

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A CORRELATE OF MARITAL STABILITY: THE COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Dr. Bruno U. Onyekuru & Dr. (Mrs) C. J. Ugwu

Department of Educational Psychology

Guidance and Counselling

University of Port Harcourt, **NIGERIA**

ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence of spouses is an essential ingredient to marital stability of individuals. This correlational study investigated emotional intelligence as a correlate of marital stability. From a population of 5384 married people, a sample of 420 married people was drawn using simple random sampling technique. Two research questions were answered and two hypotheses tested in this study. The instruments for data collection were Couples Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and Couples Marital Stability Questionnaire which measured respectively emotional intelligence and marital stability of couples. The data generated from the instruments were subjected to analyses using multiple regression statistical tool. The results of this study revealed that emotional intelligence had positive and significant joint relationship with marital stability. Secondly, it was found that emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each had positive individual relationship with marital stability which was significant for emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity but insignificant for emotional competence. It behooves on counsellors to guide couples to regulate their emotions for peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, emotional competence, emotional maturity, emotional sensitivity and marital stability.

INTRODUCTION

One of the hallmarks of a mature mind is the ability to control the emotions. Emotional imbalance does no good to anyone. So people should be emotionally balanced so as to be able to exhibit a good self-regulation of their emotions and never allow them to overwhelm them. They should be able to subject every situation to critical examinations before acting rather than acting on impulse due to unbridled emotions. Inability to control emotions has dire consequences to oneself and others. Relationships, marriages and partnerships have been severed due to unbridled emotions. In extreme cases, property and lives have been lost for the same reason. People should not be weighed down by their emotions. They should be able to get over their emotions and put them to wise use. They should strive to be emotionally intelligent at all times.

Emotional intelligence can be defined as the ability to monitor one's own and others feelings and emotions to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). According to Egbule (2009), emotional intelligence is the ability to validly reason with emotions and to use emotions to enhance thought. It involves the ability to utilize emotional knowledge to accurately perceive, understand, generate, access and assist feelings or emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth. People that are emotionally intelligent possess a clear understanding of the feelings, and can restore their moods more quickly before damage can ensue than those individuals with low levels of emotional intelligence (Ciarrochi, Chan & Caputi, 2000).

Mishra and Mohapatra (2011) assert that there are three parameters of emotional intelligence which are emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity. Emotional competence indicates one's ability to effectively respond to emotional stimuli elicited by various situations, having high self-esteem and optimism. Emotional maturity is reflected in the behavioural pattern exhibited by individuals while dealing with oneself and others and the capability to effectively evaluate emotions of oneself and others, balancing and adapting the state of heart and mind flexibly. Emotional sensitivity indicates one's capacity to effectively understand intensity of emotional arousal, managing the immediate environment. It is the ability to have a regard and respect to other people's emotions rather than ignoring them. Emotionally intelligent individuals use their emotions to engage in intelligent thoughts and also possess the ability to think intelligently about their emotions with a view to using them effectively (Mayer, Salvey & Caruso, 2000). Emotional intelligence focuses more on emotional problem solving, rather than on the social, political or verbal aspects inherent in the social intelligence construction (Mayer et al., 2000). According to Goleman (2004), the most important element of emotional intelligence is empathy which is the ability to accurately perceive emotions in others and sense what they are feeling.

Shaka (2011) carried out a study on the influence of emotional intelligence on job performance among high school teachers. A sample of 200 teachers was randomly drawn from 10 high schools in Debrece, Hungary. Instrument for data collection was Teachers Job Performance Questionnaire (TJPQ). Data generated from the instrument were analyzed using Pearson product moment correlation technique. Result of the study showed significant relationship between emotional intelligence and job performance ($r = 0.78$, $P < 0.05$). Barranta (2011) carried out a study to investigate emotional intelligence and personality traits of Filipino Seafarers and their attitude towards work environment. A sample of 183 seafarers was used for the study. The instrument for data collection was a written survey questionnaire. The result indicated high positive relationship between emotional intelligence and attitude towards work environment. Apama (2007) investigated the influence of emotional intelligence on job acquisition and progression using a sample of 200 employees from primary and secondary schools in Asaba. Instrument for data collection was a researcher designed questionnaire. The results of the study showed influence of emotional intelligence on job acquisition and progression.

