role in everyone's existence as one strives to achieve a happy and fulfilled life. Weiten, Iloyd, Dunn and Hammer (2009) defined adjustment as the psychological process through which people manage or cope with the demands and challenges of everyday life. Achieving a happy and fulfilled life even in marriage attracts challenges. One of the challenges that call for adjustment is that of forming relationship with others and living harmoniously with them in a complex society. The successful handling of such challenges in marriage may lead to marital adjustment while improper handling of such challenges in marriage will likely lead to maladjustment.

Marital adjustment is the ability to handle the demands and challenges placed on the couple by virtue of their coming together as husband and wife. Aluja, Barrio and Gracia (2006) defined marital adjustment as complex of factors such as moment of conflict, shared activities believed to be associated with happiness or success of a given marriage. Weiten, Iloyd, Dunn and Hammer (2009) viewed marital adjustment as the quality of the marital relationship itself. From the above definitions, one can deduce that marital adjustment does not mean absence of problems but rather a process of adjusting and controlling oneself to accommodate the other person so that there will be harmony. In other words, marital adjustment involves tolerance on the part of all parties (in this case husband and wife).

Sustainability of any marital relationship could be affected by behavioural adjustment problems relating to personality traits of the couples. Personality in this context refers to totality of a person's behaviour which encompasses his thoughts, feelings and

observable behaviours (Martin, Obimba & Iwuama, 2003). Weiten, Lloyd, Dunn and Hammer (2009) viewed personality as individual unique constellation of consistent behavioural traits. Personality is the impression one makes on people he has encountered. This means that it account for consistent and persistent behaviours of individuals. For instance, one can be said to be intelligent, cheerful, hopeful, outgoing or friendly.

Personality traits are those characteristics of individuals that reflect their patterns of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that affect the person's relationship with others (Ofole, 2015). Traits are characteristic behaviours that consistently differentiate individuals from one another. They are stable predisposition to act or behave in a consistent manner (Nairae, Lindsay, Paulhus & Smith, 2004). According to Ofole (2015), marital compatibility could be affected by personality traits that two people bring to their marriage which can affect the survival or dissolution of the marriage. Personality characteristics of couples that are well adjusted in their marriages are different from those found among couples that are not well adjusted in their marital relationship. No two married partners are alike, even though there are mutual interest, shared likes and dislikes and common taste between the couples; there will be difference in opinion that sometimes lead to nagging, quarrel or even fighting which may eventually lead to separation and divorce in extreme cases (Batool & Khalid, 2012; Ebebuwa-Okoh, 2008).

Personality traits that have received much attention here is the "Big Five" model by McCrae and Costa (2006) which consists of five aspects of personality, namely; Extraversion which depicts warmth, sociability, likeliness, dynamism, friendliness, assertive and gregarious. People with neuroticism tend to be anxious, hostile, self-conscious, insecure and vulnerable. Openness to experience is a personality trait that people who register high on it are open to new ideas, have general appreciation for art, emotion and adventure. Openness to experience according to Akram and Malik (2011) demonstrates creativity, intellectualism, the depth and complexity of the mental and experiential life, and preference for novelty. Akram and Malik (2011) in their research maintained that incorporating these five personality types found that marital satisfaction is linked with multiple personality traits such as agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, neuroticism and openness to experience. Agreeable is a personality trait that has to do with being compassionate and cooperative instead of suspicious and antagonistic towards others. conscientiousness is personality trait of being thorough, careful vigilant. The conscientious individual tends to exhibit strong sense of responsibility, hard work, competence, order, dutifulness, self-discipline and achievement oriented. But for the purpose of this study, this paper will concentrate on two variables of extraversion and openness to experience.

### **The purpose of Study**

The main purpose of conducting this investigation was to determine the nature and degree of correlation between extraversion and openness involvement as well as marital adjustment among married professional counsellors in Gombe State, Nigeria. Specifically, the investigation sought to determine if:

1. Personality trait of extraversion does significantly predict marital adjustment of married practicing counsellors in public secondary schools in Gombe State.
2. Personality trait of openness to experience does significantly predict marital adjustment of married practicing counsellors in public secondary schools in Gombe State.

