

Marital Stress as a Correlate of Mental Wellness among Married Adults in Polygamous Families in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State

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Abstract

A polygamous family has become a vital ground for stress to some married adults due to strained and nervy experiences that are usually emanating from a myriad of challenges which has over the year, attracted the interest of many educational researchers. This study examined marital stress as a correlate of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State. Two research questions were raised while one research hypothesis was formulated. The study employed descriptive design of a correlational type. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to select 240 participants from the population of the study. The study also employed a self-designed instrument tagged “Marital Stress and Mental Wellness Questionnaire” (MSMWQ). The instrument was face validated among 5 seasoned lecturers in the field of Educational Management and Counselling of Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin, and has test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.84. The results of the study revealed that married adults in polygamous marriage in Ilorin metropolis experienced a moderate level of marital stress which involved; unrealistic expectations from partner on household perfection (perfectionism); incessant conflicts with partner on household chores divisions; confrontational or over critical conversation and excessive social media use to avoid partner, and that married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis experienced a moderate level of mental wellness in their marital lives and such experiences include; ability to concentrate or remain focused on tasks, ability to solve personal problems in life among other findings. There was a relationship between marital stress and mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis. Based on the findings of study, it was recommended among other things that; the married adults in polygamous families should be sensitized on the need to avoid unrealistic expectations from partner on certain domestic chores and incessant conflicts with each other, and Marriage counsellors should assist married couples in polygamous marriage to develop appropriate coping mechanisms on marital stress.

Keywords: Marital Stress, Mental Wellness, Polygamous Families.

Introduction

There is insinuation in educational discourse that marital stress and polygamous marriage are two sides of a coin that could be hardly separated from each other, whether one can exist without another. In Yoruba parlance, there is this axiom that says “Ile Olorogun, Kiki Iyonu” that means; the polygamous family, is full of challenge or problems. The term mental stress represents a mental condition in which married individuals develop negative feelings towards their marriage as a result of challenges within marriage by which they can no longer cope. Omaku and Ishaya (2022) defined marital stress as a condition of negative effects such as frustration and anxiety which results from aspects of the marriage.

In a marriage some level of stress is expected and as such, not every stress is regarded as a bad stress. There are good type of stress that makes each partner work towards the realization of the goals of a marriage. Generally speaking, there are two types of stress these are; eustress and distress. Eustress is agreed to be a good type of stress that makes individuals do something that makes marriage work better. On the other hand, distress is a bad type of stress that influences individual's thoughts negatively especially when something bad happens to them (Omaku & Ishaya, 2022). Marital stress is a significant factor that can affect the mental wellness of individuals within polygamous families. Polygamy, the practice where one individual has multiple spouses, is prevalent in various cultures worldwide, including Nigeria. In Kwara State, polygamous marriages are practiced among

some communities more especially among the Muslims as their religion allows it although with some limitations, influencing family dynamics and contributing to psychological stress in variety of ways (Odebode, 2019).

There are different sources of stress among married adults of polygamous families. These sources however exist in different dimensions including; domestic chores related stresses, communication related sources of stress and intimacy and emotional connection source of stress among others. This list seems endless but common sources of stress among married adults of polygamous families include; unrealistic expectations from married partner on household perfection, incessant conflict, uncaring attitude towards other members of the family, consistent disagreement over familiar issue, constant deprivation of romantic love among others. Okoro, et al., (2024) and Lateef (2018) affirmed in their studies conducted in Nigeria that communication and marital satisfaction have positive relationship, while gender and age do not have statistically significant positive relationship. They maintained that good communication is none negotiable irrespective of any type of marriage, as this remains the bedrock of marital satisfaction which assures mental wellness of married couples. According to Muhammed (2020), marital dissatisfaction and competition for the husband's attention in polygamous marriage can lead to psychological condition among women, making them more vulnerable to mental health problems such as depression and anxiety.

