

Predictive Ability of Assertiveness and Emotional Intelligence on Marital Adjustment among Married Couples in Ibadan Municipality, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined assertiveness and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital adjustment among married couples in Greater Ibadan Municipality, Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design and used a purposive sampling technique to select five local government areas from the Greater Ibadan Municipality. Data were conveniently gathered from 395 participants using the Assertiveness Scale, Emotional Intelligence Scale, and Marital Adjustment Scale. Data collected were analyzed using multiple regression and t-tests of independent samples to test three hypotheses at a $p < 0.05$ significance level. The result indicated that assertiveness and emotional intelligence jointly predicted marital adjustment among study participants ($\beta = 0.27$, $F(2, 292) = 38.52$, $p < 0.05$). Also, assertiveness ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < 0.05$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.05$) independently predicted marital adjustment among married couples in the study population. However, gender did not influence marital adjustment among study participants. The study concluded that couples' assertiveness and emotional intelligence are strong predictors of marital adjustment. Therefore, the study recommended that marriage counsellors should assist both potential and old married couples in assertive and emotional training to be able to manage conflicts as it arises in their marriage.

Keywords: Assertiveness; Emotional intelligence; Marital adjustment; Ibadan municipality; Nigeria.

Introduction

Marriage is a social institution under which a man and a woman made a decision to live together as husband and wife by legal commitment and religious ceremonies. It is socially acknowledged and approved by the society for sexual union between two adult individuals (Okesina, 2022). Therefore, it is no means accidental that marriage allows for companionship, social integration of individuals, mutual commitment and growth, bridging of the gender gap, and promoting the birthright of children (Dixit & Ramachandran, 2020). Studies have revealed that what people considered as ingredients in marriage such as love, sexual fidelity and ability to express individual's feelings are fairly similar across cultures (Commerford & Hunter, 2016). Furthermore, it has been established that an individual's beliefs about marital satisfaction is arrived at through proper marital adjustment which is described as the accommodation of spouses to each other (Kendrick & Drentea, 2016) which significantly affect their expectations and readiness for marriage.

Despite the differences in marriage ceremonies across cultures, there are certain things which are basic to marriage. These include right expectations and happiness which tend to raise individuals' hope about achieving the aims for which marriage was established. However, most of these marital joys often turn sour in no distant time. Kendrick and Drentea, (2016) suggested that many married couples lack the ability to face challenges and problems that arises in marriage, or the inability to adjust properly to encourage marital joy. Thus, many marriages turn sour because couples are unable to face the challenges of resolving their conflicts, achieving sexual fulfilments, good communication, mutual commitment as well as child bearing and rearing in order to achieve marital adjustment (Unal & Akgun, 2022).

One factor considered in this study as a likely predictor of marital adjustment is assertiveness of the individual partner. Assertiveness is about being confident, understanding each other and other members of the family and the empathy that the couple gives to each other (Maloney & Moore, 2020). Assertiveness enables individuals to prepare to stand up for themselves, to know and achieve one's rights. In marriage as in other aspects of human endeavours, assertiveness involves using communication skills as the ability to pass information or message from one person to another, in such a way that the speaker (husband or wife) is able to interpret what is being said by the listener (husband or wife) (Adegboyega, 2021). Assertiveness shows an individual's ability to express both positive and negative emotions in order to satisfy self and others with whom one has a close contact (Alberti & Emmons, 2017). Studies have shown that married couples who scored high in assertiveness scale tend to have better marital adjustment compared to those who scored low in assertiveness scale (Obiemeka et al., 2021; Moss et al. 2021; Xien & Zakaria, 2022).