One area where emotional intelligence is needed is marriage. It is expected that emotional intelligence of family members can affect their happiness. However, it can be observed that it is not all marriages that are blissful. Some marriages are besieged with a lot of problems in the areas of financial management, number and sex of children, how to treat family friends, in-laws and relatives, parenting style and issues on house chores. Sometimes, these problems may become so enormous that the marriage is threatened. In a situation like this, we say that the marriage is witnessing instability. Marital instability was defined by Usoroh, Ekot and Inyang (2010) as a marriage with a high propensity to divorce, which is determined by the presence of thoughts or actions capable of precipitating separation. It is a situation in which disagreement and quarrel is a common occurrence and where one spouse or both spouses are dissatisfied with the marriage. However, some marriages are blessed with peace, unity of purpose, oneness and mutualism. Such marriages witness happiness of spouses and their children and are described as stable marriage. So marital stability is a relationship between husband and wife such that the chance of separation or divorce is slim. Spouses witnessing marital stability have reduced sources of friction, disagreement and quarrel.

Findings by Maciver and Dunka (2012) show that social, behavioural, domestic, sexual, religious and financial factors are some of the factors that influence marital stability. Uba (2007) reported that prevalence of divorce in Awka metropolis is 5% with higher rate in advanced societies. Spanier and Glick (2011) reported that women who marry between the ages of 14 and 17 are twice as likely to divorce as those who marry between the ages of 18 and 19. The divorce rate was 3 times higher when the 14 - to-17- year old category was compared to the 20-to-24- year old category. The rates were similar for males of corresponding ages.

The levels of education also showed similar trends (Spanier & Glick, 2011). People with less than a high school education had especially low levels of marital stability. Men and women with college educations had especially high levels of marital stability. However, women with graduate school training had much more marital instability than women who did not go beyond bachelor degree level.

Family income and the number and sex of children also contributed to marital stability. The lower the family income, the greater the marital instability. Families with large financial resources to live on are comfortable and are more likely to remain stable than those with slim financial resources. Again, the essence of marriage is procreation. Marriage not blessed with children for a considerable length of time is most unlikely to endure. In other words, families with one or no child showed the most marital disruption. Hence, the absence of children tended to increase the chances of separation and divorce. The sex of the child also tends to influence the stability of marriage. Women with at least one son were more likely to remain married. In gender sensitive societies, particularly for the males, there's a strong desire to have at least one son to carry on the family name. If this expectation is not satisfied and other complications set in, the marriage is most likely to be threatened. Mothers of sons may hesitate to get involved in a divorce as there is no certainty of having more sons if they divorce and remarry.

A study conducted by Mayer (2014) found that emotional intelligence of couples in marriage union influences marital satisfaction. Kenot (2012) investigated the relationship between empathy and marital stability and found that marital stability related positively with empathic measures.

Statement of the problem

Married people in Orlu town exhibit different levels of emotional intelligence. Some exhibit a good level of emotional intelligence while some exhibit a poor level of emotional intelligence. Similarly, it is possible that inability of couples to control their emotions can give rise to marital instability. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability.

Research questions and hypotheses

Rq₁. What is the joint relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability?

Rq₂. What is the individual relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability?

HO₁. There is the joint relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability

HO₂. There is no significant individual relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability

Method

From a population of 5384 married people in Orlu town of Imo State, a sample of 420 married people (210 men and 210 women) were drawn using simple random sampling technique. The instruments for data collection were Couples Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire and Couples Marital Stability Questionnaire. Both of these instruments were non-cognitive and researcher-made, and were vetted by three experts in Guidance and Counselling. Each of the instruments contained sections A and B. Section A elicited demographic information from the respondents. Section B of Couples Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire contained three subsections on emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity. Each of these subsections contained ten items of 4-point response options (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). Therefore, the minimum point obtainable by a respondent in each subsection was 10 while the maximum point obtainable by a respondent was 40. Similarly, section B of Couples Marital Stability Questionnaire contained 20 items of 4-point response options (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). The minimum point obtainable by a respondent was 20 while the maximum point obtainable by a respondent was 80.

The reliability indices of the subsections of Couples Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire were 0.73, 0.69 and 0.77 for emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity respectively. The reliability index for Couples Marital Stability Questionnaire was 0.81. The instruments were administered to the respondents by the researcher and three research assistants. The data generated from the instruments were analyzed using SPSS (version 21).

RESULTS

Rq₁. What is the joint relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability?

Research question 1 was answered using Pearson coefficient of correlation (r-value) arising from multiple regression analysis. The results obtained are as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Pearson correlation coefficient results on the joint relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
0.911	0.830	0.829

Table 1 shows that the correlation coefficient for the joint relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability is 0.911, the r-square value is 0.83 while the adjusted r-square value is 0.829. The value of the coefficient of correlation shows that emotional intelligence has a very high joint positive relationship with marital stability. The adjusted r-square value shows that emotional intelligence accounts for 82.9% variation in marital stability, while the remaining 17.1% variation in marital stability is unaccounted for by emotional intelligence.

HO₁. There is no significant joint relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability.

Hypothesis 1 was tested using ANOVA arising from multiple regression analysis of the generated data. The results are as shown in table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA results of the joint relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability.