### **Research Questions**

This study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How does personality trait of extraversion predict marital adjustment of married professional practicing counsellors?
2. How does personality trait of openness to experience predict marital adjustment of married professional practicing counsellors?

### **Research hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Personality trait of extraversion does not significantly predict marital adjustment of married practicing counsellors in public secondary schools in Gombe State.

**H<sub>02</sub>:** Personality trait of openness to experience does not significantly predict marital adjustment of practicing counsellors in public secondary schools in Gombe State.

### **Methodology**

This study was carried out using correlational research design. This is because the study sought to establish the degree and the nature of the correlation and prediction among the variables. The population for this study was 1,252 married practicing professional counsellors in Gombe State as obtained from the Ministry of Education. The sample was 256 married practicing professional counsellors in the eleven Local Government Areas of the state. Multi stage and purposive sampling techniques was used to select a sample of two hundred and fifty six (256) married counsellors from eleven Local Government Areas in Gombe State. This was done by using simple random sampling technique to draw 31 secondary schools from 61 public secondary schools from the eleven Local Government Areas of the State. Again, the researchers used proportionate random sampling to select the sample size.

Personality Trait Assessment Questionnaire (PTAQ) developed from International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) by Renner (2002) and Marital Adjustment Scale Questionnaire (MASQ) developed by Locke and Wallace (1959) was adapted and used to collect data for the study. The reliability for these instruments was 0.92. The Personality Trait Assessment Questionnaire consists of 50 items. Ten items for each facet of big five dimensions corresponding to the five factors of personality traits which were extraversion, neuroticism, openness to experience, agreeableness and conscientiousness. These traits are called the Five-Factor Model or “The Big Five” personality structure of McCrae and Costa (2006). The five structure traits were assessed with NEO-P1 Scale by Renner (2002) originally developed from International Personality Item Pool (IPIP). The fifty item scale uses a five-point Likert rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA); Agree (A); Undecided (UD); Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) which weighs 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Higher points indicated a higher value in assessed construct. For the purpose of this study only the items for extraversion and openness were used. Marital Adjustment Scale Questionnaire (MASQ) by Locke and Wallace (1959) was used to assess the respondents’ marital adjustment. It is a 15-item scale used to ask questions that are related to marriage. For instance No.1 item requested the respondents to circle the ‘dot’ against the clause word that best describes the degree of their happiness. Items no. 2 to 15 requested them to indicate the extent of agreements or disagreements in their marital relationships. The scores for all the 15-items were added up together. Higher scores indicated marital adjustment while lower scores indicated marriages that do not have marital adjustment. The collated scores were analysed with regression analysis.

### **Presentation of results**

**Research Question 1:** How does personality trait of extraversion predict marital adjustment of married professional practicing counsellors?

**Ho1:** Personality trait of extraversion does not significantly predict marital adjustment of married practicing counsellors in public secondary schools in Gombe State.

The result of analysis in respect of this research question and the hypothesis is as presented on table 1.

**Table 1:** Regression analysis of personality trait of extraversion and marital adjustment of married professional practicing counsellors

Variable	r	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	B	BETA	% Variance added	Cal. F	Remark
Extraversion	0.17	0	0.001	0.027	0.017	0.1	0.23	NS

NS= Not Significant; df = 788; Crit. F = 3.84

Table 1 reveals that extraversion personality trait of married professional practicing counsellors had  $R^2$  change of 0.001. This indicates that extraversion had the predictive power of 0.1 percent for married counsellors' marital adjustment. Also, at 1 df numerator, 788 df denominator and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated F value is 0.23 which is less than the critical F value of 3.84. Therefore, married counsellors' extraversion personality trait is not a significant predictor of their marital adjustment.

**Research Question 2:** How does personality trait of openness predict marital adjustment of married professional practicing counsellors?