Beside assertiveness, the second factor considered in this study as a likely predictor of marital adjustment among married couple is emotional intelligence which refers to the ability, or self-perceived ability, capacity, or skill to identify, assess and manage the emotion of oneself and those of others (Hajihasani & Sim, 2019). It has also been defined as a combination of non-cognitive capabilities, competencies and skills (intrapersonal, interpersonal and stress management) that would influence an individual's ability to cope with environmental demands (Suri & Kochhar, 2021). Married couples with high levels of emotional intelligence would be able to identify and utilise emotional information. They are able to use their knowledge to appropriately manage their relationships in marriage. This assists them to solve emerging problems in their marriage as it acts as essential ingredients to successful marital adjustment. Married couples with high levels of emotional intelligence know themselves very well and they are able to sense the emotions of others (Goleman, 2001). This is because it plays a significant role in the development of helping behaviour in marital adjustment of couples as relevant values and motives are developed. Emotional intelligence has been found to be an antecedent of positive attitudes that assist marital adjustment of couples (Jalil & Muazzam, 2013).

The third variable considered in this study as likely to influence marital adjustment among married couples in Greater Ibadan municipality is gender. Studies investigating the influence of gender on marital adjustment tend to give contradicting results. For example, while some

studies (Okpara, 2022; Park et al., 2016) found gender to significantly influenced marital adjustment among study participants, other studies (Immanuel & Muo, 2022; Okesina, 2021) did not find gender to be a significant influence on marital adjustment among study participants.

The ability of couples to be assertive and positively manage their emotions and that of their partner's emotions tend to go a long way to impact on their marital adjustment. The major objective of this study was to examine the influence of assertiveness and emotional intelligence on marital adjustment among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria. The following were the specific objectives of the study:

1. To test whether assertiveness and emotional intelligence jointly and independently predicts marital adjustment among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria.
2. To determine whether male couples would report significantly higher marital adjustment than female participants among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria.

The result of this study would shed light on the contributions of assertiveness and emotional intelligence on marital adjustment among married couples in the study population. Marriage counsellors, pastors, Imams and other individuals engaged in marital issues would benefit from the findings of this study as it would help them to settle marriage conflicts in amicable fashion for the sustenance of the marriage institution.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. Would assertiveness and emotional intelligence jointly and independently predict marital adjustment among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria?
2. Would male couples report significantly higher marital adjustment problems than their female participants among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria?

Theoretical Constructs

Three theoretical constructs were used to anchor this study.

Behavioural Theory

This theory posits that the failure of an individual to learn assertive behaviour, for example, is as the result of learned anxiety. That assertive behaviour can be used as an anxiety inhibitor. Wolpe combined both the principles of operant conditioning and reciprocal inhibition to explain that non-assertive behaviour comes majorly from the punishment of assertive behaviour and conditioning of assertive cues (Carona et al., 2022). This simply means that non-assertive behaviour is a result of the outcome of anxiety experienced in situations that require assertive behaviour. On the other hand, non-assertive behaviour would result from the lack of assertive skills or the failure on the part of an individual to differentiate the right information regarding what makes an appropriate response (Carona et al., 2022). A couple level of assertiveness or non assertiveness affects styles of interactions and determines how easy

marital adjustment would be among such married couples. Therefore, every individual that has truly mastered the skills of assertiveness is known to be able to reduce their level of interpersonal conflicts.

When applied to this study, it means that couples who master the skills of assertiveness and emotional intelligence would appropriately make use of such skills for positive marital adjustment.

Social Learning Theory (Bandura et al. 2001) The theory posits that assertiveness, non-assertiveness, and emotional intelligence are learnt through observation of significant models rather than by direct conditioning. It states that socialisation experiences play key roles as an individual's assertiveness is being inculcated. This means the inhibition of assertive behaviour is as a result of observed punishment of the model's assertiveness or reward of assertiveness (Bandura et al., 2001). Therefore, assertiveness is learned through direct observation being positively reinforced in a social setting (Animasahun & Oladeni, 2021).

When applied to this study, it means that married couples who learned positive skills of assertiveness and emotional intelligence through direct observations of significant others and act appropriately would achieve higher levels of marital adjustment compared to those who do not learn these skills.

