

Socio-demographic Variables, Mindful Awareness and Marital Satisfaction among Nursing Mothers in Southeast Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The quality of marital relationship has far-reaching implications for the health and well-being of the family. Several studies suggest that socio-demographic characteristics and mindful awareness significantly predict the quality of the marital relationship. Literature is scarce about these studies conducted among Nigerian samples. This study aimed to assess the socio-demographic factors and mindful awareness as predictors of marital satisfaction among nursing mothers in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria. The data for this study were collected at the postnatal clinics and children's welfare clinics of two tertiary hospitals in Enugu, using Socio-demographic Questionnaire, Index of Marital Satisfaction, and Mindful Attention Awareness Scale. Correlation analysis was used to test for association. A multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the predictor variables for marital satisfaction. The age range of nursing mothers was 20 – 46 years. Over 88% of the nursing mothers enrolled or completed tertiary education program. Higher levels of marital satisfaction were reported in 185 (61.7%) of the mothers. Multiple regression analysis suggested that higher levels of mindfulness and higher levels of educational attainment predicted higher levels of marital satisfaction, while an increase in the level of pregnancies predicted lower levels of marital satisfaction. The research findings may carry significant implications for the role of social-demographic characteristics and mindfulness, awareness in building and sustaining happy marital relationships and general well-being of the family.

KEYWORDS: Socio-demographic variables; mindful awareness; marital satisfaction; nursing mothers; Southeast Nigeria

I. INTRODUCTION

The marital relationship, a basic structure in every society, is considered to be one of the most critical assets in human relations (Ahangar et al., 2016). Though formal marriage arrangements exist in almost every culture (Bell, 1997), the criteria of a satisfying marriage may vary greatly based on one's broader cultural context (Dillon and Beechler, 2010). In Igbo culture, marriage is seen as an intimate and complementary union of a man and a woman, involving the extended families of both partners as major supplementary groups. The extended family takes the form of three or four generations of nuclear families of lineal descendants (Oraukwu Traditional Marriage, 2015). Also, in Igbo culture and tradition, marriage is the lawful living together of man and woman of two different families, with the support and the approval of both families, and to beget children after some rites have been performed (Oraukwu Traditional Marriage, 2015). The Igbo culture, apart from being a patriarchal society, their marriage is also patrilineal. Marriage is known to have protective effects on physical and emotional wellbeing (Jackson et al., 2014; Proulx et al., 2007). However, these effects are premised on the quality of the marriage; as problematic marriages take a toll on emotional wellbeing, whereas high-quality marriages amplify emotional wellbeing (Proulx et al., 2007; Carr et al., 2014).

Marital satisfaction is measured as the degree to which spouses perceive that their partners meet their needs and desires (Bohlander, 1999; Fields, 1983). Marital satisfaction has been found to significantly correlate to life

satisfaction and momentary happiness (Carr et al., 2014). What makes an individual happy in a marriage are not universal but may shift as the salience of cultural frameshifts, as well as changes in time and place, as when living in another culture for an extended period (Tov & Diener, 2007). Marital quality has far-reaching implications for the health and wellbeing of spouses (Carr et al., 2014), especially for nursing mothers. Poor marital satisfaction has been associated with postpartum anxiety and depression (Gourounti et al., 2012), and postpartum anxiety and depression can impair early bonding and attachment process between mother and baby, as well as hinder effective infant care skills (Hilli, 2011; Yelland et al., 2010). So if untreated, can affect the quality of mother-child relationship with deleterious effects on the child's cognitive, psychosocial and physical development (Murray et al., 2010).

Socio-demographic characteristics could also affect marital satisfaction (Ahangar et al., 2016; Zaheri et al., 2016). The age for marriage is most often influenced by culture and geographical region (Shahhosseini et al., 2014). Marital satisfaction is lower among young married couples (Yazdanpanah et al., 2015; Sayadpour, 2005) and this was more likely associated with disloyalty and jealousy (Smart, 2008; Amato & Rogers, 1997).

There is little dispute that marriages on average are viewed as less fulfilling as time passes; typically, couples find marital satisfaction to decline with marriage length (Kurdek, 1998; VanLaningham, Johnson, & Amato, 2001). However, some studies have noted that the increase in the length of the marriage can positively affect marital satisfaction (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004; Brako, 2012; Mirfardi et al., 2010). As the time of marriage grows further, married couples get better chances of getting to know each other which could improve intimacy between them, and contribute positively to marital satisfaction (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004).

