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Constructs of Marital Stability among fishers in Kenya

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ABSTRACT: Marriage and counselling are based on social cohesion, values, behaviour and beliefs which are strongly associated with socio-cultural factors. The purpose of this study was to establish the level of marital stability among fishers in Siaya County of Kenya. This study was guided by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The study used Mixed Methods Research, with a Convergent Mixed Research Design. The sample size of 99 married fisher were selected. Data was collected using interview schedule for married fishers. Reliability of the questionnaires was established through Cronbach's alpha. Data were analysed using frequencies, percentages, and Chi-square analysis. The results indicated that majority of the marriage (56%) belonged under unsatisfied-stable level of marital stability. The levels of marital stability differed by age, length in marriage, type of marriage and parenting status. From the findings, the study recommends couple's communication enhancement, and marital counselling be put in place to help the fishers experience marital stability. Religious leaders and other stake holders to organise trainings, seminars and workshops to enhance marriage skills, religious beliefs and ethnic values. The study also recommends marital counselling should be enhanced and done at integrated level to help get solutions to marital problems and realize marital stability.

KEYWORDS: *Fishers communities, Kenya, Marital stability, Marital happiness, Siaya, Religious beliefs, ethnic values*

I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage, matrimony or wedlock, is a recognized institution that permits the union/contract between two or more individuals, establishes rights and obligations between them, as well as any resulting biological or adopted children (Bookman, 2015). Thus, the elementary basis of marriage is defined as "a personal association between a man and a woman and a biological relationship for mating and reproduction" (Lundberg and Pollak, 2015). In this stance, marriage is viewed as a social institution in which two individuals come together and agree to stay together in matrimony with a view for having children as an outcome (Wallerstein, 2019). Viewed based on societal angle, the marriage encompass all the behaviours, expectations, norms, roles, and values linked with legal union of a man and woman (Nouri *et al.*, 2019). Individuals come together in marriage for several reasons including legal, social, libidinal, emotional, financial, spiritual, and religious purposes (Whyte, 2018). This may lead to the recognition of the marriage by individuals or peers, state, an organization, a religious authority, a tribal group and local community (Senchak and Leonard, 1992). In various societies, marriage serves as a moral safeguard as it act as an outlet for sexual needs and regulates man's and woman's sexual desires (Becker and Becker, 2009). The "ideal" of married love for most people include romance, sex, friendship and devotion (Halwani, 2018). Meeting these expectations in marriage occur due to commitment of the marital partnership which is key in managing the transition of detaching sufficiently from each of their families of origin and forming a new cohesive marital unit (Uğur, 2016).

In life, a long term and lasting marriage is often considered a key life goal and a key indicator for well-being and health (Karimi *et al.*, 2019). Couples should in essence live together in marriage and enjoy the closest possible loving and fulfilling relationship without any intention of break-up (Whyte, 2018). It is therefore common for every party to enter into the relationship hoping to find positive and enjoyable life (Khodaparast, 2019). Others believe that their relationship will last as long as they love the other person (Lawrence *et al.*, 2019). On the one hand, when people live together as couples, they may reassess their goals and wishes of remaining together (Wadsworth, 2016). The interplay of these aspects in marriage bring into force the issue of marital stability. In more contemporary family, marriage and counselling literature, scholars have shown that marital stability is a process that typically entails how marriage is fairing on based on perceived marital standards (Clements *et al.*, 2004). There are issues of balancing self-interests and values leading to the formation and maintenance of steadier and consistent behaviours within and between married persons (Graff *et al.*, 2019).

Marital stability in its classical conception refers to the balancing of self-interests and values leading to the formation and maintenance of steadier and consistent behaviours within and between married persons (Yucel, 2016). There is however, a consensus that marital stability can be classified into four categories: satisfied-stable (high quality), satisfied-unstable (good), unsatisfied-unstable (bad), and unsatisfied-stable marriages (very bad) (Brisini *et al.*, 2018). Not all stable marriages are happy, but this category is relatively small with estimates that 7.4% of married men and 7% of married women are in stable unhappy marriages (Glenn *et al.*, 2010). These constructs have been used for long in defining marital stability in studies in several places in the United State, Europe and Asia (Collins, 2017).