Sternberg's Triarchic Theory of Intelligence This theory posits that human intelligence as a mental activity directed toward purposive adaptation to select and shape the real-world environments that are relevant to individual life. Therefore, our intelligence is made up of how well we deal with our environmental changes through our life span. The theory has three distinct facets: analytical or componential; creative or experiential and practical or contextual. Analytical intelligence deals with how an individual relates to his/her internal world or academic problem-solving skills. Creative intelligence includes insights, synthesis and the ability to react to novel situations and stimuli that determines how an individual connects the internal word of external reality. Practical intelligence involves the ability to grasp, understand and deal with everyday tasks which reflects how the individual relates to the external word about his/herself (Sternberg, 1990).

The theory explains how couples in their intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships are able to understand their emotions and the emotions of others. Couples' interpersonal skills assist them to interact with others as couples with high emotional intelligence are known to have good positive interactions with others in terms of their morals, feelings, temperaments and motivations. Therefore, they are known to be able to adjust positively in their marriages. While emotional intelligence of couples is dependent on their personal experiences and learning from couples from their role models, sometimes from their parents and good people in their neighbourhood (Kassin, 2008).

This theory is relevant to this study as married couples acquire skills and abilities to make positive assertiveness and emotional intelligence needed for good marital adjustment.

Literature Review

Some studies have investigated assertiveness as a predictor of marital adjustment. For example, married couples who are highly assertive reported positive marital adjustment than non-assertive couples who reported low marital adjustment (Unal & Akgun, 2022). Also, Unal and Akgun (2022) revealed that assertive couples were characterised by their ability to entertain alternative views which make them to effectively resolve interpersonal difficulties and problems that are vital to marital adjustment. Obiemeka et al. (2021) confirmed that an assertive couple does feel confident in social situations and interpersonal relationships and demonstrated great interest in discussion and person-to-person (one-on-one) communication among married Catholics. Also, Darba and Shahmoradi (2020) found assertiveness to significantly predict marital adjustment/satisfaction among athletes and non-athletes women. The expression of negative feelings such as anger and positive emotions such as love, joy and praise appropriately affect marital adjustment. The expressions of these emotions are needed in intimate interpersonal relationships including marital adjustment. However, Moss et al. (2021) did not find assertiveness as a significant predictor of marital adjustment among their study participants.

Also, studies have found emotional intelligence as a predictor of marital adjustment (Arshad et al., 2015; Mishra et al. 2020; Suri & Kochhar, 2021). For example, Mishra et al. (2020) found in a study to establish the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment found emotional intelligence to positively influence marital adjustment among study participants. This means that when one partner has a higher emotional intelligence and high level of assertiveness, the partner tends to understand and manage both his/her emotions and problems and that of the partner. This would help to keep the relationship on track due to social skill, empathy, and assertiveness qualities. Furthermore, Suri and Kochhar (2021) investigated the role of emotional intelligence on marital adjustment. The result indicated that emotional intelligence did not significantly influence marital adjustment among study participants. Interestingly, the result showed that gender significantly influenced marital adjustment such that women reported better relationships between emotional intelligence and marital adjustment than their male counterparts. Also, Kalsoom and Kama. (2018) found emotional intelligence to be a significant predictor of marital adjustment among married couples in Pakistan.

Finally, for this review, Arshad et al. (2015) investigated the influence of emotional intelligence on marital adjustment among different professionals including doctors, engineers and lecturers across many organisations. The result showed that emotional intelligence significantly influenced marital adjustment among the study population. Also, the result revealed that male married couples reported higher marital adjustment than their female counterparts.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were generated and tested in this study.

1. Assertiveness and emotional intelligence would jointly and independently predict marital adjustment among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria.
2. Male couples would report significantly higher marital adjustment problems than their female counterparts in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria.