**Ho 2:** Personality trait of openness to experience does not significantly predict marital adjustment of practicing counsellors in public secondary schools in Gombe State.

The result of analysis in respect of research question 2 and hypothesis 2 is as presented on table 2.

**Table 2:** Regression analysis of personality trait of openness to experience and marital adjustment of married professional practicing counsellors

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	R <sup>2</sup> change	B	BET A	% Variance added	Cal. F	Remark
Openness	0.14	0.02		0.26				
s	5	1	0.020	2	0.145	2.0	16.96	S

S = Significant; df = 788; Crit. F = 3.84

In table 2, it was indicated that openness personality trait of married professional practicing counsellors had  $R^2$  change of 0.020. This indicates that openness had a predictive power of 2 percent for married counsellors' marital adjustment. Also, at 1df numerator, 788 df denominator and 0.05 level of significant, the calculated F value 16.96 is greater than the critical F value of 3.84. Therefore, married practicing counsellors' openness personality trait is a significant predictor of marital adjustment.

### **Discussion of findings**

The result of the regression analysis of the personality traits of extraversion and openness to experience as shown in tables 1 and 2 showed that extraversion is not a significant predictor of marital adjustment of married practicing counsellors while openness to experience personality trait is a significant predictor of married practicing counsellors' marital adjustment.

The findings of this study tally with the result of Aluja, Barrio and Gracia (2006) which held that there is shared activities which are believed to be associated with happiness or success of a given marriage. The findings of this study which show that extraversion personality trait is not a significant predictor of married practicing counsellors' marital

adjustment is in line with findings of Weiten, Lloyd, Dunn and Hammer (2009) which viewed individuals as unique constellation of consistent behavioural traits.

Again, the finding that openness to experience personality traits is a significant predictor of marital adjustment is in line with what Ofole (2015) averred that openness to experience is a significant predictor of marital adjustment. Akram and Malik (2011) found that openness to experience was positively related to marital adjustment but was not significant. The result is suggesting that couples who have openness personality traits may adopt a more intellectual approach to problem solving and possibly more flexible attitude towards change, and may be more willing to analyse their marriages. These behaviour and attitudes would likely facilitate the constructive management of conflict in marriage.

### **Conclusion**

From the findings of the study, the study concluded married counsellors' extraversion personality trait is not a significant predictor of their marital adjustment but that married practicing counsellors' openness personality trait is a significant predictor of marital adjustment.

### **Implications for Education and Counselling Practice**

The findings and conclusion reached in this study have far-reaching implications for our educational system and counselling profession. These are outlined below:

Since the scourge of marital maladjustment has permeated all facets of the society, preventive counselling approach to curbing marital maladjustment should be applied right from the primary school to the university level. This should be done through including sex education, marital interaction, and marital enhancing programmes such as family quiz in the curriculum. The scope of sex education should cut across ages in the society. Consequently classes of marital disorder such as divorce, separation, family instability, broken homes would be campaigned against. In this regard education is used as our instrument for maintaining marital stability.

Again, practicing counsellors who are in the field of marital counselling should lay emphasis on the study of individual partner personality trait before going into marriage or already married couples that are having problems of adjustment. The marriage counsellors should give them proper orientation on the study of the individual partner personality traits by providing relevant information to assist married couples adjust properly in their marital relationship, and assist intending couples in matchmaking.

Also, there are incidences of marital crises which have its own attendant challenges which people face and so must be addressed properly. One of the ways in which the professional practicing counsellors can help to tackle these challenges and difficulties connected to marriage is for educators and counsellors to understand the problems and

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**Chinyere Catherine Ngwakwe & T. A. Adaka, Ph.D**

provide knowledge based information that will enable them carry on effectively in whatever circumstance they find themselves.

Clinicians in the field of counselling have to focus on the quality of marital relationship. This implies that they should put in place different intervention programs. The first stage should be purely preventive, such as marital enrichment training programme which can lead to mutual understanding in marital relationships. While the subsequent stages should be creative or clinical level, all will function better.

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