THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING AND MARITAL STABILITY LEVELS AMONG COUPLES IN SELECTED PARISHES IN THE CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF NAIROBI, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This study was instigated by the urgent need for intervention measures to curtail the increasing number of divorce cases in the country, especially in Nairobi, Kenya. The specific objective of the study was to determine the relationship between psychological wellbeing and marital stability levels among couples in selected parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (CAN). The study was anchored on the Adlerian and Emotional Focused Theories and implemented using the concurrent convergent mixed methods research design. The study targeted the 19,828 Catholic faithful, who have exchanged their marital vows in CAN within the last 5 to 25 years. The sample comprised of 784 married men and women in couples and were selected by multistage sampling. Two questionnaires were used to collect data; the psychological well-being questionnaire and the marital stability questionnaire. The data were analyzed first descriptively using frequency counts and percentages then inferentially to test the null hypothesis at 95% confidence level. Findings revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between psychological well-being and marital stability levels among married couples in the research area [r (783) = .413, p = .000 at α = .05]. The study recommends the use of a model to predict marital stability of persons seeking professional counseling services.

KEYWORDS: Psychological Well-Being Level, Marital Stability Level, Married Couples, Nairobi Catholic Archdiocese

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Scholars around the world are in agreement that marriage is the most essential and fundamental human relationship as it provides a strong foundation for a family relationship and raises the next generation (Nadar, 2018). Marriage is defined in this study as a close and intimate relationship between a man and a woman as husband and wife. Marriage is also viewed as a deliberate intimate relationship integrally ordered to procreation and sharing of family life, which calls for permanence and exclusive commitment in whatever way the couple decides and most importantly, an appropriately functioning marriage relationship is a marital union founded on love, respect for one

another and the concerned couple's satisfaction with the marriage as opined by Karney & Bradbury, (2020). This means a stable marriage almost guarantees a healthy and happy society

Sadly however, marriage in many parts of the world has lately become unstable due to alarmingly high numbers of cases where couples are unable to deal with challenges that arise within the relationship as times goes by. Consequently, scholars have attributed the unpredictable nature of marriage to various contributory factors among them being the levels of psychological wellbeing among the married couples (Adejori, Okolie, Musa & Shehu, 2019). This study therefore investigated the relationship between psychological well-being and marital stability levels among married couples in selected parishes in the catholic archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. This is area is one of the worst affected as it has recorded the highest numbers of divorce cases in the last three years.

In Kenya, the change in family life education was a decline in marital satisfaction as manifested by an increase in marital violence, an upsurge in cases relating to custody and maintenance of children, and an increase in divorce cases (Meru County Law, 2016). Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicated that there were a total of 567,990 divorced and separated people in Kenya as per the 2009 population census whereas Kithinji (2009) attributed the differences in marital satisfaction to the impact of colonialism, Kithinji's study attributed the differences in stability in marriages to differences in family life knowledge and marital satisfaction.

The study was guided by two theories namely, Adlerian Theory (2006) and Emotional Focused Theory (1988). Adlerian theory is an approach to psychotherapy invented by Alfred Adler, an Austrian psychiatrist in the year 2006. Adlerian therapy techniques focus on addressing individuals' feelings of inferiority and discouragement in the greater context of their community and society. Adlerian therapy is goal-oriented and is based on the principle that the client can overcome feelings of inferiority with the help of insight provided by a therapist. Psychological well-being was investigated in this study to determine the extent to which it can predict marital stability. This was because according to Adlerian theory, the patient must overcome feelings of inferiority in order to be able to connect positively in a stable family. The ultimate goal of the theory is to support a person's confident integration into society through a holistic approach to personal growth.

Adlerian theory is also known as individual theory. This is because it focuses on a patient's individual personality and ability to change their own life by altering their behavior. Although individualistic in its primary focus, Adlerian theory also acknowledges each individual person as fitting into the greater society. Underneath a person's anxiety and sense of inferiority, all humans possess an innate desire to belong and be significant. Adlerian theory has been praised for its holistic approach. Its ultimate goal is to reorient patients and return them to society so that they can contribute in a healthy manner and feel a sense of belonging. The aspects of personality that were considered in this study in line with the Adlerian theory were autonomy, positive relations, purpose in life, environmental mastery,

as they are all aspects a personality of the married couples that were respondents of this study as they cumulatively constitute the psychological wellbeing, which was the study's independent variable.

Emotionally focused theory was developed by Dr. Sue Johnson and Dr. Les Greenberg in 1980s to help couples with relationship problems. It works on the bases that human emotions are connected to human needs. So, by activating and working through patients' feelings, they can adapt and change problematic emotional states and improve their relationships. This theory inspired the research because family is a social unit and emotional focused institution, yet it was the epicenter of all data collection exercises that were carried out in this study. The issue of marital stability was the depended variable under investigation in this study, whose indicators as named in the conceptual framework of this study allude to the basic tenets of the Emotional Focused theory hence guiding the data collection and interpretation in this study.