There are various studies conducted on marital stability across different spheres. Results reveal a relatively high marital satisfaction in long-term marriages (Camp and Ganong, 1997). It has also been suggested that relationship satisfaction follows a curvilinear pattern over the life course, declining in the earlier years of marriage and increasing through the later years (Mazzuca *et al.*, 2019). In turn, other study results revealed that marital happiness tends to decline over time, and that marital stability is stronger and consistently associated with age than with marital duration (Margelisch *et al.*, 2017). Despite empirical evidence for a positive association between marital stability, and subjective well-being, the effects can vary across individuals, groups and living contexts (Karimi *et al.*, 2019). However, to date, integrative work exploring the contexts of marital stability in various subsets of population is rare. Relatively little is known about marital stability among African couples due to relatively very few studies (Animasahun and Fatile, 2011). Thus an understanding of the level of marital stability among African couples is therefore urgently needed, which formed the basis of the current study.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design
The current study utilized concurrent transformative design where both the qualitative and quantitative data were collected at the same time. In this research design qualitative and quantitative data was collected and analysed simultaneously allowing for perspectives from each to be explored. The conduct of the study was informed by a theoretical perspective and data that was integrated during the interpretation phase.

2.2 Location of the Study
The study was conducted in Siaya County which is one of the six counties in the Nyanza region in Kenya. The county is about 400 km from Nairobi, the Kenyan Capital City. The altitude of the County rises from 1,140 m on the shores of Lake Victoria to 1,400 m above sea level on the North. Siaya County is dominated by Luo people speaking Luo dialect. The main livelihoods of the Luo people in Siaya County are fishing, farming and pastoral herding however fishing is more practiced. The county is divided into six sub-counties namely; Siaya, Gem, Bondo, Rarieda, Ugenya and Ugunja. Siaya County has 67 beaches, however the researcher focused on the main landing sites which include Kadenge, Ndayi, Kamariga and Usenge. Siaya County was chosen because of the reported cases of low marital stability in earlier literature (Potash, 1978).

2.3 Target Population of the Study
The study population comprised of 10370 registered married fishers in the main landing sites of Siaya County, 75 beach leaders and 23 religious' leaders (Siaya County Statistics, 2018). The total population was derived from the six sub counties. The target population comprised 10,370 residents at the landing sites.

2.4 Sample Size and Sampling Procedures
From a target population of each unit, the sample size was determined using Yamane formula (Yamane, 1973): thus $n = \dfrac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$.

Where n = required responses

    N = Population

    e^2 = error limit (0.1 for samples between 100 to 1000)

Married fishers were determined as: $n \text{ for respondents} = \dfrac{10370}{1 + 10370 * 0.1^2} = 99$

The sample size was arrived at as shown in Table 1. The married fishers were stratified into male and female. The sample size of male and female fishers was determined as a proportion of the total population. Simple random sampling was then utilized to identify the female and male fishers. Therefore, the desired sample size was 99 married fishers, 8 beach leaders and 8 religious' leaders (Table 1).

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE SIZE

Landing sites	Fishers		
	Male	Female	Total
Kadenge	9	12	21
Ndayi	9	15	24
Kamariga	10	17	27
Usenge	11	17	28
Total	40	59	99

2.5 Instrumentation

The instrument for data collection was interview schedule for the fishers. Items in the interview schedule were designed and used to collect data directly from the married fishers while the interview guide was designed to collect data from the beach leaders and religious leaders. The items were in both closed and open-ended structure and administered to all sampled fishers. The instruments were designed to ensure the in-depth exploration of personal views, feelings and opinions the extent to which the selected socio-cultural practices affect marital stability and counselling.

Scoring of the instrument was done to establish the levels of marital stability, seeking of marital counselling, religious beliefs and ethnic values. In determining the marital stability, 28 items based on Likert scale 1 to 5 were used where the lowest score was 28 and maximum score of 140.

TABLE 2: SCORING METRICS FOR THE INSTRUMENTS

Variable	Scores	Classification
Marital Stability	28-71	Unsatisfied-unstable
	72-99	Unsatisfied-stable
	100-128	Satisfied-unstable
	>128	Satisfied-stable

2.6 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The researcher developed the interview schedule and guide in line with the research objectives. The salience of the instruments was sought by providing the interview schedule and guides to three experts in the field of Counselling Psychology at the Department of Counselling Psychology of Egerton University. This was to purposely ascertain the item's face and content validities. Their comments and suggestions were used to improve the items in the instruments.

The reliability of instruments was established through a pilot study in Luanda Kotieno Beach. Twenty married fishers participated in the pilot study. Cronbach's coefficient alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the items in the interview schedule. The study considered the instrument reliable and acceptable if the computation yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.7 and above, which is considered acceptable in most social sciences research (Taber, 2018). The reliability coefficient estimated was 0.87 and it was considered adequate.

