

## **EFFECTS OF AGE ON MARITAL SATISFACTION OF MARRIED PEOPLE IN SUNYANI MUNICIPALITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study was carried out in order to find whether age was a determinant in the marital satisfaction level of married people in the Sunyani Municipality of the Brong-Ahafo Region of Ghana. A descriptive survey design was used as the research frame for the study. Purposive sampling techniques were used to sample 320 respondents for the study. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated to keep the study in focus.*

*Data from respondents were gathered by the use of the Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI). The results of the findings revealed that both young and old married people in the municipality were dissatisfied with their marriages. The younger ones were significantly more dissatisfied than the older ones.*

*It is there recommended to the young foes to consult counsellors and other people who are well versed in marriages as to what marriage is about and how to achieve satisfactory marriages. To the older people, it was recommended that knowledge is not worth keeping when it does not benefit society so they should educate the young people on issues in marriage.*

**Key Words: Married people, Religion, Marriage and Marital satisfaction**

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Today, divorce is a quick way out for people who feel trapped in an unhappy marriage. However, the people who really suffer from the divorce are not so much the parents but rather the children. Sometimes, it seems that the parents who try to use the route of divorce as the ultimate solution are really acting in a self-centered manner.

Marital satisfaction is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person. The more costs a marriage partner inflicts on a person, the less satisfied one generally is with the marriage and with the marriage partner. Similarly, the greater the perceived benefits are, the more satisfied one is with the marriage and with the marriage partner. The categories of how people express love to each other are potentially helpful. These expressions of affection suggest a framework for understanding how different people view positive moments.

This researcher wishes to place emphasis on the reasons for divorce (i.e. non-satisfaction of the marriage) rather than the numbers or percentages of divorces. This stance generates questions of its own. Are the same people getting divorced a number of times for the same reasons? How have these reasons changed or been eliminated in a subsequent successful marriage? Why are people who have chosen not to remarry not taking a second chance at the privilege of this institution?

Healthy relationships, overall, tend to last longer, are generally happier, and tend to give each individual a meaningful, rich life that all tend to want. Marriage is an intrinsic part of our contemporary conception of a meaningful, rich life (Flowers, 1998, p. 531). Marital happiness is still the largest contributor to overall happiness for married individuals and is strongly associated with physical and psychological well-being (Reynolds, Remer, & Johnson, 1995, p. 156). The unhealthy

relationships that either lack these aspects or possess deficits in certain parts are typically the ones that end in divorce because they don't fulfill the happy, long lasting, meaningful criteria for a rich life.

Back home in Ghana, many studies on divorce such as the one conducted by Acheampong and Heaton (1989) show a similar trend of increase in divorce rates in Ghana. The authors state that "overall we find the prevalence of high rates in Ghana." The concern here about the rise in the divorce rates is experienced by the fact that divorce had been and indeed would continue to be the ultimate result of people not being satisfied with their marriages. Reflecting on such marital insecurities or the fact that some married people are not satisfied with their marriages hence the rise in divorce rates, one is tempted to ask thus; "What is happening to marriages these days? Do people still perceive marriage along the lines of the French essayist, Montaigne, who commented that; "Marriage is like a cage; one sees the birds outside desperate to get in, and those inside equally desperate to get out." Does this assertion imply that there is a hidden factor in marriage which can only be felt by those who experience it? And that such a factor or factors determine the course of the marital union? Both experience and observation highlight marital satisfaction as the hidden element which determines the direction of the marital relationship. It is a result of this factor that people who are not happy or satisfied with their marriages do resort to such measures as emotional or psychological divorce, separation or divorce.

## 1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

Generally, the study seeks to assess marital satisfaction from the perspective of married people in the Sunyani Municipality. Therefore, the study is purported to achieve the following:

1. Assess how age of the married people influences marital satisfaction.

## 1.3 RESEARCH QUESTION

The study provided answer to the following question:

To what extent does age of married people influences their marital satisfaction in the Sunyani municipality?