The problem that warranted this study emanates from the fact that the stability of marriage is crucial for the existence of a harmonious community hence development of any country. Kenya is one of the countries that has recorded increased number of divorce and domestic violence cases in the recent past, which is threatening harmonious existence of families therein. Many married couples in Kenya are experiencing psychological and emotional challenges, brought about by tough economic times and job losses among others, which are consequently affecting the sustainability of marriage. Some of these challenges have led to high numbers of divorces, suicide and domestic violence cases in the country, especially Nairobi County (KNBS, 2019).

Research done by the Kenya National Bureau of statistics (2021), shows considerable growth in marriage dissolution during the last five years nationwide. According to the Arch-diocesan office of the judicial vicar, between 2017 and 2022, there were a total number or 133 marriage cases presented to the tribunal for consideration for annulment (Arch-diocesan tribunal register 2017-2021). Despite pre-marital trainings/seminars before any marriage is solemnized. This possesses a question as to why it happens. Proper levels of psychological well-being among married couples plays a crucial role in ensuring married couples settle challenges in their marriage in an amicable manner, and therefore has potential to reduce chances of divorce and separation. In Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi however, there's minimal research that addresses the increasing number of these occurrences. This study was therefore conducted to provide empirical evidence in form of facts and figures that can be benchmarks for future policy formulation to arrest the issue of increased cases of divorce and troubled marriages in the country.

The objective of this study was to determine the relationship between psychological wellbeing and marital stability levels among couples in selected parishes in CAN, Kenya. A null hypothesis was formulated from this objective and tested statistically at 95% confidence level thus:

H$_O$: There is no statistically significant relationship between psychological wellbeing and marital stability levels among couples in selected parishes in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by Okojide and Adekeye (2023) explored the degree at which psychological well-being predicts marital stability among women in the study location. The study made use of the survey design. For data collection, a questionnaire form labeled Psychological Well-Being and Marital Stability Scale was use with 540 married female secondary school teachers and married female commercial bank workers randomly selected for the study. One research question and two research hypotheses were raised. Findings revealed a more occurrence of psychological well-being among employed women and a significant influence of psychological well-being on marital stability (R=.184, R2=0.034, F=3.104, p<0.005. in addition, there was no significant difference in participants' marital stability. They concluded that positive relation with others as an indicator of psychological well-being is positively related to marital stability. Also, the 69.8% prevalence of marital stability and 30.2% instability, as shown in the study, calls for public concern.

Azimian, Piran, Jahanihashem and Dehshankar (2017) conducted a study on marital satisfaction and its relationship with job stress and health, whereby, 64% of participants had marital satisfaction. From the study, it was also found that there is a significant relationship between marital satisfaction and psychological well-being.

On the other hand, Mamun, Clavarino, Najman, Williams, Callaghan, and Bor (2009) found a strong bidirectional relationship between depression and matrimonial relationships among women. In a study by Mamun et al., (2009) it was revealed that women without depressive symptoms reported high-quality marital relationships while those who reported depressive symptoms reported poor marital relationships. Randall & Bodenmann (2017) postulated that people who had poor psychological well-being experienced stressful situations and engaged in hostile conversations with their spouses that could lead to marital instability, crisis, and reduced psychological well-being.

Oginyi, Ofoke, and Francis (2015), also found a significant relationship between psychological well-being and marital stability. In their study, Azimain, Piran, Jahanihashem, and Dehshankar (2017) found depression (p=0.012) and anxiety (p=0.001) to having significant relationship with marital satisfaction. On the contrary, Katagulle et al. (2017) reported no significant relationship between psychological well-being and marital satisfaction. In line with Katagulle et al. (2017), Kamp-Dush, Taylor, and Kroeger's (2008) found that the respondents in their study 7 who had poor marital happiness had the highest psychological well-being level.

A study conducted on psychological well-being as a predictor of marital stability among employed women in Logos state, Nigeria by Adjumo et al. (2021) showed that the combination of the six dimensions of psychological wellbeing influences marital stability. Khajeh et al. (2014) found a

significant correlation between psychological well-being and marital stability. However, this result is not in line with Karagulle et al. (2019), who found that psychological well-being had no significant relationship with marital stability.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Mixed Methods Research Design (MMRD) was used to implement this study. According to Masinde (2023), a mixed methods approach is characterized by the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component. For this study, the concurrent convergent MMRD was used in this study to obtain both quantitative and qualitative data that independently addressed the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study. Research data were collected at the same time, because this approach demands collection of both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time (Masinde, 2023). In this regard both quantitative data and qualitative data were collected at the same by the quantitative and qualitative statements in the questionnaires.