Method

Participants

Descriptive statistics indicated that 187 (47.3%) participants were males while 208 (52.7%) participants were females. The age distribution ranged between 24 and 68 years ($SD = 35.42$). In terms of religious background, 242(61.3%) were Christians while 153 (38.7%) were Muslims. The distribution of participants by years of marriage indicated that 119 (30.0%) were married for less than five years, 111(28.1%) were married between 5 and 10 years, 84(21.3%) were married between 11 and 15 years, 39(9.9%) were married between 11 and 15 years, 39(9.9%) were married between 16 and 20 years and 42(10.6%) were married for over 20 years.

Research Design

The study adopted cross-sectional survey design. The study did not manipulate any variables since the variables investigated already existed. The independent variables were assertiveness and emotional intelligence while the dependent variable was marital adjustment.

Procedure

A formal Letter of Introduction was obtained from the Department of Psychology, University of Ibadan for identification by the potential participants. The researchers sought for consent from the potential participants. Participants who agreed to participate in the study were given the questionnaires to fill. They were told to discontinue with the study at any point they felt uncomfortable. Participation in the study was voluntary. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to participants across the five Local Government Areas. The total number of questionnaires retrieved was 397(i.e., 99% response rate). However, two questionnaires were incompletely filled and were removed while the remaining 395 were used for the analysis.

Research Settings

The study was conducted in Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State in South-west, Nigeria. Ibadan municipality has five out of the 33 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state. As of 2006, Ibadan had a population of 2,567, 000 people. This is one of the oldest state capitals in Nigeria. The study was carried out in the five Local Government Areas within the greater Ibadan municipality: Ibadan South-East, Ibadan South-West, Ibadan North, Ibadan North-East, and Ibadan North-West.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the five Local Government Areas in greater Ibadan municipality for the study, while individual participants were selected using a convenience sampling technique.

Measurements

Three instruments were employed for data collection.

Emotional Intelligence. This was assessed using Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS-25) developed by Kun and Demetrovics (2010). It is a 25-item that is presented on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from strongly Agree to strongly disagree. Sample items include: 'I am familiar with the concept of emotional intelligence' and 'Emotional intelligence assists human personality positively'. The author reported Cronbach's alpha of the scale as 0.82. The scale Cronbach's alpha for the present study was 0.79.

Assertiveness. This was measured using Assertiveness Scale (AS-30) which was adapted by Thompson and Boerenbaum (2011). The 30-item scale is presented on a 4-point Likert's format that ranges from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Sample items are: 'Assertiveness encourages marital satisfaction' and 'Assertiveness encourages positive marital communication'. The author reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.82 while in the present study, Cronbach's alpha of 0.81 was obtained.

Marital Adjustment. This was evaluated by using Marital Adjustment Scale (MAS-20). It is a 20-item scale presented on a 4-point Likert's format that ranges from strongly agree (4) to strongly disagree (1). Items include: 'My life experience assists my marital adjustment' and 'My partner adjustment easily in times of conflict and disagreement'. The author reported Cronbach's alpha of 0.92 while the present study calculated Cronbach's alpha as 0.86.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using SPSS version 23. Descriptive statistics was used to summarise demographic variables in the study while inferential statistics were used to test the hypotheses. Hypothesis one was tested using multiple regressions while hypothesis two was tested using t-test of independent means. All hypotheses were accepted at a $p < 0.05$ level of significance.

Results

H1: Assertiveness and emotional intelligence would jointly and independently predicts marital adjustment among married couples in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria. The hypothesis was tested using multiple regression analysis and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Multiple Regression Showing Joint and Independent Predictors of Marital Adjustment among the Study Participants

Variable	β	t	p	R	R^2	F	p
Assertiveness	0.20	4.55	< 0.05	0.52	0.27	38.52	< 0.05
Emotional Intelligence	0.29	5.76	< 0.05				

Dependent variable = Marital adjustment

From Table 1 above, it is observed that assertiveness and emotional intelligence jointly predicted marital adjustment among study participants ($R^2 = 0.27$, $F(2, 293) = 38.52$, $p < 0.05$). This explained 27% of the variance in marital adjustment among study participants. Also, assertiveness ($\beta = 0.20$, $t = 4.55$, $p < 0.05$) and emotional intelligence ($\beta = .29$, $t = 5.76$, $p < 0.05$) independently predicted marital adjustment among study participants. Therefore, the hypothesis was supported.