## 1.4 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

In order to answer the research question, the following hypothesis was formulated and tested.

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between young married people (18 – 40 years) and old married people (41 – 60 year and above) with regards to their level of marital satisfaction.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is significant difference between young married people and old married people with regards to their level of marital satisfaction.

## 1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study among other things will expose married people to how achieve marital satisfaction and therefore will help manage risky behaviours that lead to divorce. The finding of this study will expose prospective married people to how to achieve satisfying marriage.

It will also add to the existing literature on marital issues and involve policy makers to make will informed decision. It will also guide further research into the area of marriage and counselling.

## 2.1 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

### 2.1.1 Marriage as a Concept

Every known human society has some form of marriage. In every complex society governed by law, marriage exists as a public legal act and not merely a private romantic declaration or religious rite.

As Davis (1985) summed up the anthropological evidence: "Although the details of getting married who chooses the mates, what are the ceremonies and exchanges, how old are the parties vary from group to group, the principle of marriage is everywhere embodied in its practice".

As a practically universal human idea, marriage is about regulating the reproduction of children, families, society. While marriage systems

differ, marriage across societies is a sexual union between a man and a woman that creates kinship obligations and sharing of resources between men, women, and the children their sexual union may produce.

Marriage can be described as a union between two biologically unrelated female and male who live together and seek to derive benefits from such union such as sexual gratification, love, companionship etc. and also use such a union as a legitimate means to procreate (Abra, 2001). Acknowledging that marriage is a basic institution in every society Nukunya (1992) on his part disclosed that despite the universality of it there is no accepted definition for it. He however quoted one of the often quoted definitions as contained in the official handbook of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain as “a union between a man and a woman such that children born to the woman are recognized as a legitimate off-spring of both parents.” (p. 23)

Akinade (1997) on his part defines marriage as “the union and cohabitation of two people of the opposite sex with a permanent commitment to each other and their children when they are born and are dependent on them.” According to Peil (1977) marriage is a publicly recognized, more or less permanent alliance between a man and a woman (the conjugal unit).

The difficulty in arriving at a compromise definition may stem from the fact that modernity has brought in its trail other forms or types of marriages such that trying an all encompassing definition for them in a single definition will not only be an arduous task but also render the whole attempt cumbersome and meaningless. Nonetheless the attempts by Akinade (1997), Peil (1977), and Nukunya (1992) to define marriage have been very relevant and thus useful to this study and discussions.

### 2.1.2 Attachment vs. Independence.

It is only natural for a young couple to appear as if they share one life. Within most Christian societies, marriage vows state that, “the two shall become as one”. This kind of attachment, if carried out in the relationship for an extended amount of time, can become a strain on the individualistic characteristics of each partner. Eckstein & Axford (1999) noted that young

children and adolescents need to learn a healthy balance between attachment and independence. They say that when couples feel both independent from and attached to their partner, they appear to be happiest. Several theoretical bases have been used by numerous researchers to explain the concept of a balance between attachment and independence in the marital dyad. One of the most prominent of these theories is Bowlby's Attachment theory.

Guided by Bowlby's attachment theory Ainsworth (1985) noted that adults who possess a secure attachment style tend to develop mental models of themselves as being valued and worthy of others' concern, support, and affection. Significant others are described as being accessible, reliable, trustworthy and well intentioned. Secure individuals report that they develop closeness with others easily, feel comfortable depending on others and having others depend on them, and rarely are concerned about being abandoned or others becoming extremely close to them. Their romantic relationships, in turn, tend to be characterized by more frequent positive affect, by higher levels of trust, commitment, satisfaction and interdependence, and by happy, positive, and trusting styles of love.

According to Ainsworth, adults who hold an ambivalent or attached style, tend to possess mental models of themselves as misunderstood or under-appreciated. They report that others seem to be reluctant to get as close as they would prefer, frequently worry that their significant others do not truthfully love them or will abandon them the first chance they get. These beliefs along with others such as, that partners are undependable and are unwilling to commit themselves, force these adults to over-commit (i.e. become too attached) in order to counterbalance the views that are held of their partners.

