



Emotional intelligence as correlates of marital stability among married couples in rivers state Nigeria

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Abstract

The study investigated emotional intelligence as correlates of marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria. A correlational design was adopted for the study. The Taro Yamen's formula was used to determine the sample size of 392 respondents from estimated population of 20000 married couples in the three Senatorial District in Rivers State Nigeria. Two researcher's structured instruments titled "Emotional Intelligence Assessment Questionnaire and Marital Stability Scale were used to elicit information for the study of the extent to which self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers Sate Nigeria. The instruments were validated by experts in the field of educational measurement and evaluation and educational guidance and counselling.. The reliability of the instruments was established using cronbach Alpha, the results yielded an Alpha of 'a' 0.81 for emotional intelligence assessment questionnaire and 'a' 0.78 for marital stability scale. Findings of the study revealed that to a high extent self-awareness, self-regulation predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria, to a very high extent empathy predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers State, It was recommended among other things that married couples should practice mindfulness to improve self-regulation and also cognitive reframing process involving challenging one's thoughts and replacing them with positive ones should be acquired.

Keywords: self- awareness, self- regulation, empathy, marital stability

Introduction

The institution of marriage from the aspect of societal interpretation refers to all behaviours, norms, role expectations, and values that are associated with legal union of man and woman. Marriage is seen as an institutionalized social relationship of crucial importance. The institution of marriage exist in all societies across the global in spite of diversity of customs, forms and functions. In Nigeria marriage is perceived as the union for life, (though subject to divorce) between a man and a woman in the case of statutory marriage and a woman or more than one woman in case of customary and Islamic religion, (Olomjobi, 2016) ^[18]. Scholars of anthropology have defined marriage in order to accommodate the wide variety of marital practices seen across many cultures. Westermarck in (George, Ukpong and Imah 2016) ^[6] defined marriage as a "more or less durable connection between male and female lasting beyond the mere act of propagation. According to Sheri (2021) ^[27] marriage is a formal union, social and legal contract, between two individuals that unite their lives legally, economically and emotionally. The contractual marriage agreement often entails that the couple has legal obligations to each other throughout their lives unless they divorce. The concept of marriage in Nigeria is often seen as having essential role in the preservation of moral and tradition. Nigeria culture regards marriage as one of the key social customs that gives respect and status to an individual. Amiru in (George, Ukpong and Imah 2014) ^[30] opined that three types of marriage practices in Nigeria include traditional marriage or (native and custom), religious (church etc) and civil (court) marriage. Also two forms of marriages exist in Nigeria, namely monogamy - a marriage of one man to one woman, and polygamy a marriage of one man to two or more wives. These forms and practices of marriage are evident in almost all tribes in Nigeria. Marriage breeds bonds between and among groups. The beauty of marriage is that couples have a lifetime to understand and appreciate their differences. Happily married couples aren't smarter, richer, or more psychological astute than others, but in their day-to-day-lives, they have hit upon a dynamic that keeps their negative thoughts and feelings about each other from overwhelming their positive ones. They have emotional intelligent marriage, Gottman in Zach (2016). The condition of marriage guarantees the extent of peace couple will derive in their marriage, it also guarantees marital stability.

Marital stability can be seen as remaining legally married without divorce, physical separation, or legal separation (Mitchell & Plauche 2016) ^[16]. Marital stability among married couples is characterized by knowing that there is a mutually influenced baseline of how couple are with each other and what their marriage looks like. If they ever move away from the baseline, they will both work together to repair and reestablish their healthy foundation, Marital stability is founded on strong communication that leads to a deeper connection between couple, thus expectations are clear and agreed upon especially in conflict. There is mutual trust that shows that