H2: Male couples would report significantly higher marital adjustment problems than their female counterparts in greater Ibadan Municipality in Oyo State, Nigeria. The hypothesis was tested using t-test of independent means and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.
Independent Sample T-test of Gender on Marital Adjustment among Study Participants

Gender	N	M	SD	df	t	p
Male	187	125.88	25.96	393	.38	>.05
Female	208	128.02	27.84			

Dependent variable: Marital adjustment

From the results in Table 2 above, it is revealed that there was no significant gender difference in marital adjustment among the married couples [$t(2, 293) = 0.38$, $p < 0.05$]. However, when the mean were compared, the result showed that female gender ($M = 128.02$, $SD = 27.84$) had higher marital adjustment problems than their male counterpart ($M = 125.88$, $SD = 25.96$). Therefore, the hypothesis was partially confirmed.

Discussion

This study investigated assertiveness and emotional intelligence as predictors of marital adjustment among married couples in five Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Oyo State, South- west, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were generated and tested in the study.

The hypothesis that assertiveness and emotional intelligence would jointly and independently predict marital adjustment was supported. This indicates that the level of individual assertiveness and emotional intelligence are strong factors in determining marital adjustment in a marriage relationship. These two factors accounted for 27% of variance explained in marital adjustment among the study participants. A well-adjusted marriage leads to a well-adjusted life. High marital adjustment leads to high psychological well-being including marital adjustment. A well-adjusted marriage allows spouses to enjoy such things as hobbies, careers, or community services, and in fact is characterised by the spouse doing almost everything together. This result supported previous findings (Darba & Shahmoradi, 2020; Obiemeka et al., 2021) that assertiveness and emotional intelligence contributed to marital adjustment among Japanese married couples. Also, the result supported Suri and Kochhar (2021) finding that married couples with high skills in assertiveness and high level of emotional intelligence have better marital adjustment than those couples that are deficient in these two social skills.

The second hypothesis that male couples would report significantly higher marital adjustment problems than their female participants was not supported. This means that when male and female married couples are compared in terms of their marital adjustment problems, there was no significant difference among the two genders. This finding supported the result by Okesina (2022) who found no significant difference between marital adjustment and gender among the study participants. However, the result contradicts Arshad et al.'s (2015) finding that male married couples were better in marital adjustment than their female counterparts. This finding could be as the result of the heterogeneous nature of their participants in their study.

Recommendations Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered: Special attention should be paid to aspects of assertiveness training and the development of emotional intelligence among potential and current married couples to encourage positive marital adjustment. There is a need for parents to nurture their children in good parenting styles so that when they grow up, they will not depart from such parenting styles in their marital relationship.

Limitations of the Study This study suffered some constraints. Since the study was cross-sectional in nature, validating the data collected over a period of time was not achieved. Further studies should adopt a longitudinal study design. Another practical shortcoming of this study was the refusal of some couples to participate in the study on the premise that the previous study they participated in did not give them any solution to their marital problems. Hence, further studies should make provisions to give participants feedback on their findings to help solve problems the participants are going through. Collecting data from participants should go with providing solutions to solving practical problems. Finally, only two predictors were investigated in this study. Further study should include self-esteem, learned helplessness, and social support as explanatory factors in marital adjustment among married couples.

Conflict of interest There is no conflict of interest among the authors.

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Conclusion

In sum, assertiveness and emotional intelligence would contribute to marital adjustment. Then, male couples would report significantly higher marital adjustment problems than their female participants was not supported.

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