Conversely, adults who hold an avoidant or detached style tend to possess mental models of themselves as being aloof, emotionally distant, and skeptical. They report that others seem to be overly eager to make long-term commitments to relationships and/or are just unreliable. The feelings of being uncomfortable when close and difficulty trusting and depending on others, forces these adults to push away and become disengaged from significant others in order to relieve the tensions of the uncomfortable feelings.

In essence attachment can be adequately represented in terms of two underlying dimensions. These dimensions reflect the degree to which an individual feels uncomfortable in close romantic relationships (discomfort with closeness) and the degree to which he or she fears abandonment from romantic partners (anxiety over abandonment). High discomfort with closeness involves a belief that attachment figures are untrustworthy and cannot be relied upon to provide assistance in times of need. In contrast, high anxiety over abandonment involves a belief that a married person is 'unlovable' and unworthy of help from attachment figures in time of need (Roberts & Noller, 1998, p. 121).

This modality of thinking puts a lot of emphasis on how one thinks of his/her partner. Although there is some truth to the idea that humans must categorise entities outside of themselves in order to realize a consistency within the world, nevertheless the way in which this organisation occurs starts within the self. This is touched upon within Bowlby's theory, but is either not extended to its full length or not given the importance it so rightly deserves.

A belief that one is unlovable by others probably will result in abandonment issues for the individual, but what of the individual who has never learned how to be comfortable alone. This person probably will have abandonment issues also but, in this context, does not hold the negative self-view of 'I am unlovable'; this person would hold a view more closely to that of 'I am nothing if I am alone'. Each of these individuals will possibly be too attached to his/her partners, but it has little to do with how they categorize their partner and everything to do with what's going within themselves.

Eckstein & Leventhal (1999) used the analogy of a 'three-legged sack race' to illustrate the importance of a balance in the level of attachment and independence in a marital relationship. Using theoretical bases of family systems they too state that there are two types of imbalances that can occur; "one is the concept of too much dependence (no individuation), the other extreme imbalance is independence (no contact)" (p. 400). Within the analogy a couple that maintains this balance has their inside legs inside the sack and their outside legs free. When there is no individuation then all three legs are inside the sack,

and when there is far too much independence all three legs are out side the sack.

This analogy of the three-legged sack race was used to describe these theoretical concepts in laymen's terms for the Eckstein & Leventhal experiment. The author seeks to add to this already useful analogy and say that instead of looking at three distinct levels of attachment, for the purposes of this study the researcher will be looking at an attachment continuum that is curvilinear in nature. The three extremes of attachment, independence, and balanced would fall to the far right, left, and top respectfully.

Gottman, in a third theoretical basis, in his 1998 review of the Bank Account Model (BAM) which assessed the seven negative patterns in ailing marriages, suggests that "...the amount of cognitive room that couples allocate for the relationship and their spouse's world," soothes each individual and aids in problem resolution (p. 182). Problem resolution is one of many areas of a relationship that can be fixed in a less stressful state when a balance between attachment and independence is maintained within the relationship.

Levels of attachment in the marital dyad are extremely important areas of research because of the tendency for insecure attachments to lead to marital violence. "Discomfort with closeness is primarily associated with a lack of emotional involvement in relationships and a strong tendency to deny negative affect (Eckstein & Leventhal, 1999, p.408).

## 2.2 EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Studies by numerous authors in relation to this study are revealed under this section.

### 2.2.1 Age and Marital Satisfaction

Most research in the area of marital satisfaction has focused on age at time of marriage (e.g. Lee, 1977; Booth & Edwards, 1985). There is virtually unanimous agreement that there is an inverse association between the age at first marriage and the probability of divorce; meaning that the younger one is when married, the higher the likelihood of divorce (Lee, 1977). People who marry early are at a higher risk of marital instability than those who marry later in life. One major reason for addressing age is that factors which are

negatively related to marital “success” (i.e. whether one divorces or remains married) include many which are related to age at time of marriage, such as low education, premarital pregnancy, short premarital acquaintance, personality maladjustment, and low socioeconomic background (Burchinal, 1965).