the intention of the spouse is always in service of the strength of the union. A clear communication of expectations, needs and desires among married couple is the foundation of marital stability (Megan 2021) ^[14]. Evidence suggests that in marriage there appear to be moments of conflict, misunderstanding, misaligned expectation and mistake. However in marriages experiencing marital stability tough conversations are faced rather than avoided and when couple embody openness and curiosity, tough conversation become an opportunity to learn more about one's partner. One of the simplest signs that indicates couple are experiencing marital stability is expression of kindness among themselves and understanding of spouse's point of view, treating one another with respect, love, kindness, mutually understanding agreements on each individual's personal and interpersonal boundaries, regular self-reflection, feeling safe and comfortable and being honest both with oneself and one's spouse. A solid and admirable marriage is rooted on mutual understanding and honest communication. Communication is an important instrument by means of which marriage partners share their life experiences and through which they send signals and messages to each other. One essential feature of marital stability is marriage having personality traits that are compatible or coexist. A happy marriage that guarantee marital stability is an emotionally intelligent marriage involving two individual who are committed to both self and other awareness. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand, use, and manage one's emotion in positive ways to relieve stress, communicate effectively, empathize with others, overcome challenges, and defuse conflict, (Segal, Smith, Robinson & Shubin 2021) ^[24]. Emotions are important pieces of information that lets an individual know about himself/herself and about others, however in stressful situation it takes individuals out of their comfort zone, hence making individuals, lose their temper. Been emotionally aware, an individual can learn to receive upsetting information without letting it override his/her thoughts or self-control and be able to make choices that allows controlling of impulsive feeling, and behaviour, managing emotions in healthy ways, taking initiative, following through on commitment and adjust to changing situations. Being able to connect one's emotion, that is having a moment- to - moment connection with one's changing emotional changes is the key to awareness of how emotion effects one's thoughts and actions. Emotional intelligence could also be the abilities, such as being able to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustrations, to control impulse and delay gratification, to regulate one's moods and keep distress from swamping the ability to think, to empathize and to hope. Much evidence testifies that people who are emotional adept, who know and manage their own feelings and who read and deal effectively with other people's feelings are at an advantage in any domain of life, whether romance, marriage or picking up the unspoken rules that govern success in organization politics or in education, Vipene and Okirigwe (2021) ^[31] opined that emotional intelligence of a teacher is a great instrument which can evaluate a teacher's performance, achievement and qualities. People with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their lives, master the habits of mind that foster their own productivity. People who cannot marshal some control over their emotional life fight inner battles that sabotage their ability focused work and clear thought. When emotions are too muted they create dullness and distance, when out of control, too extreme and persistent, they become pathological, as in immobilizing depression, over-whelming anxiety, raging anger, manic agitation. The key to emotional well-being and marital stability is when couple keep distressing emotions in check. Extreme emotions among married couples that vex too intensely or for too long undermine stability. The challenge is to manage one's emotional life with intelligence, our passions when well exercised, have wisdom; they guide our thinking, our values and our survival. The problem is not with emotionality but with the appropriateness of emotions and its expression. Emotional intelligence according to Bayatzizs and Sala in (Syade, 2009) is a set of competencies or abilities to recognizes and use emotional information about oneself and others that leads to or causes effective and superior performance. Emotions are powerful forces that sets the tone for a marriage, good or bad (Bechtoldt & Schner, 2016) ^[3]. One key distinction that sets happily married couples apart from unhappily married couples is a greater capacity for emotional intelligence in their marriage (Bechtoldt & Schner, 2016) ^[3]. Accordingly to fitness in (Syeda & Ruhi, 2009) ^[28] higher emotional intelligence enable people to move effectively, manage the delicate emotional negotiations (e.g. seeking and granting forgiveness), and happiness in marriage might depend upon each partner's ability to cope constructively with conflicts and to understand and manage negative emotions like anger and hate. The importance of emotional intelligence hinges on the link between sentiment, character and moral instincts, (Goleman, 2010) ^[7]. There is growing evidence that fundamental ethical stances in life stem from underlying emotional capacities, for an individual impulse is the medium of emotion, the seed of all impulse is a feeling bursting to express itself in action, those who are at the mercy of impulse, who lacks self-control suffer moral deficiency. The ability to control impulse is the base of will and character. Accordingly the ability to say sorry and to practice forbearance needs certain emotional skills, like empathy, self-control, and a highly serviceable understanding of human needs and feelings. Marital couple's feelings towards each other and the way they express those feelings predicts their present or future quality of marriage. Every strong emotion has at its root on impulse to action, managing those impulses is basic to emotional intelligence. A key ability in impulse control is knowing the difference between feelings and actions and learning to make better emotional decisions by first controlling the impulse to act then identifying alternative actions and their consequence before acting. Possessing emotional intelligence skills plays key role in decision making toward marital stability. According to Cherry, (2021) ^[5] psychologist and author Daniel Goleman suggested that there are five components of emotional intelligence and by working on and increasing these skills, one can become more emotionally intelligent. The emotional skills include self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy and motivations.