Also, some studies have reported a statistically significant inverse relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction (Mirfardi et al., 2010; Askarian, 2016), whereas some other studies have reported otherwise (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014; Mirghafoorvand et al., 2013).

Though a most likely desired state, pregnancy affects cognitive and emotional functioning and can deepen, or threaten the marital relationship (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2011). Pregnancy could be distressing on a marriage (Peppers & Knapp 1980), and even more when the pregnancies were unplanned and probably undesired (Rollins & Galligam, 1978). The sexual relationship of couples in pregnancy can be affected by physical, psychological, and cultural factors (Hayatbakhsh et al., 2011). Moreover, this problem may creep into the postpartum, such that many new parents could experience a decline in their marital satisfaction during the period after pregnancy and delivery (Peppers & Knapp, 1980; Rollins & Galligam, 1978; Kohn et al., 2012; Mangeli et al., 2009). However, the impact of the number of pregnancy on the marital relationship may be dependent on social and cultural buffers (Culture skews human evolution, 2009; Cohen & Hoberman, 1983). Christensen (Christensen, 1968) in his study, suggested that it is not the number of children that causes either harmony or disharmony (Christensen, 1968), but the number of children relative to the desired number (Rollins & Galligam, 1978).

Pregnancy, Children and the Quality of Marital Relationship in Igbo Society

In Igbo culture, begetting a child is seen as a practical vindication of womanhood in a woman (Obi, 1970). Also, children are held as sources of pride, strength and economic fortune for the family, with a man's wealth, strength and influence being equated to his progeny (Okonofua et al., 1997). Having more children increases marital satisfaction among the Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria (Onyishi et al., 2012). Children occupy a central point in Igbo marriage (Oraukwu Traditional Marriage, 2015; Obi, 1970), and have been found to influence the quality of the marital relationship (Onyishi et al., 2012).

In Igbo society, the position of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child, especially a male child who will in the future inherit the estate to keep the family name (Obi, 1970). Another critical motive for fertility among the Igbos may be for old-age security motives (Nugent, 1985), due to the almost non-existent or poorly organized social security system. Onyishi et al. (Onyishi et al., 2012) in their study of children and marital satisfaction in a non-Western sample, found that having more children was associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction among the Igbo people of Nigeria. They reported that the number of children was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction, even when compared to other variables like wealth and education (Onyishi et al., 2012). They opined that the negative relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction is not culturally universal (Onyishi et al., 2012).

Literature is scarce on the relationship between marital satisfaction and place of residence (urban versus rural). In their comparative study of 376 women from Okpanku, a rural community, and 460 women from Ogui Nike, an urban community, both in Enugu State Southeast Nigeria, for divorce rate and domestic violence against women, Ajah et al., (2014) found higher divorce rate and domestic violence against women much higher among rural women. The prevalence of domestic violence among rural women was significantly higher than that among urban women (97% versus 81%). In particular, the prevalence of physical violence was significantly higher among rural women than among urban women (37.2% versus 23.5%).

Several studies suggest that higher mindful awareness is a good predictor of high marital satisfaction (Buss, 1991; Kim et al., 1989; Nemechek & Olson, 1996), and relationship satisfaction in romantic relationships (Barnes et al., 2007; Forster, 2017; Kozlowski, 2013). Mindfulness is defined as the ability of the individual to

purposefully bring his or her attention and awareness to the experiences of the present moment and relate to them in a non-reflexive and non-judgmental way (Bishop, 2004; Chiesa, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). It has also been defined as open or receptive attention to and awareness of what is taking place, both internally and externally, in the present (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness has been shown to have dispositional variance across individuals (Jones et al., 2011), and is associated with a range of intrapersonal characteristics related to health and wellbeing (Bihari & Mullan, 2014; Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness enables individuals to engage more, feel more self-confident, and to be less avoidant of uncomfortable situations (Bihari & Mullan, 2014). It results in context-sensitivity and a heightened awareness of alternative perspectives (Langer, 1989). In contrast, mindlessness results in insensitivity to context and perspective, which occurs when an individual gets locked into patterns of behavior, either overtime or on initial exposure (Burpee & Langer, 2005).