Bumpass and Sweet (1972) studied whether the inverse correlation between age at time of marriage and marital instability was attributable to the participant’s education, premarital pregnancy, religious affiliation, parental marital stability, or husband’s marital history. They performed a multivariate analysis on a large sample of married white women under the age of 45, and found that marital instability was not attributable to the aforementioned factors. Their data showed that age at marriage was the strongest single predictor of marital instability in their analysis. This means that, in absence of all other seemingly relevant variables, age at time of marriage was the strongest predictor of marital stability.

Lee (1977) studied the relationship between marital satisfaction, age at marriage, and marital role performance. “Role performance” was defined as the extent to which a person acts out what is perceived to be his or her role socioeconomically and interpersonally in marriage. This study used the used data from a non random sample of 394 married couples, including spouses’ evaluations of role performance in order to gain a more accurate response. All respondents were in their first marriage, had been married six years or less at the time of the study, and were under 35 years of age. Through use of multivariate analysis, Lee found a positive correlation between age at time of marriage and marital satisfaction after controlling for the antecedent variables of length of marriage, education, socioeconomic background, and religious importance. This means that as the age at marriage increased, marital satisfaction increased as well. He hypothesized that those who marry young may be cognizant of their better potential to remarry in the event of a divorce, and may then be less willing to tolerate dissatisfaction.

Booth and Edwards (1985) expanded on the research done by Bumpass and Sweet (1972) and Lee (1977) and also found that age at marriage was positively correlated with marital satisfaction due to inadequate preparation. They hypothesized that this situation likely stemmed from inadequate

role models or from lack of exposure length to these role models because of early termination of their “marriage apprenticeship” (p. 68) as a result of early marriage. They felt that people who married at an early age were more likely to experience deficiencies in their marital role performance, which then led to marital dissatisfaction.

Researchers used random digit dialing procedures to locate eligible participants. In total, the analysis involved 1,715 men and women currently in their first marriage. To test their hypotheses that early marriage was related to marital instability and poor role performance, and to control for the confounding variable of external pressure for marriage, Booth and Edwards used the Marital Instability Index (Booth, Johnson, & Edwards, 1985) as well as multiple items to assess role performance, alternatives to the present marriage, and external pressure for marriage. They found that marital instability is the highest for those who married early (before age 20). Those who married in their twenties scored the lowest on marital instability. They found that those who married later than their twenties scored similarly to those that married earlier, which suggested that marital stability may have a curvilinear relationship with age.

Bradbury, Fincham and Beach (2000) continued in this similar study of marital satisfaction in relation to age. Their research indicated that both society and the individual benefited when couples formed strong marriages, as those unions frequently led to less involvement in crime and other detrimental activities by spouses and/or offspring. According to them, slowly declining divorce rates over the last eight years may be related to a sharp increase in the average age of brides and grooms during that same span of time; however, overall marital satisfaction dropped significantly over the past four decades, and continued to noticeably decline for nearly all couples during the first decade of marriage. Furthermore, the positive and negative factors that led to both increased marital satisfaction and marital dissatisfaction, respectively, might not be mutually exclusive (i.e. satisfaction in marriage is a judgment based on criteria that changed both with the age of each partner and that of the marriage).

Jose and Alfons (2007) examined the effects of age, number of children, employment status, and length of marriage on marital



satisfaction. They found that those who married later were more likely to remain married, but also that those who married younger and got divorced were more likely to remarry. Contrary to previously stated results, these researchers found that age had a significant negative effect on the sexual adjustment and marital adjustment of first-married adults. In other words, the older one was at the time of first marriage, the less adjusted the individual was toward the marriage and, consequently, the less satisfaction one would had. Middle-aged adults seemed to have greater adjustment problems than both young and elderly participants involved in the study.