Self-awareness involves the capacity to recognize and understand one's emotion and having sense of how one's actions, moods affect other people. Self-awareness also entails recognizing the relationships between how one feels and how he/she behave, it also boils down on having awareness or been capable of recognizing one's strengths and limitations and been open to different experiences, new information and learn from interacting with people. Furich in (Mariel, 2020) ^[13] stipulates that true self-awareness has two parts – external and internal self-awareness. External self-awareness is understanding how other people view us in terms of our values, strengths and weakness, this is what allows couple to see from partner's perspective. Internal self-awareness is how clearly we see our own values, passions, aspirations, fit with our environment, reactions, (including thoughts, feelings, behaviours, strengths, and weaknesses) impact on others", and this is crucial for sustaining marital stability. Evidence suggests that a lot of marriages that are experiencing stability involves one's spouse not seeing things in his or her way rather is able to see things from the perspective of his or her spouse.. Stosny in (Mariel 2020) ^[13] posits that when an individual sees things from his/her partner's perspective simultaneously with his/her own, the individual gains a more accurate view of the reality of his/her marriage, he/she gains depth –perception and a grasp of the interactive dynamics between them, this will increase the likelihood that one's partner will see himself or herself through his/her eyes. Self-awareness is a component of emotional intelligent, that is important to marital stability and it is a skill an individual – has complete control of. It is important for one to be aware of his/her drives so as to have better handle of subconscious impulses. Having better control of subconscious impulses and expressing emotions appropriately suggests strong self-regulation skills.

Self-regulation include been able to regulate and manage emotions, coping or adapting to change and ability to manage dispute, dispersing difficult or uneasy stich and being mindful of how one's action impact others and taking liability of one's actions. An inward action among couples in marriage is taking accountability for one's behaviour. Ability to regulate interpersonal emotional actions could create conditions that spouses can be mindful of what will in turn assist them have control of their utterances to their partner. Self - regulation is indispensable for happy marriage and marital stability. Evidence suggest that happily married couples aren't psychological astute than others, they also experience the urge to do something that will hurt them or derail their marriage; Unlike impulsive partners that risk wrecking everything they built through thoughtless misdeed, but couple who exercise self- regulation regardless of whether they feel those impulses sustain marital stability because they keep one eye on their impulse and the other on the long term. When couple have emotional self-regulation they are more satisfied with their marriage and more likely in harmony with their partner's need and also have greater awareness of their own deeds and how they will survive the challenges that might befall them. The development of distress tolerance skills for relation behaviour and use of cognitive reframing to change thought patterns and emotional responses are certain ways of improving self -regulation for sustainable marriage. Self -regulation significantly improve marriage quality. Rasoul, Ali Esa and Maryan (2016) worked on effectiveness of self-regulation couple therapy intervention on marital satisfaction and partner abuse. The result suggests that self- regulation couple therapy intervention is an effective way to improve marital conflict and marital satisfaction. The root of altruism lies in empathy. If there are any two moral stance that our times call for, they are self-restraint and compassion.

Empathy builds on self-awareness the more open we are to our own emotions, the more skilled we will be in reading feelings, (Goleman, 2010) ^[7]. Empathy refers to the ability to understand the feelings of others. In marriage empathy involves putting oneself in his/her partner's shoes that is imagining oneself in another person's situation or circumstance especially when feelings of sadness or hopeless are expressed. Marriages where couples cultivates empathy experiences much closer emotional bond that often result to a more stable marriage. Empathy entails being conscious of others feelings.

The inability to empathize with one's partner when he/she expressed situations shows a lack of compassion which indicates lack of mutual and healthy marriage that could put barrier between couples. Lack of empathy in marriage could be symptoms of an underlying conflict. Improving communication skills and emotional intelligence could allow connection to be restored. Empathy creates a bridge in marriage and also generate mutual respect. Cognitive as well as affective empathy, and dispositional as well as situational forms of empathy played a meaningful role in shaping the provision of spousal support, (Lesley, Inge, & Mark 2016) ^[12]. Developing empathy in marriage can be achieved by regularly listening to one's partner thoughts and feelings and seeing the world from one's partner's point of view. This ultimately can build closeness and respect for individuality. Empathy could be seen as outward driven to the other, while social skills are inward, driven and rooted on ways to collaborate with and leverage on others to reach one's goals.