Mindfulness may be involved in the enhancement of the quality of romantic relationships (Burpee & Langer, 2005; Flaxman & Flook, 2008; Kozlowski, 2012), which could occur through the promotion of attunement, connection, and closeness in relationships (Kabat-Zinn, 1993; Welwood, 1996). Higher levels of trait mindfulness have been linked with more skilful responses to relationship stress, increased empathy, greater acceptance of one's partner, and more secure spousal attachment (Barnes et al., 2007; Burpee & Langer, 2005; Wachs & Cordova, 2007). Also, mindfulness is related to more interpersonal skills such as social and communication skills that have the potential to enhance the quality of the relationship (Jones & Hansen, 2014), given the emotionally challenging nature of intimacy (Cordova and Scott, 2001).

Different factors may contribute to increasing marital satisfaction more than others, and mindfulness has been shown to increase marital satisfaction through open-mindedness and flexibility, rather than criticism and rigidity (Burpee & Langer, 2005). Socio-demographic factors were also assessed to determine whether significant relationships might exist between socio-demographic factors and marital satisfaction. Several studies suggest that socio-demographic characteristics (Ahangar et al., 2016; Zaheri et al., 2016), and mindful awareness (Buss 1991; Kim et al., 1989; Nemechek & Olson, 1996), significantly correlate with the quality of the marital relationship. However, literature is scarce about these studies conducted among Nigerian samples. The data for the study was collected as part of a cross-sectional study to assess dependent personality, marital satisfaction and mindful awareness as predictors of postpartum psychological distress at two tertiary hospitals in Enugu, South-East Nigeria. The objective of the study was to investigate if mindfulness and socio-demographic factors correlated with the overall sense of marital satisfaction among nursing mothers in Enugu, Southeast Nigeria.

To achieve the objectives, we formulated the following hypotheses. H1: We expected demographic variables such as age, age at marriage, duration of the union, level of education, number of children, and number of pregnancies, to be positively associated with marital satisfaction. We also expected unemployment and residing in the rural area to negatively correlate with marital satisfaction. H2: We expected mindful awareness to correlate with the marital satisfaction of nursing mothers positively.

II. METHODS

Sample identification and recruitment procedures

We conducted the study at the postnatal clinics and children's welfare clinics of the University of Nigeria Teaching Hospital (UNTH), Ituku-Ozalla, Enugu State, Nigeria, and ESUT University Teaching Hospital Enugu; in Enugu South-East Nigeria. The hospitals provide medical services to residents of Enugu state, and also, receive referrals from, and beyond all five states of Southeast of Nigeria. We collected the data between November and December 2015 at the postnatal clinics and children's welfare clinics of the two hospitals. All the nursing mothers, who came to the clinics for follow-ups, and immunization for children, formed the sampling frame. There was a random selection of mothers with a randomization table using the outpatients' attendance list. Data from 300 participants, who gave their consent for the study, and who satisfied the inclusion criteria were analyzed. Preliminary interviews were conducted for the 334 randomly selected women to confirm their eligibility for the study, and 23 mothers were excluded, nine of whom were either divorced or single, while 11 mothers refused to give their consent, and withdrew from the study, or returned poorly completed questionnaires.

Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria include where delivery occurred from the gestational age of 36 weeks, being a nursing mother (mothers who are breastfeeding their babies), and visiting one of two tertiary healthcare facilities in Enugu, in South-East Nigeria for follow-ups and routine immunization for children. We excluded from the study, women with conditions that might decrease the reliability of the instrument for the assessment like multiple births, obstetric and pregnancy complications, any severe or unstable medical illness, a current or previous history of psychiatric disorders, and recent traumatic and life events. Single or divorced mothers were also excluded from the study.

Ethical standards

The study was approved by the ethics committee of the College of Medicine, University of Nigeria, Ituku-Ozalla Campus, Enugu, and have therefore been performed following the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its later amendments.

The nursing mothers were invited to participate in the study only after a complete description of the study was given to them. Written informed consent was sought and obtained from the mothers before their inclusion in the study.

Instruments**Socio-demographic Questionnaire**

Socio-demographic Questionnaire was used to collect information on age, number of pregnancies, the number of children, marital status, educational attainment and others.

Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS)

Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) was designed to measure the degree and severity or magnitude of the problems perceived by one or both spouses in their marital relationship (Hudson, 1982). The focus is on current problems that have impaired marital satisfaction. It is a 25-item inventory. The items that required reverse coding were reversed. For the index of marital satisfaction, 25 was subtracted from the score that arose from the summation of all the raw scores. A score below 30 was indicative of satisfaction with the relationship, while a score above 30 was indicative of dissatisfaction. The higher the score on IMS, the lower the satisfaction with the relationship (Hudson, 1982). For this study, the reliability estimate of IMS scores was .83 (Cronbach's alpha). Hudson (Hudson, 1982) reported a Cronbach's alpha of .96 and 2-hour test-retest reliability of .96. IMS has been validated in many countries, including Nigeria (Omoluabi, 1994; Oyewo, 2007), and the present sample had a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)

The Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) (Brown & Ryan, 2003) is a 15-item Likert scale questionnaire designed to assess mindfulness as a naturally occurring characteristic. It measures the core characteristic of mindfulness, namely, a receptive state of mind in which attention and awareness are purposefully brought to the experiences of the present moment and relate to those experienced in a non-reflexive and non-judgmental way, and only observes what is taking place (Bishop, 2004; Chiesa, 2012; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). So, this is in contrast to the conceptually driven mode of processing, in which events and experiences are filtered through cognitive appraisals, evaluations, memories, beliefs, and other forms of cognitive manipulation. Higher mean scores on the scale reflect higher levels of dispositional mindfulness (Brown & Ryan, 2003). A single factor scale structure has been confirmed for MAAS through factor analyses with an undergraduate, community and nationally sampled adults, and adult cancer populations (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Carlson & Brown, 2005). It has demonstrated high test-retest reliability, discriminant and convergent validity, known-groups validity, and criterion validity (Brown & Ryan, 2003). The MAAS has wider acceptability due to its potential applicability to the broader population. In the present sample, the Cronbach's alpha was .88, and this was also reported in a previous study in Nigeria (Oluyinka, 2011).

Data Analysis

All data were first keyed into EpiData software version 3.1 (The EpiData Association, Odense, Denmark), for data entry, documentation and storage, and was later transported to SPSS version 20.0 (IBM, USA) for analysis. Descriptive frequency distributions of the socio-demographic characteristics were determined. Shapiro-Wilk's test showed that mindful awareness, age, and age at marriage had a normal distribution, while the length of the marriage, number of children, number of pregnancies, number of deliveries, employment status, area of residence and educational attainment were non-parametric. However, to see the associations between all the study variables at once, the Spearman correlation was used for all the variables. A multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the relative contribution of each of the independent variables to marital satisfaction. All statistical tests were two-sided and were conducted at a significance level of 0.05.

Results

The age range of the nursing mothers, as shown in Table 1, was 20 – 46 years, with a mean and S.D. of 29.76 \pm 4.80, while the age range at marriage was 17 – 43 years, with a mean and S.D. of 25.57 \pm 3.84. Over 88% of the nursing mothers enrolled in tertiary education program, and most of them were graduates of tertiary educational institutions (75.0%). All the respondents went beyond primary school (elementary school), and only 1.70% of them dropped out of secondary school.

The mean score of the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS) was 4.02 (SD = 1.031). Based on the scoring system and procedure for Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS), the cutoffs of ≤ 30 are indicative of satisfaction with the marital relationship. The number of mothers with scores above 30 was 115 (38.3%), while those with scores ≤ 30 were 185 (61.7%).

Spearman's correlation coefficients analyses were conducted between all the study variables to help us to see the associations between all the study variables at once. The scores from MAAS, the educational attainment, and employment status had an inverse relationship with the score from IMS (Table 2). The area of residence had no significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

Given that scores of ≤ 30 are indicative of satisfaction with the marital relationship; mindful awareness, educational attainment and employment status had a positive correlation with marital satisfaction. While the scores from age, the age at marriage, the length of the marriage, the number of children, the number of pregnancies, and the number of deliveries had a negative relationship with the scores from IMS (Table 2).