The study conducted by Sinai and Peleg (2021) found that women in polygamous marriages face more mental health challenges compared to those in monogamous relationships. Their study reported that women in polygamous marriages often experienced more stress and they also reported some level of poorer mental health than their married women counterparts from monogamous marriage. Their findings are in line with the study of Rahmanian,etal., (2020) whose findings also indicated that women in polygamous marriages are at a greater risk for mental health problems like anxiety and depression. Similarly, a study conducted in the Middle East by Al-Krenawi (2021) found out that women in polygamous marriages reported having lower marital satisfaction and higher psychological distress than those from monogamous families. This reports therefore suggested that this experiences are not limited to Nigeria married women in polygamous marriage alone but cut across all the nations.

A study conducted by Adegboye (2021) in Nigeria also suggested that children from polygamous families often exhibited some signs or symptoms of depression, anxiety and other behavioural problems more often than those children from monogamous families. Wilber (2021) also discovered that children from polygamous families tend to suffer some form of mental health challenges including, depression and social withdrawal compared to their counterparts from monogamous families. According to Buhari, etal., (2021), the psychological impact of polygamous marriage on family members

was found to be relatively higher than monogamous marriage, and based on such fact, more awareness must be created among intending couples and married, of the proper way to practice polygamy so that its adverse effects can be actually minimized. They maintained further that the agencies involved in polygamous practices should broaden and enhance their understanding of the correct practice of any form of polygamous marriage so as to help devise appropriate coping strategies. It is emphasized that polygamous marriage is not a problem in itself, but it turns so by the approaches that peoples involved brought to it, and the hallmark of its success is to develop appropriate coping strategies more especially, by the co-wives in a polygamous family (Naseer, et al., 2021).

Marital stress can be considered as a key predictor of mental wellness in polygamous families going by the available literature facts and figures as presented above, but there may be need to identify all conditions under which marriage endure. Mental wellness is a subjective perceptual issue as different people see things from different views which in one way or the other affects their mental well-being differently. However, it can be stated that whatever that leads to marital stress, affects mental wellness of married adults and solutions to the former, help in sustaining the later. In order to assist individual married adults overcome their marital stress experiences, it is incumbent on the researcher to diagnose as appropriate and adequately, the underlying signs and symptoms. It is evident in the contemporary world that marital stress are prevalent (Olatubi, etal., 2022), more prevalently,

among married couples in polygamous marriage, (Naseer, et al., 2021), and there are counselling dimensions to assist the affected individuals (Lateef, 2018; Karney & Bradbury, 2016).

Mental wellness can be regarded as a complete state of balance between body and soul. It is absence of any form of disturbance from both the body (physical state) and mind (psychological state). World Health Organization (2020) defined mental wellness as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. The married adults in polygamous marriage mental wellness are relatively correlated with certain factors some of these is their marital stress experience. The facts abound in empirical studies that mental wellness of married adults in polygamous married are affected by their level of marital stress and as such, marital stress has negative impact on the mental wellness of married adults in polygamous families (Ayotunde, et al., 2017; (Olatubi, et al., 2022)). It was based on this premise that this study investigated marital stress as predictor of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.

Statement of the Problem

Marital stress, particularly within the context of polygamous families, is a pervasive issue that can have significant impacts on the mental wellness or well-being of individuals involved. Polygamous families in Nigeria are under the influence of various cultural,

social, and religious dynamics with attendant consequences on the lives of members involved. Marital stress often emerges from different sources ranging from the need to manage multiple relationships, competition among co-wives, the emotional needs of children, and the inequitable distribution of resources in a polygamous home. These stressors can be compounded by socio-economic challenges pose by the larger society, such as poverty, unemployment, or limited access to education, which may all further intensify their marital stress. Marital stress has been affirmed in many literatures as serious threat to the wellness of married adults and it is on high side of prevalence scale already. The problems emanating from polygamous marriage are quite enormous which can has significant negative impacts of the mental wellness of the married adults involved these include; inability to spend quality time together with the partner, decreased physical and emotional intimacy, unresolved conflicts, communication breakdown, uncaring attitude, lack of appreciation among disparaging attitudes and behaviours in the family.