**3.1 SAMPLE**

The target population was all married people in the Sunyani Municipality. The accessible population out of the target was 1900 registered married people. The Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size was followed to sample 320 respondents for the study. The respondents were selected purposively.

**3.2 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT**

The instrument developed by Essuman (2010) was adopted for the study. It is a marital satisfaction inventory. It was designed for married people to assist them find out the extent to which they are satisfied in their marriage. The inventory is made up of 35 items. The background items which began and guided the inventory were five while the main items were 30. The 30 items have been grouped into seven scales. Each scale helps to find out how satisfied a married person is in his or her marriage.

**3.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

The data gathered were analysed using the statistical package for service solution (SPSS). The biographic data of the respondents were analysed by the use of frequencies and percentages. Descriptive statistics of means and standard deviations were used to answer the only research posed for this study. The hypothesis was tested with the independent t-test.

**4.1 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the responses of the respondents and how they are analysed using

frequency, percentages, means, standard deviations and t-test guided by research questions and hypotheses. The t-test was used to test the hypotheses at statistical significant level of 0.05.

**4.1.1 Biographic Data of Respondents**

Table 1 represents the sex distribution of the respondents. The distribution indicates that in all 160 (50%) males and 160 (50%) females were sampled for the study. The percentage ratio of males and females was 50:50

**Table 1: Sex distribution of Respondents**

	Frequency	Percentage
Male	160	50
Female	160	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 2: Age Distribution of Respondents**

Age	Frequency	Percentage
Young (18 - 40)	208	65
Old (41- 60+)	112	35
<b>Total</b>	<b>320</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows that out of the total of 320 respondents 208 representing 65% are in the young age bracket and 112 representing 35% are in the old bracket.

To find answer to the research question respondents were given a four point Likert scale inventory to respond to. The scoring was based on the four point Likert scale of measurement of Very Satisfied (VS), Satisfied (S), Not satisfied (NO) and Not at all satisfied (NAS). The options of the items were weighted in the Likert format with VS = 4, S = 3, NO = 2 and NAS = 1. The inverse is true for the negative items.

A maximum score a respondent could obtain was 120 and a minimum score of 30. The weights were equated to a maximum of 4 and a minimum of 1 to reflect the averages, using the number of items as a denominator. To interpret the score a person obtains on the inventory, score bands were used as shown below. The greater the score the more satisfied a person is in marriage. Thus for

Not at all satisfied an interval of	1.0 – 1.5
Not satisfied an interval of	1.6 – 2.5
Satisfied	2.6 – 3.5
Very satisfied	3.6 – 4.0

**4.1.2 Research Question One**

To what extent does age of married people influence their marital satisfaction in the Sunyani municipality?

**4.1.3 Null Hypothesis One**

H<sub>0</sub>: There is no significant difference between young married people and old married people with regards to their level of marital satisfaction.

Data in Table 3 are used to answer the Research Question and test Hypothesis.

**Table 3: T-table comparing the marital satisfaction of old and young**

**married people**

Scale	Old		Young		t-Value	P Value	Sig.
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Relationship	2.3	.42	2.1	.35	-3.1	.002	S
Affection, love and appreciation	2.1	.55	2.0	4.1	-2.9	.004	S
Character	2.8	.25	2.7	.43	-3.0	.006	S

Temperament	3.2	.99	3.1	.77	-	.81	N
In-law issues	2.8	.40	2.9	.25	2.5	.01	S
Marital roles	2.2	.43	2.0	.48	-	.00	S
General evaluation	2.0	.38	2.1	.31	2.4	.01	S
<b>Marital satisfaction</b>	<b>2.5</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>.14</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>.00</b>	<b>S</b>

df = 318, p < 0.05

In the answering Research, Table 3 revealed that old married people had a satisfaction level of 2.53 and those with lower levels had 2.47. They both fell within the score band of 1.6 – 2.5 which is interpreted as not satisfied. The results however revealed that old married people were slightly ahead of young married people in terms of marital satisfaction.