Multiple regression was run to predict marital satisfaction from mindful awareness, age, age at marriage, the area of residence, the status of employment, educational attainment, length of the marriage, number of pregnancies, number of deliveries and the number of children alive. The assumptions for multiple regressions were satisfied. Partial regression plots and a plot of studentized residuals against the predicted values supported Linearity. Durbin-Watson statistic, which assessed Independence of residuals, was 1.98. Visual inspection of a plot of studentized residuals versus unstandardized predicted values was done to satisfy homoscedasticity. The tolerance value was greater than 0.1, and the variance inflation factor (VIF) was less than 10 (Hair et al. 1995); hence, there was no demonstration of multicollinearity. There was no evidence of studentized deleted residuals being greater than ± 3 standard deviations, no leverage value was greater than 0.2, and there was no value for Cook's distance that was above 1. The assumption of normality was satisfied and was assessed by Q-Q Plot.

The overall multiple regression model was statistically significant for marital satisfaction, $F(10, 289) = 13.344$, $p < .005$, adjusted $R^2 = .292$. Only three variables (mindfulness, educational attainment and the number of pregnancies) were statistically significant predictors, $p < .05$. We found that an increase in the number of pregnancies was the strongest predictor of a lower level of marital satisfaction. Also, a higher level of mindfulness was a strong predictor of a higher level of marital satisfaction, while higher educational attainment mildly predicted an increased level of marital satisfaction. Regression coefficients and standard errors are presented in Table 3.

Discussion

The study investigated the prevalence of marital satisfaction among nursing mothers, the socio-demographic factors and mindful awareness as predictors of marital satisfaction in the postnatal clinics and children's welfare clinics of two tertiary hospitals in Enugu, South-East Nigeria. The data for the study was collected initially as part of a cross-sectional study to assess dependent personality, marital satisfaction and mindful awareness as predictors of postpartum psychological distress in two tertiary hospitals. The prevalence of low marital satisfaction among the nursing mothers was quite high in this study, and a very significant number of them were graduates of tertiary educational institutions. The considerable number could mean that these women in order to achieve high educational attainment probably paid less attention to marriage and childbirth.

From the regression results, most of the significant correlation results became insignificant when other variables were added. Therefore, in the discussion, we would focus mostly on the variables that were significant in the regression analysis, while being more modest in terms of the strength of the effects of the variables which turned insignificant in the regression.

The present study found that a higher level of mindfulness was a moderate predictor of a higher level of marital satisfaction, and this is consistent with previous studies (Buss, 1991; Kim et al., 1989; Nemecek & Olson, 1996). Invariably, a decrease in mindfulness will predict lower marital satisfaction. Previous studies have suggested that lower levels of mindfulness could predict insecure attachment, which is usually associated with higher avoidance and higher anxiety (Leigh, 2010; Shaver et al., 2007), and that insecure attachment could predict lower marital satisfaction (Al Tamimi, 2009). Kozlowski (Kozlowski, 2013), in a review, suggested that higher levels of mindfulness, both dispositional and learned, are consistently correlated with greater romantic relationship satisfaction.

Another point of interest in the study is the finding that higher educational attainment mildly predicted an increased level of marital satisfaction. Our finding was supported by a previous study which reported that educated women experienced less marital conflict, which could encourage excellent marital satisfaction (Guo & Huang, 2005). Also, Zaheri et al., (2016), in a systematic review, reported a positive significant statistical relationship between educational level and marital satisfaction. They noted that the appropriateness of educational level and homogeneity between university majors could be a positive and influential factor in a couple's mutual understanding. Also, this is because it provides sufficient motivation and appropriate cultural atmosphere for verbal and spiritual communication between couples, which creates grounds for broader cultural and intellectual convergence (Zaheri et al., 2016).

Also, Heaton (2002) found that higher education attainment could potentially predict marital satisfaction, and this may be due to having no appreciable differences in the level of educational attainment. It could also be due to higher socio-economic status of the husband, which in some cases could make up for low educational attainment of the husband in Igbo society. In most of such cases, the women make an effort to brush up their

husbands, while their husbands make efforts to make up for their low educational attainment by engaging in activities that will reduce the deficit. Some young girls of marriageable age crave for such arrangement, because of the apparent financial security that such an arrangement would offer the woman and her children. Married couples, matched for the same level of education have been judged as having satisfying marriages, while married couples with different levels of education may be less satisfied with their marriages. It is mainly, if the female partner is the one with a higher level of educational attainment (Tucker & O'Grady, 2001), while the husband makes no effort to enhance himself to reduce the gap. Other studies have also reported that women with a high educational level tend to have less happy marriages (Alder, 2010), and high divorce rate (Chen, 2012), especially, if the male partner has lower education attainment (Tucker & O'Grady, 2001).