Social skills are part of emotional intelligence skills that enables an individual to adequately manage one's and other impulses, to interact and relate with others. Understanding of social skills helps an individual choose emotions to display and those to keep within himself/herself. Effective social skills involves good communication, influence. Collaboration and cooperation, conflict management, leadership, change catalyst, bonds. Strong social skills permit couple to build meaningful marriage and create a stronger understanding of themselves and others. Miriam and Zilda (2013) defined marital social skills as the repertoire of behaviour (or class of behaviours) used to appropriately deal with interpersonal situations involving spouses. The ability to express displeasure in a socially competent way as against impulsiveness and outbursts are social skills that particularly stand out in sustaining marital stability and plays a vital role in couple's marital satisfaction. Communication in marriage can be compared to a river, when thought and emotions flow smoothly between couple it's fun, couple feel good and everyone around enjoys it. However when communication flow is

explosive, it's implicitly threatening and hurtful. According to Agi, (2017) ^[1] effective communication is a device through which an individual shares his/her thoughts, verbalize his/her feelings, express his/her opinion and transmits his/her knowledge either for clarification, definition or persuasive purposes. One of the weapon that can be utilized in fostering nuptial adjustment and stability is proper interpersonal communication (Agi, 2017) ^[1]. Assertive conversation, expressiveness and self -assertiveness are essential social skills that could make couples to be satisfied with their marriage. Sardinha in Miriam and Zilda, (2013) opined that social skills perceived by spouses strongly contributed to explaining one's own marital satisfaction. Ability to control oneself and appropriately dealing with issues of conflicts are vital social skills that sustains marital stability. Apparently couples who struggle with social skills, especially in dealing with important issues in their marriage overtime may lack full communication flow that consequently dries up the passion, love and motivation among them. According to Gottman in Brie (2019) the seven principles for making marriage work- found that couples in lasting relationships have five positive interactions for every negative one, he calls this the "magic ratio". It takes motivation to sustain the 'magic ratio'.

Motivation as a component of emotional intelligence refers to intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation means that an individual is driven to meet personal needs and goals, rather than being motivated by external rewards such as money, fame and recognition (Heather, 2019) ^[8]. Marriage has an essential function in couple's lives, affecting how couple think, feel and act. Motivation due have an effect on the establishment and maintenance of marriage, the choice of the spouse, the kind of relational behaviour and in the understanding of rudiments of successful and stable marriage. Different types of motivation are associated with important and various behavioural, cognitive and affective consequence Vellerand in (Josede, Isabel & vera 2015) ^[10]. Self -determined motivation could result to more adjustable behaviour and more impressive outcomes. Evidence suggest that couple who are intrinsically motivated often have faith that their marriage would be stable when the marriage is valued for its (intrinsic motives) and when their partner's qualities were valued (Instrumental motives) Hence couple may experience marital stability when the marriage is valuable to them and itself rather than for what the marriage can give. Couple's motives when it comes to marriage may help gain insight into their relationship. Couple's motives can affect their feeling about their marriage, how they trust each other and what they tend to gain from their spouses. Understanding what drives individual's marriage can help an individual to understand his/her partner and how individual responds to his/her partner. Awareness of this will foster marital stability and mutually satisfying marriage. A marriage is more likely to be stable and be satisfactory when the motivation is more intrinsic, Rampel in (Jose de, Isabel & Vera 2015) ^[10].

Identifying aspects of emotional intelligence that contribute to marital stability may help counsellors and researchers to target the special marital interactions types that may enhance marital stability, furthermore prevent dispensable divorces. Hence the study seeks to add to existing body of knowledge by examining aspects of emotional intelligence as predictor of marital stability with focus on married couples in three Senatorial Districts in Rivers State Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Marital stability could be seen as a firm, steady, well balance and healthy marital relationship between married couples.