2.7 Data Collection Procedure

Once the research proposal was approved, the researcher obtained the introductory letter from the Graduate School, Egerton University. The researcher then applied for a research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Thereafter the researcher visited the study area and through the beach leaders, planned with individual respondents on the appropriate date and time for data collection. The researcher assistants were trained for 2 weeks on how to conduct interviews with the respondents for the data collection. The entire data collection exercise was one month. The researcher used two research assistants who communicated in the local dialect. The research assistants administered the interview schedule to the fishers and the researcher conducted the interviews with religious and beach leaders.

2.8 Data Analysis

Collected data was coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version (23.0) computer package (SPSS, 2011) before analysis. Data on characteristics of the fishers, marital stability were analysed through frequencies and percentages. Significant differences between marital stability relative to age of marriage, length of marriage and type of marriage were analysed using chi-square.

2.9 Ethical issues
This study adhered to the ethical standards required in research vis-a-vis: anonymity, confidentiality and informed consent. Anonymity was ensured by not collecting and identifying information of individual subjects (e.g., name, address, Email address, etc). Confidentiality was ensured by not divulging the identity of the respondents or their organizations. Informed consent to participate in the study was obtained from the study participants including authorization from the beach management leaders.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Response Rate
The researcher sampled 99 married fishers. They were provided with the questionnaires and the response rates to the questionnaires was 96% which was considered very good when compared to the recommended response rates to verify consistency of measurements required for analysis of over 60% (Greco *et al.*, 2018).

3.2 Characteristics of the Married Fishers
This section presents the characteristics of the fishers including age, parental status, type of family, and type of marriage. This was meant to generate responses which are representative of the general view of the respondents where the research was conducted. Table 3 summarizes fishers' characteristics by age, parenting status, type of family and type of marriage.

TABLE 3: CHARACTERISTICS OF MARRIED FISHERS

Variable	Range	Married fishers (n = 95)	
		Frequency	Percent
Age of fishers	18-25 years	12	12.6
	26-35 years	17	17.9
	36-55 years	31	32.6
	> 55 years	35	36.8
Type of family	Nuclear	37	38.9
	Extended	58	61.1
	Total	95	100
Type of marriage	Monogamous	32	33.7
	Polygamous	63	66.3
	Total	95	100

The results show that among the married fishers, 36% of the respondents were aged over 55 years, while 32.6% were aged between 36 to 55 years, and those between 18 to 25 years were 12.6%. The results for the three groups suggest that the age distribution is skewed towards elderly who are mainly above the age of 35 years. In most parts of Africa, marriages take place when a man is around 30 to 35 years and the woman around 26 to 30 years (Kaufman and Nandi, 2015; Maswikwa *et al.*, 2015). In terms of types of marriage, the study established that, most had extended families compared to nuclear families indicating that marriage in the study area still relied on the traditional marriage customs where polygamy is still acceptable norm. In issues were more complex transcending the normal man and wife relationships which agrees with other studies (Myers, 2018). There was also the issues of marriage being dominated by extended family. Marriage system in Africa has common features of involving not just the man wife and children but also include close and other distant relatives which make them more extended as a rule; unions are often more than one lineage groups and more than few family members (Phillips, 2018).

3.3 Marital Stability among Fishers
The level of marital stability was based on scoring of the interview schedule among the fishers in Siaya County. The fishers' responses were summarized into four categories of those who felt that they were in satisfied-stable marriages, satisfied-unstable marriages, unsatisfied-stable marriages and unsatisfied-unstable marriages. This is shown in Table 4. A successful marriage is both men's and women's best bet for living healthy and happy. It provides the optimal conditions for bearing and raising children as well (Umberson and Thomeer, 2020). Marriage and family are key structures in most societies. Therefore, a healthy marriage provides benefits to a person physically, mentally, financially, and sexually (Lawrence *et al.*, 2019). Echebe (2010), observed that marital stability lead to a well-balanced and well-adjusted family which in turn lead to well-adjusted progressive society. Marital stability and happiness are to large extent reflected in the ratio of positive to negative behaviour in the relationship. The high quality and supportive relationships is essential to develop healthy individuals in all aspects of life. As part of a "healthy" marriage, there is need to ensure stability in the marital relationship by

taking up the necessary measures or steps to ensure smooth running of family activities that promote marital stability (Karney and Bradbury, 2020).