This study did not have data on the educational level of their husbands. However, in the contemporary Igbo society the education of girl-child is on the rise, and it has become apparent that parents, apart from sending the boys to school, make deliberate efforts to send their female children to school. While more girls enrol for tertiary education, a significant number of boys engage in business, or vocation after secondary education (high school). Also, to this effect, men with lower educational attainment tend to marry women with higher educational attainment.

The low level of marital dissatisfaction in the nursing mother may be due to the positive fall-out of the educational mismatch in which children from such marriages, where the woman is the more educated partner, tend to follow the footsteps of their mothers to gain higher education. The education of the children would be more guaranteed; since the education of every child starts from the family, and the mother is usually the first teacher (Amaghiro, 2015). Also, most of the men would point at their children as the reason for marrying women with higher-level educational attainment than them. On the contrary, some previous studies suggested that women with high educational attainment experienced unstable marriages (Cherlin, 1977, 1979; Janssen et al., 1998; Kalmijn, 1999), and that women with higher educational attainment are more likely have lower levels of marital satisfaction (Cherlin, 1979; Janssen et al. 1998).

The study also found that an increase in the number of pregnancies was the strongest predictor of a low level of marital satisfaction, and this does not support the study hypothesis. It is generally believed in Igbo society most married women crave for pregnancy, as it is seen as a state that heralds a socially and culturally desirable status (begetting children) in marriages. In Igbo culture, begetting a child is seen as a practical vindication of womanhood in a woman (Obi, 1970), and children are held as sources of pride, strength and economic fortune for the family, with a man's wealth, strength and influence being equated to his progeny (Okonofua et al., 1997). Apart from pregnancy being distressing on a marriage (Peppers & Knapp 1980), it could even more, when the pregnancies were unplanned and probably undesired (Rollins & Galligam, 1978). The data on the planning of the pregnancy or the desirability of it was not captured in this study.

All the significant correlation results that became insignificant when other variables were added in regression analysis will be discussed while being more modest in terms of the strength of the effects of the variables which turned insignificant in the regression. The study showed a moderate negative correlation between age, length of the marriage, and marital satisfaction, while age at marriage had a mildly negative correlation with marital satisfaction. These findings contradict what was observed in previous studies. Increased age has been associated with higher marital satisfaction (Ahangar et al., 2016), and studies have also suggested that lower marital satisfaction was higher among young married couples (Yazdanpanah et al., 2015; Sayadpour 2005). Marriage at an early age is highly related to poor marital satisfaction, and low marital satisfaction tends to be higher among young married couples (Yazdanpanah et al., 2015; Sayadpour, 2005). Age and age at marriage can be essential and underlying factors in increasing the stability of marriage (Strong et al., 2011). Given the emotionally challenging nature of intimacy (Cordova & Scott, 2001), people who married at a younger age are more likely to experience marital conflicts, mainly in the area of disloyalty and jealousy (Smart, 2008; Amato & Rogers, 1997). As people age, there is greater stability in emotional experience and better able to solve highly emotional problems (Carstensen et al., 2011), and emotional stability is a significant predictor of the happiness (Hills & Argyle, 2001). However, Burpee and Langer (Burpee & Langer, 2005) suggested in their study that younger individuals are generally more happily married than older individuals, especially if they have been married for a shorter, rather than more extended, period.

The study also showed that the length of marriage has an inverse relationship with marital satisfaction, and this was reported in previous studies. Kamp et al., (2008), in their research, suggested that the length of marriage was negatively correlated with marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction tends to be highest during the initial years of marriage and then gradually declines with length of marriage (Glenn, 1998; VanLaningham et al., 2001). In contrast, previous studies have found that the longer the length of marriage, the higher the marital satisfaction (Ahangar et al., 2016; Rohany & Sakdiah, 2010), and the long marriage length tend to improve intimacy among couples (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004; Brako, 2012; Mirfardi et al., 2010). As the time of marriage grows further, married couples get better chances in getting to know each other which could improve intimacy between them, and contribute positively to marital satisfaction (Hinchliff & Gott, 2004).