The drastic change in the trends or preferences of married couples compels to reason out the extent of marital stability and conflicts being faced by them. The high rate of infidelity and domestic violence have been prevalent issues influencing marital stability and destabilizing most families. Greater impact of the effect of destabilized family is seen in the psychological and psychosocial activities of the victims. The victims exhibit depressed mood, lower self-esteem, children also have insecure attachment to parents that results to different types of antisocial behaviour such as truancy, vandalism, bullying and kidnapping. American Association of Marriage and Family therapy (2016) article confirms that a single shattering event such as an extramarital affair can lead to distress in marriages and the effect on families is profound especially when conflict is high and children raised in high conflict homes tend to have more emotional difficulties. The recurrent paternity contention that trends in social media indicates lack of commitment to marital vows and inability of married couples to understand aspects of emotional intelligence for effective marital interaction towards marital stability. The findings of study by Reza, Maryam and Abbas (2019) ^[22] revealed that some aspects of relationships, such as commitment, act to preserve the pillars of marriage in critical situations while other aspects such as intimacy help to construct marital identity and satisfaction, with the detrimental aftermath of prevalence of infidelity and domestic violence it becomes increasingly important to study the predictors of marital stability. The current study adds to existing body of knowledge by exploring aspects of emotional intelligence as predictor of marital stability with focus on married couples in three Senatorial District in Rivers State Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate emotional intelligence as correlates of marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria. The specific aims includes to:

1. Ascertain the extent to which self-awareness predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which self-regulation predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.

- Determine the extent to which empathy predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.

Research Question

The following research questions guided the study:

- To which extent does self-awareness predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria?
- To which extent does self-regulation predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria?
- To which extent does empathy predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant.

- Self-awareness does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.
- Self-regulation does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.
- Empathy does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Rivers State Nigeria. A correlational research design was adopted for the study to ascertain the relationship between the independent variable and dependent variable. Taro Yamen formular was used to determine the sample size of 392 from estimated population of 20,000 married couples using cluster sampling technique to draw the sampled subjects from the population. Two researcher's structured instruments titled 'Emotional Intelligence Assessment Questionnaire (EIAQ) and Marital stability Scale (MSS)' were used to elicit information from the sampled subjects on the extent to which self-awareness, Self-regulation, empathy predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria. Responses to the items in the questionnaire were based on 4 point scale of Very High Extent (VHE) 4 points, High Extent (HE) 3 points, Low extent (LE) 2 points, Very Low Extent 1 point. Face and content validity of the instruments were carried out by experts in educational measurement and evaluation and educational guidance and counselling. The reliability of the instruments was established using Cronbach Apha Statistics and it yielded 'a' = 0.81 for EIAQ and 'a' = 0.78 for MSS. The research questions and hypotheses were answered and tested with Mean, Standard Deviation and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to ascertain whether or not there was relationship between the variables. To determine the acceptability or otherwise of the hypotheses stated, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was further transformed to t-test analysis which formed the basis for accepting or rejecting hypotheses.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: To which extent does self-awareness predict marital stability among Married couples in Rivers state Nigeria?

Table 1: Extent of Relationship between Self-Awareness and Marital Stability among Married Couples in Rivers State Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	SD	$\sum X \sum y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	R	Remark
Marital Stability & Self awareness	373	16.3	4.32	6095	37,149.025	36,314, 010	0.82	High extent of relationship
	373	15.9	4.15	5958	35,497.764			

Table 1. shows the extent of relationship between marital stability and self-awareness among married couples in Rivers state Nigeria. Married couples had a mean score of 16.3 on marital stability with a standard deviation of 4.0 and, a self-awareness mean score of 15.9 and a standard deviation of 4.32, $\sum x = 6095$, $\sum x^2 = 37,149,025$, $\sum Y = 5958$, $\sum Y^2 = 35,497,764$ and $\sum XY = 36,314,010$ and $r = 0.82$. this shows a high extent of relationship. The answer to research question 1 therefore is: self-awareness is related to marital stability to a high extent.

Research Question 2: To which extent does self-Regulation predict marital stability among Married couples in Rivers state Nigeria?