The study was carried out in selected parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (CAN), Kenya. Geographically, the CAN covers two counties - Nairobi and Kiambu, covering an area of 3,721sq. Km. the archdiocese comprises of 15 deaneries, 115 parishes and over 4,000 Small Christian Communities, with 2.03 million faithful (CAN, 2022). This population is highly cosmopolitan due to the fact that Nairobi city is the capital of Kenya, and therefore attracts workforce from all communities in Kenya and the world at large. The study location was ideal for data collection due to readily available records of married couples for the last 5 to 25 years hence sampling was practical.

The target population comprised of the Catholic faithful living and worshipping in catholic churches within the archdiocese of Nairobi, who have exchanged their marital vows in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi for the last five to twenty years. These were 19,828 in number, distributed in the various deaneries in the archdiocese albeit in varying proportions (Archdiocese, 2023). This number was obtained after thorough scrutiny of the holy matrimony records in all the Archdiocesan records for the years 1997-2017.

The sample of this study was selected by multistage sampling, a combination of census, proportionate quota and simple random sampling techniques, due to the tier-like arrangement of the sampling units i.e. deaneries, parishes and actual respondents within the archdiocese. To execute this, census sampling was used to select all the 14 deaneries in the research area, since the researcher was interested in collecting data from respondents of all socio-economic classes, who are spread out in the Nairobi metropolitan area, from which the CAN was formed. The Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the number of married couples (n) that were to be selected from the sampled parishes. This was executed by substituting N and e in the formula with 19828 and 0.05 respectively thus the required number of couples was 392 couples hence 784 married men and women.

These respondents were in deaneries and therefore to ensure each was proportionately represented, further procedures were conducted. The whole CAN consists of 115 parishes spread out in the 14 deaneries. To determine the number of parishes that were to be selected in all the deaneries, the Yamane (1967) formula was employed thus by substituting N and e in the formula with 115 and 0.05 respectively thus 89 parishes were to be selected from all the 14 deaneries in the CAN. To determine the number of parishes that were to be selected from each deanery so that they add up to 89, proportionate quota sampling was applied thus:

$$\text{No. of parishes per deanery} = \frac{\text{total no. of parishes in the deanery}}{\text{total no. of parishes in the archdiocese}} \times 89$$

The actual parishes that were selected from each deanery by simple random sampling. This ensured all deaneries were fairly represented according to their population size. The actual number of couples that were to be selected in each of the selected parishes was determined proportionately using the formula:

$$\text{No. of couples} = \frac{\text{total no. of couples in the parish who wedded 5 or more years ago}}{\text{total no. of couples in the archdiocese who wedded 5 or more years ago}} \times 392$$

Once the required number of couples required for each selected parish was determined, the actual couples in each parish was selected by simple random sampling. These were identified using the list of married couples for weddings that took place in each sampled parish 5 or more years ago, up to a maximum of 25 years. This list was obtained from the pastoral offices at each of the selected parishes. Only couples matching this description were used, as they were deemed best placed to give adequate information about the various aspects of marriage stability that were under investigation in this study. The researcher incorporated parish secretaries and Small Christian Community (SCC) officials as research assistants, to help trace the target population, from which a sample was drawn. The balloting technique was applied to execute simple random sampling.

Data was collected using the Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ). The MSQ is a standard instrument, developed by Perron (2006) for measuring marital stability among couples. It was a close-ended questionnaire, which sought information on the Marital Stability of the selected respondents in the research area. The MSQ had two sections labelled A and B. Section A was for capturing demographic information about the respondents while Section B had 16 items on a five-point likert scale, seeking data on the various indicators of marital stability among the married couples in the research area. Some of the statements in therein were negatively worded while others were positively worded. Data collected by the MSQ was used to address the null hypothesis.

The positively worded statements in the MSQ were scored in descending order i.e. strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Negatively worded statements were on

the other hand scored in reverse order i.e. strongly agree=1, agree=2, undecided=3, disagree=4 and strongly disagree=5. This way, responses that correspond to a respondent's high level of marital stability always obtained a score that was higher than that of a response depicting a comparatively lower marital stability level, regardless of whether the statement was negatively or positively worded.