According to Burpee and Langer (Burpee & Langer, 2005), as time passes, couples may have more difficulty defending the accumulation of mindless daily rituals of keeping their marriages fresh and exciting. As life stressors accumulate, people may find it more challenging to maintain the level of satisfaction first present at the start of the marriage (Burpee & Langer, 2005). However, several other studies have suggested that there is no significant relationship between the length of the marriage and marital satisfaction among couples (Mirfardi et al., 2010; Ghoroghi et al., 2012; Ziaee et al., 2014). Besides, research on married students in Malaysia found that there is no correlation between marriage length and marital relationship (Ghoroghi et al., 2012).

The study also noted that there was lower marital satisfaction among the unemployed women, and previous studies have shown a positive correlation between higher marital satisfaction and female spouses being employed (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014; Mirzaie et al., 2014). Mirzaee et al., (2014) showed that marital satisfaction scores in employed, married women are significantly higher than the unemployed married women in charge of household (Mirzaie et al., 2014). However, in contrast, Moghadam et al., (Moghadam et al., 2006) in their study showed no statistically significant correlation between marital satisfaction and employment status of female spouses (Moghadam et al., 2006). However, it has been observed that financial problems and low income can increase marital conflict, lower marital satisfaction (Mirzaie 2015, Moghadam et al. 2006; Copur & Eker, 2014) and increase in the divorce rate between couples (Rabani & Beheshti, 2011).

Our finding may sound like a contradiction to logical expectations for people with a higher level of education are more likely to be employed. Moreover, a higher level of education will be positively related to higher marital satisfaction as employed people are more satisfied compared to unemployed people. However, many of the nursing mothers, despite their level of educational attainment, remain unemployed. There is a very high rate of unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria. In Nigeria, the unemployment rate measures the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force. The unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 12.31 per cent from 2006 until 2018, reaching an all-time high of 23.10 per cent in the third quarter of 2018 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

The study also found a negative correlation between the number of children, number of deliveries, and marital satisfaction. Previous studies from various cultures supported the finding support our finding regarding the relationship between the number of children and marital satisfaction (Burpee & Langer, 2005; Maghsoodi et al., 2011). Also, a previous study by Zanjani & Baghiat in Karaj, Iran (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014) showed that a higher number of children resulted in greater marital satisfaction (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014). However, suggesting that some culture-dependent factors may influence the association between marital satisfaction and the number of children (Sorokowski et al., 2017). Twenge, Campbell, and Foster (Twenge et al., 2003) in their study opined that marital satisfaction might decrease after the birth of a child due to role conflicts and restriction of freedom. Mirghafoorvand et al., (Mirghafoorvand et al., 2013) from another perspective, reported in their study that there were no statistically significant differences between the number of children and marital satisfaction (Mirghafoorvand et al., 2013).

Women with higher educational levels than their spouses tend to have less marital satisfaction (Kalmijn, 1999; Alder, 2010; Chen, 2012). However, higher educational level of both spouses could potentially predict higher marital satisfaction (Heaton, 2002), and this may be due to no considerable differences in the level of educational attainment (Tucker & O'Grady, 2001).

Mirzaee et al., in their study (2014) showed that marital satisfaction scores in employed married women are significantly higher than the unemployed housewives (Mirzaie et al., 2014). However, in contrast, Moghadam et al., (Moghadam et al., 2006) in their study showed no statistically significant correlation between marital satisfaction and employment status of female spouses (Moghadam et al., 2006). There is a positive correlation between financial problems, unemployment, low income and lower marital satisfaction (Zanjani & Baghait, 2014; Mirzaie, 2015).

Conclusion

Marital quality has far-reaching implications for the health and well-being of the mother and the family. This study suggests that a higher level of mindful awareness and higher levels of educational attainment were associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. It also suggested that an increase in the number of pregnancies will be associated with less happy marriages. The research findings may carry significant implications for the role of social-demographic characteristics and mindfulness awareness, within the context of building and sustaining happy marital relationships and general well-being. The findings might inform future research that its outcome may be integrated into clinical practice that will contribute to relationship satisfaction and emotional well-being.