Table 2: Extent of Relationship between Self-Regulation and Marital Stability among Married Couples in Rivers State Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	SD	$\sum X \sum y$	$\sum X^2 \sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	R	Remark
Marital Stability & Self-regulation	373	15.6	3.9	5852	34,245,904	30,594,256	0.78	High extent of relationship
	373	14.0	3.7	5228	27,331,984			

Table 2. shows the extent of relationship between marital stability and self-regulation among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria. Married couples had a mean score of 15.6 on marital stability with a standard deviation of 3.9 and, a self-regulation mean score of 14.0 and a standard deviation of 3.7, $\sum x = 5852$, $\sum x^2 = 34,245,904$, $\sum Y = 5228$, $\sum Y^2 = 27,331,984$ and $\sum XY = 30,594,256$ and $r = 0.78$, this shows a high extent of relationship. The answer to research question 2 therefore is: self-regulation is related to marital stability to a high extent.

Research Question 3: To which extent does Empathy predict marital stability among Married couples in Rivers State Nigeria?

Table 3: Extent of Relationship between Empathy and Marital Stability among Married Couples in Rivers State Nigeria

Variable	N	Mean	SD	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	R	Remark
Marital Stability & Empathy	373	16.7	4.1	6250	6120	39,062,500	6120	38,250,000	0.93	Very high extent of relationship
	373	16.4	4.0	6120	6250	37,454,400	6250			

Table 3 shows the extent of relationship between marital stability and Empathy among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria. Married couples had a mean score of 16.7 on marital stability with a standard deviation of 4.1 and, an empathy mean score of 16.4 and a standard deviation of 4.0, $\sum x = 6250$, $\sum x^2 = 39,062,500$, $\sum Y = 6120$, $\sum Y^2 = 37,250,000$ and $\sum XY = 38,250,000$ and $r = 0.93$, this shows a very high extent of relationship. The answer to research question 3 therefore is: empathy is related to marital stability to a very high extent.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Self-awareness does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.

Table 4: Testing of the Null Hypothesis on the Relationship between Marital Stability and Self-Awareness using PPMC

Variables	Mean	Sd	N	Df	r-cal	r-crit	P	t-cal	t - crit	Decision
Marital stability & Self-awareness	16.3	4.32	373	371	0.82	0.195	0.5	28.3	1.960	Reject H01
	15.9	4.15								

Result Significant at 0.05 level

Table 4. shows that married couples has a mean score of 16.3 and a standard deviation of 4.32 on marital stability with a self-awareness mean score of 15.9 and standard deviation of 4.15 with 373 cases at 371 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The calculated value of $r = 0.82$, the critical value of $r = 0.195$. The calculated r value of 0.82 is greater than the critical value of $r = 0.195$ at 0.05 level of significance. On this basis the null hypothesis of self-awareness does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria is rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained, which means self-awareness significantly predicts marital stability.

Furthermore, the calculated r was transformed or converted to t and the obtained t ratio is compared with the critical t value at the cut off score for the t distribution. The critical value of t at 0.05 level of significance under 371 degrees of freedom for a two tailed test is 1.960 at the chosen alpha. The calculated t of 28.3 is greater than the critical value of $t = 1.960$. Therefore, the null hypothesis self-awareness does not significantly predict marital stability is rejected. This shows that there is indeed a statistically significant positive relationship between self-awareness and marital stability.

Hypothesis 2: Self-regulation does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.

Table 5: Testing of the Null Hypothesis on the Relationship between Marital Stability and Self-Regulation using PPMC

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	Df	r-cal	r-crit	t-cal	t-crit	P	Decision
Marital stability & Self-regulation	373	15.6	3.9	371	0.78	0.195	24.7	1.960	0.05	Reject HO ₂
		14.0	3.7							

Result significant at 0.05 level

Table 5 shows that married couples has a mean score of 15.6 and a standard deviation of 3.9 on marital stability with a self-regulation mean score of 14.0 and standard deviation of 3.7 with 373 cases at 371 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The calculated value of $r = 0.78$, the critical value of $r = 0.195$. The calculated r value of 0.78 is greater than the critical value of $r = 0.195$ at 0.05 level of significance. On this basis the null hypothesis of self-regulation does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers

State Nigeria is rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained, which means self-regulation significantly predicts marital stability.