Previous researchers have come with certain gap in their studies. For instance, Alakija (2016) conducted an empirical study to investigate marital stress and marriage duration as predictors of occupational stress among 222 RCCG pastors that were married in Osun and Ogun Provinces. In another related study, Isreal (2021) examined causes and effects of marital conflicts among married adults in Agbado and Oke-Odo/Ifako LCDAs in Lagos State. Awatu (2017) also investigated the influence of

coping strategies on marital stress among 377 married working women participants that were made up of 218 married working women from ESUT and 159 from UNEC Enugu State Nigeria, with their ages ranged from 25-55 years, and with a mean age of 39.67. From the above studies, it is crystal clear that previous studies left certain gaps in their scopes in terms of topic, locale, population and sample, and design scope. Thus, this study intends to fill these existing gaps by investigating into “marital stress as predictor of mental wellness of married adults of polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.

Purpose of the Study

This study is aimed at investigating marital stress as predictor of mental wellness of married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis of Kwara State. Specifically, the study finds out:

1. The level of marital stress among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.
2. The level of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.
3. The relationship between marital stress and mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of marital stress among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State?
2. What is the level of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous

families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State?

Research Hypothesis

1. There is no significant relationship between marital stress and mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State.

Methods

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive design of correlational type. The population of this study consists of all married adults in polygamous marriage in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State. The study adopts purposive and snowball sampling methods to select a total sample of 240 who were the participants of this study from the population of the study. The researchers initially identified a few eligible participants through community leaders, religious leaders, marriage counsellors, and personal contacts. After participating in the study, each respondent was requested to refer other married adults who met the inclusion criteria, namely being currently married in a polygynous union. This referral process continued until the required sample size was obtained. The technique was considered appropriate because there was no readily available sampling frame of married adults in polygynous marriages, and participants were more easily identified through referrals from individuals within the same social networks.

The married adults who have spent 5 years and above in their polygamous marriage were purposively selected for the purpose of getting first-hand information from the population of the study. The study used a

questionnaire titled “Marital Stress and Mental Wellness Questionnaire (MSMWQ)” with 15 structured items on each of the two variables under investigation making a total of 30 items on the instrument. The instrument uses Four Likert Type rating scale format as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points; Agree (A) = 3 points; Disagree (D) = 2 points; Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The instrument was face validated by 5 seasoned lecturers in the Department of Educational Management and Counselling in Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin.

The instrument was subjected to measure of stability of test re-test. In this process, the instrument was firstly administered on 20 participants who have similar characteristics of the population of the study but who did not participate in the final study. After two week, the same instrument was re-administered on the same set of respondents. The results obtained in the two occasions were subjected to PPMC statistic and the result yielded 0.84 reliability co-efficient. The highest score that any respondent can get on the instrument is 4 and least score that any respondent can get is 1. Thus, the average (benchmark) mean value of respondents’ responses was 2.50 (that is $4+3+2+1/4 = 10/4 = 2.50$). So, any mean

score above 2.50 is considered as positive response while a mean score below it is considered as a negative response. The data analysis of the study was done using means and standard deviation and rank order for research questions, while inferential statistics of PPMC was used to test the three null hypotheses formulated for the study. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

This study focused on marital stress as correlate of mental wellness of married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study also examined the relationship between marital stress and the three components of mental wellness that is; social; psychological and cognitive component among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. 240 copies of questionnaire that were administered, retrieved and analysed in the study. The descriptive statistic was used to analyse the demographic data of the respondents, while mean and rank order were used to answer the two main research questions raised in the study, and finally, PPMC statistic was used to test the three null hypotheses of the study at 0.05 level of significance.