Limitations

This study included only nursing mothers who visited the two tertiary health care in Enugu. Therefore, the study sample was selective rather than representative. As such, the results cannot be generalized to the entire country or the entire population of Southeastern Nigeria. Data were collected in the form of a self-report survey, and

participants may not have revealed or correctly given information about themselves and therefore may not have provided all the accurate information.

The implication of the Study to practice

The result of this study will add more empirical pieces of evidence to the body of knowledge that will inform practice and help policymakers to focus on those things that will help to increase emotional well-being and higher levels of marital satisfaction among women in Southeast Nigeria.

Recommendations

The study found that an increase in the number of pregnancies was the strongest predictor of a low level of marital satisfaction. The finding does not support generally held believe in Igbo society where it is believed that most married women crave for pregnancy, as it is seen as a state that heralds a socially and culturally desirable status (begetting children) in marriages. These findings may suggest a shift in social and cultural norms, which its explanations may need further investigations.

Future Research

Future studies should be designed to address some of the deficiencies of the present work to improve its validity for southeastern Nigeria.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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Table 1:
Distribution of Mothers According to Age Range; Marital Status, Educational Status, Area of Residence, Employment Status, Religion, Ethnicity.

Variables		N	%		
Age (years)	Age Range			Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
	20 – 25	52	17.33	29.76	±4.80
	26 – 35	219	73.00		
	36 – 43	24	8.00		
	44 – 46	5	1.60		
Age at marriage	Age Range at marriage				
	17 - 20	27	9	25.57	±3.84
	21 - 30	247	82.33		
	31 - 40	26	8.66		
	41 - 43	2	0.66		
Educational Status	Secondary school completed	30	10.00		
	Secondary school not completed	5	1.70		
	Tertiary education completed	225	75.00		
	Tertiary education not completed	40	13.30		
Area of Residence	Urban Area	276	92.00		
	Rural Area	24	8.00		
Employment Status	Employed	170	56.7		
	Unemployed/housewife	79	26.3		
	Student	51	17.0		
Religion	Christianity	209	99.70		
	Muslim	1	.30		
Ethnicity	Igbo	297	99.00		
	Others	3	1.00		
Total		300	100		

Table 2:
Spearman's Rank-Order Correlation Coefficient Assessing the Relationship between Independent Variables and Marital Satisfaction.

	Marital Satisfaction	Mindful Awareness	Patient's Age	Age at Marriage	Length of Marriage	Number of Pregnancies	Number of Deliveries	Number of Children	Educational Attainment	Employment Status
Mindful Awareness	-.387**									
Patient's Age	.316**	.031								
Age at Marriage	.120*	.114*	.624**							
Length of Marriage	.365**	-.049	.569**	-.169**						
Number of Pregnancies	.430**	-.080	.539**	-.075	.875**					
Number of Deliveries	.392**	-.061	.489**	-.143*	.886**	.923**				
Number of Children	.392**	-.059	.482**	-.147*	.881**	.913**	.987**			
Educational Attainment	-.196**	.059	-.143*	-.068	-.127*	-.089	-.118*	-.118*		
Employment Status	-.183**	-.111	-.484**	-.328**	-.258**	-.209**	-.209**	-.207**	.288**	
Area of Residence	-.070	-.002	-.080	-.132*	-.028	-.055	-.026	-.021	-.011	.159**

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

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3
Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Likely to Predict Marital Satisfaction from the Independent Variables

Marital Satisfaction Independent Variable	B	SE _B	β
Intercept (Constant)	36.900	10.751	
Mindful Awareness	6.082	.890	-.344*
Age at Marriage	2.534	1.529	.534
Age	-1.788	1.517	-.475
Area of Residence	-1.963	3.395	-.029
Status of Employment	-.170	.995	-.010
Level of Education Attained	-2.670	1.293	-.108*
Duration of Marriage	1.539	1.534	.320
Number of Pregnancies	3.992	1.282	.362*
Number of Deliveries	.050	4.323	.004
Number of Children Alive	.642	4.214	.047

Note: *p < .05; B = Unstandardized regression coefficients; SE_B = Standard error of the coefficients; β = Standardized coefficients