Furthermore, the calculated r is transformed or converted to t and the obtained t ratio is compared with the critical t value at the cut off score for the t distribution. The critical value of t at 0.05 level of significance under 371 degrees of freedom for a two tailed test is 1.960 at the chosen alpha. The calculated t of 24.7 is greater than the critical value of $t = 1.960$. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that self-regulation does not significantly predict marital stability is rejected. This shows that there is indeed an overwhelming evidence for upholding the alternate hypothesis that self-regulation significantly predicts marital stability.

Hypothesis 3: Empathy does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria.

Table 6: Testing of the Null Hypothesis on the Relationship between Marital Stability and Empathy using PPMC

Variables	N	Mean	Sd	df	r-cal	r crit	t-cal	t crit	P	Decision
Marital stability & Empathy	373	16.7	4.1	371	0.93	0.195	8.41	1.960	0.05	Reject H03
		16.4	4.0							

Result significant at 0.05 level

Table 6 shows that married couples has a mean score of 16.7 and a standard deviation of 4.1 on marital stability with a mean score of 16.4 and a standard deviation score of 4.0 on empathy, with 373 cases at 371 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance. The calculated value of $r = 0.93$, the critical value of $r = 0.195$. The calculated r value of 0.93 is greater than the critical value of $r = 0.195$ at 0.05 level of significance. On this basis the null hypothesis that states that empathy does not significantly predict marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria is rejected and the alternate hypothesis retained, which means empathy significantly predicts marital stability.

Furthermore, the calculated r is transformed or converted to t and the obtained t ratio is compared with the critical t value at the cut off score for the t distribution. The critical value of t at 0.05 level of significance under 371 degrees of freedom for a two tailed test is 1.960 at the chosen alpha. The calculated t of 8.41 is greater than the critical value of $t = 1.960$. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that empathy does not significantly predict marital stability is rejected. This shows that there is indeed a statistically significant positive relationship between empathy and marital stability.

Discussion of Findings

The main objective of this study was to investigate Emotional intelligence as a correlate of marital stability among married couples in Rivers State Nigeria. The study adopted the correlational research design in carrying out the study. The discussion of the findings of this study is based on the results emanating from the research questions and test of hypothesis and its place in existing literature and previous studies.

Based on the result of the research questions and hypothesis presented on tables 1 and 4 respectively, result reveals that self-awareness significantly predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers state Nigeria. This result is quiet revealing because it has gone a long way to show that self-awareness is a major determinant of marital stability. This result corroborates that of Onyekuru and Ugwu (2017)^[19] who investigated emotional intelligence as a correlate of marital stability in Imo State Nigeria with a sample of 420 married couples. The findings of the study revealed that emotional intelligence had positive and significant joint relationship with marital stability, secondly the study also revealed that emotional competence, emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity each had positive individual relationship with marital stability which was significant for emotional maturity and emotional sensitivity but insignificant for emotional competence.

Again the study of Rayah and Rayah, (2019)^[21] is in line with the findings of this study in their study of impact of emotional self-awareness (ESA) and personal growth initiative and goal attainment in final year bachelor students. A correlational design was employed with a sample of 57 participants. Findings of the study revealed a positive significant relationship between emotional self-awareness and personal growth initiative with goal attainment and negative relationship personal growth initiative and emotional self- awareness.

In the same vein the study of Kreibich, Hennecke and Brandstatter, (2020) who investigated the effect of self-awareness on identification of goal related obstacles. The study manipulated self-awareness in two correlational and two experimental studies. A sample of 123 participants were chosen through online survey. The results indicate that self-awareness plays a crucial role for identifying obstacles.

The result of the second finding presented on tables 2 and 5 respectively reveals that self-regulation significantly predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers state Nigeria. This result is also revealing because it has proved beyond reasonable doubt that self-regulation is a major determinant of marital stability. This finding also agrees with that of Heshmati Dhaleghkhah Jafari and Marandi (2016)^[9] who investigated effectiveness of self-regulation couple therapy intervention on marital satisfaction and partner abuse (non-physical) in Tabriz. The study adopted protest a semi experimental with experimental and control group design using pretest and posttest method. A sample of 24 couples were used. The results of the study showed that self-regulation couple

therapy intervention had significant increase in marital satisfaction scores and significant reduction in non-physical partner abuse scores in experimental groups compared with control group. This implies that self-regulation is a strong determinate of marital stability. The result of this study is also supported by that of Noroozi, Nazari, Rasouli, Davarniya and Babae (2015) ^[17] who investigated effect of brief self-regulation couple therapy (SRCT) in reducing the couples marital stress in Tehran. The quasi-experimental study with the pretest, posttest model was adopted for the study with a sample of 16 couples selected by accessible sampling method. The findings of the study revealed average score of marital stress in experimental group was significantly reduced according to control group in post-test ($P = 0.0001$). Thus self-regulatory marital therapy is effective in reducing couple's marital stress it also promotes marital stability.