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	31155.379	3	10385.126	676.711	0.00
Residual	6384.133	416	15.346		
Total	37539.512	419			

Table 2 shows that the mean square of regression is 10385.126 while the mean square of residual is 15.346. The calculated F-value is 676.711 which is significant at a probability level of 0.00 and also significant at a probability level of 0.05 used in this study. This implies that there is a significant joint relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability.

Rq₂. What is the individual relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability?

Research question 2 was answered with correlation coefficients for the different aspects of emotional intelligence and the results are shown in table 3.

Table 3: Correlation coefficients of different aspects of emotional intelligence

	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Emotional competence	0.880	0.775	0.775
Emotional maturity	0.889	0.790	0.790
Emotional sensitivity	0.898	0.807	0.806

Table 3 shows that the r-values for emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity are 0.880, 0.889 and 0.898 respectively. The r-square value for emotional competence is 0.775, that of emotional maturity is 0.790 and that of emotional sensitivity is 0.807. The r-values show that emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each has high, positive individual relationship with marital stability. The adjusted r-square values are 0.775, 0.790 and 0.806 for emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity respectively. The adjusted r-values show that emotional competence accounts for 77.5%, emotional maturity accounts for 79% and emotional sensitivity accounts for 80.6% on individual basis.

HO₂. There is no significant individual relationship between emotional intelligence (emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity) and marital stability.

Table 4: T-test result of the individual relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability

	Unstandardized B Coefficients	Standardized Beta Coefficients	t
sig.			
Constant	8.104		7.129
0.00			
Emotional competence	0.152	0.070	0.843
0.40			
Emotional maturity	0.793	0.395	7.275
0.00			
Emotional sensitivity	1.010	0.465	5.172
0.00			

Table 4 shows the t-values for emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity are 0.843, 7.275 and 5.172 respectively. The t-value for emotional competence is significant at probability level of 0.40 but not significant at 0.05. The t-values for emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity are significant at 0.00 alpha level and also significant at 0.05 alpha level. Based on 0.05 alpha level, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each has a significant relationship with marital stability, while emotional competence has no significant relationship with marital stability. In this model, the predicting equation is given by $Y = 8.104 + 0.152X_1 + 0.793X_2 + 1.01X_3$ where y is data point for marital stability. The x_1 , x_2 and x_3 are data points for emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity respectively.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

It was found that emotional intelligence had a joint positive relationship with marital stability and that the joint relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability was significant at probability level of 0.05. This finding is similar to the finding of Barranta (2011) which reported a high positive relationship between emotional intelligence and attitude towards work environment. This finding of positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital stability can be explained from the fact that emotional intelligence serves as a veritable guide to couples in their marriage relationships. It helps them to know what to do and when to do it or what to say and how to say it in order not to infuriate their spouses. If couples should monitor their emotions and emotions of each other, they should be more careful with their spouses for the peaceful co-existence of the family members.

It was also found that emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each had a positive significant relationship with marital stability and emotional competence had a positive relationship with marital stability which is not significant at probability level of 0.05. This finding of emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity having a positive relationship with marital stability which is significant and emotional competence having a positive relationship with marital stability which is not significant is not quite in agreement with the finding of Mayer (2014) which reported that the three aspects of emotional intelligence namely emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each had a positive and significant relationship with marriage satisfaction. This minor difference may be due to the fact that Mayer (2014) had a sample size of 58 married people, but this present work has a sample size of 420 married people. The finding of positive relationship between emotional

competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity and marital stability can be explained from the fact that emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity are very important qualities which married people should exhibit in order to show understanding and empathy towards one another.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions can be drawn

1. Emotional intelligence has a very high joint positive relationship with marital stability and the relationship between these two variables is significant at 0.05 alpha level.
2. The r-values show that emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each has high, positive individual relationship with marital stability. While emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each has a positive and significant relationship with marital stability, emotional competence has positive but insignificant relationship with marital stability.

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

Emotional balance or imbalance may make or break marriages. From the findings of this study counsellors should guide and make couples realize that their emotional intelligence is a good asset to the stability of their marriage. Couples should study emotional qualities of themselves and those of their spouses. Armed with the knowledge so obtained, they should be mindful of how they treat their spouses so that emotion will not flare up unnecessarily which may not augur well with the stability of their marriage. They should be emotionally mature and sensitive to emotions of their spouses. Avoidable provocation resulting from emotional insensitivity may impact negatively on the marriage stability. With careful handling of emotions of oneself and those of others, couples can get the best of each other and thus make their marriage worthwhile and enjoyable. Counsellors should always insist on pre-marital and post-marital counselling as a coping strategy for managing emotions and sustaining a good level of emotion needed for family stability.

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