The Null Hypothesis was tested at statistical significance level of 0.05 and the results showed that at df = 318, p = 0.000 which is less than 0.05. Therefore we reject the Null Hypothesis 3. This implies there is significant difference between young and old married people with regard to their marital satisfaction.

These results were expected and the reasons the researchers assigned to this were that older people are matured in understanding than younger ones. Most psychologists agree to this assertion and they maintain that age and understanding are strongly positively correlated. A study conducted by Booth, Johnson, and Edwards (1985) confirms these findings. They found that marital instability is high with young married people especially those who married before age twenty. Communication they say is the engine of every healthy relationship and what propels this communication is “understanding”. Gordon (1994) attributed what goes wrong in marriage relationships partly to mis-communication.

The researcher again thinks that the young married people are quick to react and very vindictive. They take a lot of things for granted and

get confused over a lot of things because of the changed life stage they find themselves. Older married people on the other hand have met a lot of life phenomena and have assimilated and accommodated these phenomena. They tend to appreciate the weaknesses of people especially their partners than young people do.

Also with relationship, Scanzoni and Scanzoni (1988) asserted that marriage is a merger into a new social unit which must erase all traces of the two individuals as separate entities. The more this merger comes the more quality the marriage becomes and the more the satisfaction is achieved. The logic and perceptions are that the more people are experienced in getting along with people the better the relationship. What it means is that age is a factor of relationship. Thus, experienced old married people were ahead of young married people.

Affection, love and appreciation to researchers Rankin-Esquer, Burnett, Baucom and Epstein (1997) is a pinnacle on which satisfying marriages revolve. To the young married people, showing affection is a trade off of freedom for entrapment and wedlock as most of them revealed to the researcher. On the part of the old, affection, love and most importantly appreciation is what quenches the fire in troubled marriages. Again, societies, especially the Ghanaian communities attach so much importance to sustained and successful marriages. Successful married people in that sense are respected; a good number of the old married people said this attached respect is something they long for.

The researcher identified that some studies were in contrast to the stand point of this study. A case in point is that of Katz's (2001) study of nonfiction children and youth divorce emotions which stated that there is no significant difference between young and old people with regards to their marital satisfaction. She was however found to have stated that older married people had the potential of improving and sustaining successful marriages. Again, Rogers and White (1998) had earlier found that there is no significant difference between young and old married people with respect to their satisfaction in marriage. To them what is perceived to be a difference between young and old married people is the level of commitment.

The results revealed that there were statistical significance in all the scales on the MSI expect temperament scale. Again, the revelations were that older people were satisfied in five out of the seven scales; relationship, affection, love and appreciation, character, temperament and marital roles. Out of these five, four were statistically significant.

The only scale which saw young married people showing higher level of satisfaction than the old married people is the in-law issues scale as shown in the results. The difference was statistically significant and the reasons the researcher gathered from the young married respondents are that, they want to build trust with their in-laws. In the bid to building trust with their in-laws, they go all out to impress them. The in-laws in this way get the idea that the son or daughter have them at heart and there accept them into their folds. Adonu (2005) maintains that acceptance of the married people by the partner's family is an integral part of the customary marriage in Ghana.

## 5.1 CONCLUSIONS

The study finally revealed that, young married people and old married people were both not satisfied in their marriages. There also existed no statistical significant difference between young and old married people in terms of their marital satisfaction.

## 5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

From the results, younger people were more dissatisfied in their marriages than older people. It was there recommended to the young folks to consult counsellors and other people who are well versed in marriages as to what marriage is about and how to achieve satisfactory marriages. To the older people, it is said that knowledge is not worth keeping when it does not benefit society. They should open up to marriage aspirants and young married people when they get to them to seek knowledge to achieve satisfying marriages. Counsellors should also put in more effort so far as premarital counselling for younger people is concerned. They should encourage younger people to seek premarital counselling.



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