Research Questions

Research Question One: What is the level of marital stress among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Responses on the Level of Marital Stress among Married Adults in Polygamous Families in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria

Item	As a married adult in polygamous family, I consistently experience the following:	Mean	Grand Mean	Rank
Domestic Chores:				
	unrealistic expectations from partner on household perfection(perfectionism)	2.68	2.61	1 st
	incessant conflicts with partner on household chores	2.66		
	lack of appreciation from partner for contributions to household chores	2.62		
	uncaring attitude towards childcare	2.58		
	consistent disagreement over meal	2.52		
	Total	13.06		
Communication:				
	confrontational or over critical conversation	2.62	2.56	2 nd
	excessive social media use to avoid partner	2.58		
	consistent insulting pattern of conversation	2.56		
	lack of active listening	2.54		
	unrealistic perfectionism approach to communication	2.50		
	Total	12.8		
Intimacy and Emotional Connection:				
	consistent deprivation of romantic love/sex	2.64	2.54	3 rd
	lack of emotional intimacy from partner (i.e. feeling for each other condition)	2.60		
	persistent unresolved conflicts with partner	2.54		
	decreased physical intimacy (e.g. kissing/hugging)	2.48		
	inability to spend quality time together	2.42		
	Total	12.68		

Table 1 present the responses on the level of marital stress among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. “Domestic Chores” component was ranked 1st among the three domains of marital stress studied with a grand mean score of 2.61 and with the two leading statements “unrealistic expectations from partner on household perfection (perfectionism); and incessant conflicts with partner on household chores”. However, the

statement with least responses under the domestic chores domain was consistent disagreement between the married partners over meal. Ranked 2nd in the three marital stress components that were studied was “Communication” with a grand mean score of 2.56 and with the two leading statements “confrontational or over critical conversation; and excessive social media use to avoid partner”. Under this component, the least responded to statement was “unrealistic

perfectionism approach to communication. Hence, it can be deduced from the above analysis that the most experienced marital stress among married adults in Ilorin metropolis lies on domestic chores. It is evident further that respondents have moderate level of marital stress as majority of the items responded to by the participants have mean scores above the benchmark of 2.5 that was initially set for making decision on the responses of the respondents except two items that have 2.48 and 2.42 respectively that less than 2.5.

Research Question Two: What is the level of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Responses on the Level of Mental Wellness among Married Adults in Polygamous Families in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria

Item	As a married adult in polygamous family, I do enjoy the following conditions:	Mean	Grand Mean	Rank
Cognitive Component:				
	Able to concentrate or remain focused on task	2.72	2.62	1 st
	Have ability to solve personal problems	2.64		
	Have ability to switch between different tasks	2.62		
	Have ability to make informed decisions	2.56		
	Have ability to learn new things	2.55		
	Total	13.09		
Psychological Component				
	Have a good sense of self-awareness	2.64	2.58	2 nd
	Have ability to monitor personal and other's emotions	2.62		
	Find it easy to cope under difficult situations	2.58		
	Have adequate sense of self-acceptance/confidence	2.55		
	Have a clear sense of purpose/direction in life	2.52		
	Total	12.9		
Social Component				
	Derived adequate emotional supports from people around	2.60	2.56	3 rd
	Find it easy to resolve conflict with others	2.58		
	Actively involved in community-based activities	2.56		
	Adequate feeling of connectedness	2.54		
	Find it easy to make new friends	2.52		
	Total	12.8		