Shahid & Kazmi (2016) ^[25, 26] also supports the findings of this study when they examined the role of emotional regulation in Marital Satisfaction in Knyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study adopted a correlational research design using a sample of 200 married couples chosen through convenient sampling technique. The result showed that there was a significant positive correlation between emotional regulation and marital satisfaction: Regression analysis showed that emotional regulation was found to be a significant predictor of marital satisfaction.

The result of the third finding presented on tables 3 and 6 respectively reveals that Empathy significantly predicts marital stability among married couples in Rivers state Nigeria. This result is also revealing because it has proved beyond reasonable doubt that Empathy is a major determinant of marital stability. This finding agrees with that of Lesley, Inge and Mark (2016) ^[12] who examined the role of cognitive and affective empathy in spouses support interactions. An observation study in Belgium. A sample of 50 married/cohabitating couples provided questionnaire data. The result of the study showed that providers scoring higher on affective empathy provided lower levels of negative support, also for male partners scoring higher on cognitive empathy was related to lower levels of negative support provision. For both partners' higher scores on cognitive empathy correlated with more instrument support provision. Male providers scoring higher on affective empathy provided higher levels of instrumental support. Dispositional perspective taking was related to higher scores on emotional support provisions for male providers and condition and found significant increases in treatment group empathy levels at each of three assessment points, again the study collaborates that of Schmidt and Gelhert (2016) ^[23] who investigated couples therapy and empathy: An evaluation of the impact of Imago relationship therapy on partner empathy levels in India. The study adopted an experimental design of random and controlled study. A sample of 60 couples were selected using stratified sampling. Results of the study showed a significant interaction between time and condition and found significant increases in treatment group empathy levels at each of three assessment points.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study it was concluded,

1. Self-awareness is a good predictor of marital stability in Rivers state Nigeria, couples should endeavour to acquire self-awareness skills to ensure the stability of their marriage.
2. Self-regulation is also a predictor of marital stability. Married couples should endeavour to remain calm in the face of provocation, adapt and respond to situations appropriately in order to do well with their partners.
3. Empathy as a predictor of marital stability is very important because it helps us to understand how others feel so as to respond appropriately to situations. This skill can help individuals go on well with partners and significant others.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, it is recommended that:

- Every married couple should practice self-meditation on a regular basis to improve self-awareness because it allows one to focus on being self-aware because it keeps the mind calm and brings one to a pleasant mental state, and a pleasant mental state is needed for marital stability.
- Married couples should practice mindfulness to improve self-regulation. Cognitive reframing process involving challenging one's thoughts and replacing them with positive ones should be acquired.
- Every couple should understand how the partner feel by putting him/herself in the persons' shoes so as to respond appropriately to issues instead of acting out of emotions. Respond to situations in a way you will not feel offended if you were the one involved.

Counselling Implication

By implication the results of the study have shown that Self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, are all predictors of marital stability. The outcome of this has significant implication for counsellors and married couples. The first finding that self-awareness predicts marital stability among married couples implies that self-awareness is needed by couples to stabilize their marriage. It also implies that individuals can gain self-awareness and become knowledgeable about many issues of life. This means that counsellor need to teach couples self-awareness skills when they come for counselling regarding marital issues. The second finding which states that self-regulation predicts marital stability among married couples also implies that self-regulation skills are needed for marital stability. This means counsellors should be well grounded in self-regulations skills so as to teach couples who may come for counselling during marital crises to help stabilize their marriages. The third finding which states that empathy predicts marital stability among married couples implies that empathy is

needed to stabilize marital relationship. The ability to understand the feelings of a partner and respond accordingly is essential in marriage relationships, this should be communicated effectively by counsellors when marital counselling is involved, as it will go a long way to fix a lot of issues in marriage.

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