TABLE 4: LEVEL OF MARITAL STABILITY AMONG FISHERS

Satisfied-Stable Marriage		Satisfied-Unstable Marriage		Unsatisfied-Stable Marriage		Unsatisfied-Unstable Marriage	
F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
8	8.4	16	16.8	54	56.8	17	17.9

Among the fishers sampled, the results showed that majority of the marriage belonged under unsatisfied-stable level of marital stability (56.8%), which suggest that the marriage is unhappy but stable. Unsatisfied-stable marriage is the hallmark of several marriages in Africa (Fledderjohann, 2017). In Kenya, it was reported that most couples get married without any form of pre-marital counselling and therefore likely to have low marital quality which was associated with most unsatisfied marriages (Odero, 2019). Although there are no such studies in Siaya County, the available findings in Kenya indicate that most couples in unsatisfied-stable relationship fear that if they end their marriage they will be subject to societal ridicule and the children will suffer as a consequence (Ndungu, 2017). Further to that, there is the societal view that once married, the couple should stick to the union to avoid ridicule by the community. In fact, a number of available studies suggest that most of the couples fear dissolve unsatisfactory marriage because of the fear that the children will suffer the consequences, and they will be stigmatized leading them to just hang in into the relationship (Masua, 2016). Another reason is that most of the couples have fear that it will lead to sharing of the family belonging (Goodman *et al.*, 2019). The study established that those under unsatisfied-unstable marriage (17.9%) had similar proportion to the satisfied-unstable marriage (16.8%). In this context, most of the couples are in unstable marriage, but they still remain in their marriage satisfied. The marital success or failure therefore depends on an individual's weighing of the benefits of the relationship or all aspects of the relationship that may be rewarding, for example, financial expenses or sexual fulfilment. When couples are unsatisfied- unstable in their marriage, there is constant threat. Such couples may not be strong and resilient against common issues and obstacles within their marriage. They often experience persistent undertone of drama and disagreements are quick to escalate. When marriage is under unsatisfied-unstable, couples think and go for worst scenarios, (Brook, 2016). Results revealed that 8.4% of the couples were belonging to satisfied-stable (8.4%). This could be attributed to couples who had the ability to practise less dysfunctional individual coping strategies and relied more frequently on interpersonal (dyadic) coping when dealing with stressful situations between them (Wadsworth, 2016). Successful marriages must be developed and in order to achieve the marital stability (White *et al.*, 2019).

3.4 Constructs of marital stability among the fishers
The study further sought to establish the level of marital stability by age. Cross tabulation of the percentage of the fishers with different levels of marital stability against the age of the couples is shown in Table 5.

TABLE 5: LEVEL OF MARITAL STABILITY BY AGE, LENGTH OF MARRIAGE AND TYPE OF MARRIAGE

	Percent of Fishers with Different Levels of Marital stability				
Age (years)	Satisfied-Stable Marriage	Satisfied-Unstable Marriage	Unsatisfied-Stable Marriage	Unsatisfied-Unstable Marriage	Total
18-25	5.3	2.1	5.3	0.0	12.6
26-35	1.1	7.4	9.5	0.0	17.9
36-55	1.1	1.1	17.9	12.6	32.6
> 55	1.1	6.3	24.2	5.3	36.8
Total	8.4	16.8	56.8	17.9	100.0
Length of marriage					
< 1 year	6.3	2.1	11.6	3.2	4.2
1-5 years	0.0	8.4	8.4	0.0	8.4
6-10 years	1.1	0.0	20.0	10.5	31.6
> 10 years	1.1	6.3	16.8	4.2	27.4
Total	8.4	16.8	56.8	17.9	100
Type of marriage					

Monogamous	5.3	3.2	15.8	9.5	33.7
Polygamous	3.2	13.7	41.1	8.4	66.3
Total	8.4	16.8	56.8	17.9	100