Table 2 present the responses on the level of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. “Cognitive” component was ranked 1st among the three domains of mental wellness studied with a grand mean score of 2.62 and with the two leading statements that read: “able to concentrate or remain focused on task; and have ability to solve personal problems”. The least responded to item under the cognitive dimension of mental wellness was “have ability learn new things”. Ranked 2nd among the three domains of mental wellness studied was “Psychological” component with a grand mean score of 2.58 and with two leading statements that read; “have a good sense of self-awareness; and have ability to monitor personal and other’s emotions”. However, the least responded to item under this component reads as “have a clear sense

of purpose or direction in life”. Lastly, “Social” component was ranked 3rd among the three domains of mental wellness studied with a grand mean score of 2.56, and with two leading statements read: “derived adequate emotional supports from people around me; and find it easy to resolve conflict with other people”. The least responded to item under this component was “find it easy to make new friends”. However, it can be deduced from the above analysis that the most experienced mental wellness among married adults in Ilorin metropolis rests on cognitive component. It is evident further from the above analysis that respondents have moderate experience of mental wellness as all the 15 items responded to by the participants have mean scores above the benchmark of 2.5 that was initially set for making decision on the responses of the respondents.

Hypothesis Testing

Three null hypotheses formulated in this study were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistic at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relative contribution of marital stress to the of mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria

Table 3: Pearson ‘r’ Statistic Showing Relationship between Marital Stress and Mental Wellness of Respondents

Variables	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. r-value	Crit. r-value	p-value
Marital Stress	38.54	7.80	238	0.25*	0.125	0.0000
Mental Wellness	12.80	2.82				

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 indicates that the calculated r -value is 0.25with correspondence p-value of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than the 0.05 alpha level, this result thus suggests that there was a significant relationship between marital stress and mental wellness among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The first findings of this study suggested that the respondents have a moderate level of marital stress. Their marital stress experiences lie mostly on domestic chores component with items such as; unrealistic expectations from partner on household perfection (perfectionism) and incessant conflicts with partner on household chores divisions; followed by communication breakdown related marital stress cases such as; confrontational or over critical conversation and excessive social media use to avoid partner, among other stress related behavioural outcomes within the family. These findings however are in line with the findings of Olatubi, et al., (2022); Okoro, et al., (2024) and Lateef (2018) who had earlier discovered similar findings in their previous study. The second finding of this study suggested that mental wellness of the participants of this study was at moderate level and this also lies on cognitive component with experiences that involve; ability to concentrate or remain focused on tasks, and has the ability to solve personal problems in life. These findings corroborate the findings of the previous studies conducted by Buhari, et al., (2021) and Al-Krenawi (2021) that have suggested similar things in the past. There was a significant positive relationship between marital stress and mental wellness among married adults in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria. This finding suggests that marital stress goes a long way in determining mental wellness among married adults in polygamous families in Ilorin metropolis in Kwara State. However, this finding was in tandem with

the previous findings of Tahereh, et al., (2015) which suggested that marital satisfaction and mental health of married adults were significantly correlated. It is also in line with the findings of the study of Bahmani-Makavandzadeh and Amanuelahi (2018) which also established that condition such as depression (a consequence of marital stress in marriage), has a significant predicting influence on marital satisfaction and stability. Also, the present finding corroborates the findings of Rakhshani, et al., (2024) who equally established in their study that quality life in marriage was highly correlated with level of marital stress experienced in marriage. Finally, the above finding supported the outcome of the study of Abdulkareem, Adegbenro and Lasisi (2024) which maintained that stress was a significant issue that could impact the well-being and professional effectiveness of married women in teaching profession.

Conclusion

This study concludes that; both the level of marital stress and level of mental wellness among married adults in Ilorin metropolis were moderate. The marital stress of the respondents lies in domestic chores challenges and mental wellness of the respondents lies in its cognitive domain. There was a significant positive relationship between marital stress and mental wellness among married adults in Ilorin Metropolis.

Recommendations

Based on the findings revealed by the present study the following recommendations were made:

1. The married adults in polygamous marriage should be sensitized on the need to avoid unrealistic expectations from partner on certain domestic chores and incessant conflicts with each other.
2. Marriage counsellors should assist married couples in polygamous marriage to develop appropriate coping mechanisms on marital stress among others.
3. Marriage counsellors should provide regular marriage enrichment programmes for married adults in polygamous marriages to help them develop effective communication, conflict-resolution, and stress management skills that can enhance their mental wellness.

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