The researcher assessed content validity of the questionnaire by consulting counselling psychology research experts within CUEA. This helped the researcher to determine whether items in the questionnaires were accurate in terms of capturing data on the various indicators of marital stability among the sampled respondents. The experts were asked in writing to carry out the validation process, using a rating scale and scoring guide developed by the researcher. A threshold of 0.65 was used to determine whether the questionnaires were valid or not (Masinde, 2023). Results revealed that the MSQ questionnaire had ratings of 0.78 hence valid as it surpassed the threshold set by Masinde (2023). The raw data was coded in SPSS and analyzed descriptively to generate frequencies and percentages and represented in tables, histograms, pie charts and bar graphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The specific objective of this study was to determine the relationship between psychological wellbeing and marital stability levels among couples in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. Data concerning levels of psychological well-being was collected by the PWQ while data on marital stability level was collected by the MSQ as previously discussed. The PWB and MS among couples were analyzed descriptively by computing means and standard deviations of both PWB and MSQ scores thus:

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Psychological Well-being and Marital Stability

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Psychological Well-Being Score	784	77.26	8.461
Marital Stability Score	784	70.46	9.851

As the table indicates, the mean scores obtained were higher for the psychological well-being and more dispersed for the marital stability. This shows that that generally, respondents had high level PWB and MS. It also shows there was a big disparity between those with high scores and those with low scores due to the relatively high values of standard deviations for both variables.

The null hypothesis of this study as derived from the third research objective was as follows:

H$_O$: There is no statistically significant relationship between psychological wellbeing and marital stability levels among couples in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya.

To test the truth value of this hypothesis, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was computed with PWQ scores as the independent variable and MSQ scores as the dependent variable and the results were as follows:

Table 2: Correlation between Psychological Well-Being and Marital Stability

Variables	Statistic	PWB	MS
PWB	Pearson Correlation	1	0.413**
	P		0.000
	N	784	784
MS	Pearson Correlation	0.413**	1
	P	0.000	
	N	784	784

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

As the table shows, it was found that a moderate positive relationship exists between psychological well-being and marital stability level *[r (783) = .413, p = .000 at α = 0.05]*. This implies that from the sampled respondents, couples with high levels of psychological well-being also had high levels of marital stability and vice-versa. The moderate relationship is as a result of the r- value calculated lying near the mid-point of 0 and 1 while the positive relationship is as a result of the positive sign of the r-value obtained from PPMCC analysis (Masinde, 2023).

It was established that a significant moderate positive relationship exists between psychological well-being and marital stability level scores. This relationship was deemed significant at 0.05 alpha level of statistical significance because the p-value obtained with respect to the calculated r- value was less than 0.05, the set alpha value. This revelation was contrary to the assertions of the null hypothesis. For this reason, the null hypothesis was rejected. It can alternately be stated that there is a significant moderate positive relationship between psychological well-being and marital stability levels among couples in the CAN.

These findings are in unison with those of a study by A Okojide and Adekeye (2023) which explored the degree at which psychological well-being predicts marital stability among women in the study location. The study made use of the survey design. For data collection, a questionnaire form labeled Psychological Well-Being and Marital Stability Scale was use with 540 married female secondary

school teachers and married female commercial bank workers randomly selected for the study. One research question and two research hypotheses were raised. Findings revealed a more occurrence of psychological well-being among employed women and a significant influence of psychological well-being on marital stability (R=.184, R2=0.034, F=3.104, p<0.005. in addition, there was no significant difference in participants' marital stability. They concluded that positive relation with others as an indicator of psychological well-being is positively related to marital stability. Also, the 69.8% prevalence of marital stability and 30.2% instability, as shown in the study, calls for public concern.

Barrett and Hsu (2021) also obtained similar findings as their study investigated the association between psychological well-being and marital stability. They examined the association between marital status and negative well-being, measured as depressive symptoms, and positive well-being, measured as autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, self-acceptance, and purpose in life. Using Wave 2 of Midlife in the United States (2004–2006; n = 1,711), they found that the continuously married fare better on the negative dimension than do the formerly married. The results for some measures of positive well-being also revealed an advantage for the continuously married, compared with the formerly and the never-married. However, results for other positive measures indicated that the unmarried, and the remarried, fare better-not worse-than the continuously married. Further, some results suggest greater benefits for remarried or never-married women than men.

Findings of this study with respect to the third objective, together with all the studies mentioned in the review of related literature as presented in chapter two of this work, all make a valuable contribution to the understanding of the relationship between marital stability and psychological well-being. All indicators of psychological well-being and marital stability were independently associated with one another to varying levels of statistical significance. Moreover, level of education emerged as a significant mediator in the relationship between marital stability and psychological wellbeing. Specifically, most investigations found that PWB accounts for marital stability. The present study highlights the importance of high psychological wellbeing levels in promoting high marital stability levels, going by the empirical evidence arising from the data collected from respondents in the CAN.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of empirical evidence arising from data that were collected in this mixed methods investigation, the major conclusion arrived at is that married couples in the CAN with high levels of psychological well-being in terms of autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relations, purpose in life and self-awareness are bound to have more stable marriages in terms of commitment, communication, affection, faithfulness, sexual satisfaction, personal growth and religiousness when compared to those with low levels of psychological well-being and vice-versa.

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