As indicated in table 5, most of the couples who were in unsatisfied–stable marriage (24.2%) were aged between 36-55. The study established that those couples under the same age also experienced unsatisfied- unstable marriage (12.6%). The study then established that those couples who experienced satisfied-stable marriage at 8.4% were aged between 18-25. Marital relationships have often been described using a "U-curve pattern (Graham and Pozuelo, 2017) with people generally affirming that their marriages are happiest during the early years, but not as happy during the middle years. Marital satisfaction then increases in the later years after finances have stabilized and parenting responsibilities have ended, (Craig, 2015). During the age between 36-55, relationships dissolve for as many reasons as there are numbers of challenges. In some cases, the couple cannot handle an extended crisis, the spouses change and grow in different directions and still in others, the spouses are completely incompatible from the very start. Conflicts, problems, growing out of love, and "empty nest", feeling a lack of purpose in life or emotional stress) demand to children's need, and children who have left home, all are inevitable issue, (Solomon, 2016). Those who are in a polygamous marriage often live in fear of divided attention and love. Emotionally, couples in polygamous marriage live in conflict and misunderstanding among the couples. Peaceful stay is often disrupted by seasonal jealousy and sometimes the leader being the man may not be able to financially meet the needs of the entire family thus competition among the wives and children erupts (Samad *et al.*, 2016).

The current study further sought to determine the difference in level of marital stability by age of the married fishers in Siaya County and a Chi-square analysis used to test the significance of the cross-tabulation. This is presented in Table 6.

TABLE 6: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN MARITAL STABILITY BY AGE, LENGTH OF MARRIAGE AND TYPE OF MARRIAGE

	Pearson Chi-Square	df	*p*-value
Age of the fishers	41.540	9	.000
Length of marriage	23.721	9	0.005
Type of marriage	8.237	3	0.041

Based on statistical chi-square test that was done as seen in table 8, there were significant differences in marital stability based on age of the respondents ($P < 0.001$). It is therefore clear that marital stability of the fishers in Siaya County is related to the age of the couples. The result in table also indicates that there was a difference in the marital stability based on length of marriage and type of marriage ($P < 0.001$). Most of those who had been married for less than one year experienced satisfied- stable marriage because the societal pressure and children responsibilities had not set in, that has been reported to cause a lot of strains in a relationship (Kabete, 2017). Among those with satisfied-unstable marriage majority had been married for 1-5 years which were followed by those married for over 10 years. The findings suggest that staying longer in marriage result in the couples become unsatisfied with the marriage. This could be because of most people in marriage becoming "bored" with each other after long period of staying together (Kiara, 2019). Inconsistent findings have been reported in the literature regarding whether negative or positive aspects of marital relationships are associated with marital length. There are some findings which have reported that the longer humans stay together, the more they find faults with each other because at the start of a relationships most of the partners hide a lot of their characters which becomes exposed in marriage (Wachira *et al.*, 2017). Respondents under monogamous marriage were satisfied and stable in their marriages (5.3%) while most of those in polygamous marriages were unsatisfied– stable (41.1%). There are disputes about inheritance, and in the case of bankruptcy, the family remains uninsured. Less time and attention are given to children exposing them to all forms of lifestyle. Polygamy is associated with mental illness (in particular, depression and anxiety) among women and children thus may compromise marital stability. Men have also been found to play it tough in the face of conflict and anxiety in polygamous homes despite all the other challenges they face.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The level of marital stability for majority of the couple was stable-unsatisfied. The differences in marital stability by age, length in marriage and type of marriage revealed that there were differences in the level of

marital stability with findings indicating that majority of the married fishers (56.8%) were unsatisfied-stable. The study also determined that the level of marital stability differed with age. The findings indicate that married fishers aged 18-25 years had satisfied-stable marriage, while all the couples of all the age groups 25 years had unsatisfied-stable marriage. In marital stability of unsatisfied-unstable marriage, majority of the couples were of the age group 36-55 years (12.6%). In terms of study findings on the marital stability by length of marriage, couples with less than one year of marriage had relatively higher levels of satisfied-stable Marriage (6.3%) compared to the other age groups (<1.2%). Meanwhile for satisfied-unstable marriage higher numbers of fishers in this age group were 1-5 years 98.4%) and over 10 years in marriage (6.3%). Study findings on the level of marital stability by type of marriage showed observable differences. The study findings indicated that polygamous marriages led to satisfied-unstable marriages among couples (13.8%) compared to monogamous couples (3.2%). Furthermore, results revealed that majority of polygamous couples (41.1%) compared to monogamous couples (15.8%) had unsatisfied-unstable marriage. Both the polygamous and monogamous married fishers appeared to suffer more equally from unsatisfied-unstable marriage.

It is recommended that communication should be enhanced between couples in order to address the low level of marital stability with a view to help them overcome the challenges in marriage. Moreover, workshops and seminars should be arranged by different stakeholders to enlighten the fishers on the importance of marriage and the need to practice good marital attributes that will enhance marital stability. Also there is a need to do further research on the levels of seeking marital counseling in the region to determine how the married couples respond to marital challenges.

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