

**PARENTS' PERCEPTION OF CHILDRENS' GENDER  
AS A DETERMINANT OF MARRIAGE STABILITY  
AMONG COUPLES IN THE  
YORUBA CULTURE**

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**Abstract**

This study investigated the perception of couples on childrens' gender as a determinant of marriage stability among couples in Ijebu-Ode. A questionnaire was designed and used to collect information from a randomly selected sample of 160 couples. The study cross analysed data using t test, along gender, marital age and educational qualifications. There was statistically significant difference in the perception of male and female married couples on the gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability. There was no statistically significant difference in the perception of newly and old married couples as well as graduates and non graduates on the gender of their children as a determinant of marriage stability among couples.

**Introduction**

Marriage is as old as man. It is the socially approved union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. When a man and a woman decide to leave their parents' home and come together as one with a

formal bond, such as recognized by a Clergy man or Imam and with the consent of their parents, they are regarded as married man and woman - couple. Marriage is a complex customs which centres upon the relationship between a sexually associating pair of adults living together and taking care of their children resulting from their union. According to Fadipe (1970), for a man or woman who has reached the age of marriage to remain single is against norms of the Yorubas. Men get married even when they are sexually impotent in order to save their immediate relatives, as well as to get someone to look after their domestic establishment. Ladele, Adewale, Adenuga (2004) viewed marriage within the entire range of past and present human societies. They described marriage as more or less durable union, sanctioned by the society, between one man and many women and between one woman and many men. For instance, polygamy and polyandry They argued that to comply with sanctions of the society the relationship must be in accordance with the customs, beliefs, taboos and the laws of the land. Furthermore, the joining together of this couple must be in accordance with the ways, attitudes and characters of the parents and relatives of the groom which the wife is going to be living with. Her deeds should be in accordance with the society in which she lives. Akinnifesi (1992) also described marriage as a relationship between the spouses. This relationship could start right from the younger age to the adult age and this can weave together the rules of the land on which the spouses live.

The importance of marriage is recognized in all culture because the institution of the family exists in all societies in some forms. Therefore, they must serve purposeful basic needs and perform essential tasks. Such importance is not only because marriage provides the best avenues for procreation and continuation of races, but also, because it serves as the most conducive setting for the socialization and rearing of children.

There are two dimensions to marriage; the economic and the sexual (Murdock, 2000). According to him, when a man and a woman are interdependent, both sexually and economically, they are said to be married. Marriage in his view exists.

“When two persons maintain on-going instrumental and expressive exchanges ... the expressive or person oriented dimension includes sexual gratification, companionship and empathy; while instrumental or task oriented dimension of marriage includes economic behaviours such as the earning and spending of money as well as the performance of certain household task interdependently”. P.22

Judson (2004) has identified a number of other functions of marriage which are closely related to that of Murdock. In his view, some obvious functions of the family are to provide for the continuation of the species, the control of sex expression, caring for and socialization of the children, provision of close affection and emotional ties to the individual serving as the last remaining places where primary relationship are possible ascription to individual.

From the onset, marriage was intended to provide mutually supportive benefits for the couples concerned. Infact, most sociologists and psychologists are of the opinion that personal pathology and individual unhappiness will follow from inadequate family models or a bad family atmosphere (Scanzoni and Scanzoni, 1991; Westly and Vilant Zooo, 2000; Landis, 2003). But more often, basic conflicts tends to arise as the “fire of love burn down” and years of marriage go on. Some studies have noticed the supportive aspect of good marriage to men. There is also evidence that a conflict, non-supportive marriage may be the cause of severe emotional breakdown for adults. For example, Vogler (2005) revealed that a person with severely deprived childhood develops severe mental illness only if their marriage fails to provide security and acceptance.

Another study explores the role of marital conflicts in precipitating depression in women (Weismann and Paykel, 2003), Brown Bhrolchan and Harris, 2002 strongly agree that having a marital relationship which the entire psychological intimacy is possible, offers protection against the development of depression even if stress from other sources is severe.

From the various views above, it appears therefore that marriage

is not only important to individuals, marital relationship plays an important role in determining the quality of the person's life. Then, if the quality of a marriage is often so crucial for both husband and wife and contributes critically to their psychological well being, what then are the factors that destabilize marriage?

The literatures on marital conflicts are so immense that all cannot be reviewed in a single study of this magnitude. Many researchers, sociologist, psychologists, marriage counselors and psychiatrists, have reported on the various sources of marital disruption. Alao (1982) while listing other factors that have contributed to marital conflicts especially in the African context stressed the issue of children as one of the most important. The role of children (their presence and absence) in precipitating marital conflicts between couples has long been recognized since ages. The arrival of children in the families, may lead to tensions. It is true that children are wanted in most families, but since these children require a considerable investment on the part of parents who spend a great deal on children. In spite of all this cost, parent may also view children as a source of reward (joy), thus bring economics load on the parent, especially when the children are many.

The greatest among the numerous child-related marital conflicts is the issue of gender of the children. Akinboye (1982) recognized the existence of this problem within the Nigerian society where couples often develop violent rage and sometimes threaten a divorce on issues such as the method of discipline, the number, spacing and the amount of times spent with children. Specifically the relationship between marital stability and gender of children has been expressed throughout the world in different ways, and at different period of history. Couples from different backgrounds have made various attempts to influence, and if possible, select the sex of the unborn child. In the words of Akinboye (1982),

some spouses may be totally discouraged about the association if the children are only of one sex, that is all boys or all girls, clinical interviews have indicated that in many African countries, couples with female children above tend to be moody, often depressed and bored about the association and sometimes wrong attribute are

made that possibly the wife or the man is responsible for the inability to have male children". P. 24.

However, the gender of a child plays a significant role in the stability of marriage in Yoruba cultural settings. Although, the extent to which the gender has affected the stability of marriages among Nigerian couples have not been well documented and systematically reported, instances occur among the various tribes where marriages collapse as a result of the desire couples (especially husband) for a particular sex in preference to the other.

Among the Yorubas of Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo, Lagos and part of Kwara States, the factors, which promote marital stability, are those which contribute the basic conditions to the preservation of the patrilineal descent group as a functional socio-economic unit (Okediji and Okediji, 1996). According to them, these factors are inherent in the needs the patrelineage perform, among other things, its recruitment, protection and economic functions. The functions are expected to interlock in a systematic way with certain traditional rules such as patrilocal residence, agnatic descent and collective land ownership to act as anchors upon which the stability of the individual families and the entire system rest. In this view, Okediji et al (1996) seems to see the stability of marriage among the Yorubas resting on only two factors – economic and the lineage system but even these two factors have been religiously maintained in the rural areas, Yoruba marriages are not exempted from the persistent conflicts and disruptions affecting marriage among other tribes in Nigeria.

Fadipe, (1970), in his discussion of the family, he has developed a number of interesting points. He analysed lucidly, the influence of Christianity, Islam, the social system and the issue of children on the stability of marriage among the Yorubas. In discussing the influence of children's gender in marital relationship of parents, Fadipe only stressed the financial benefits of female children when they become married, because such marriages "provide the needy, impecumous father-in-law a means of repairing his fortune". However, as a result of this economic advantage, Fadipe believes that in some communities it was and is still considered more fortunate to have girls more than the boys because "to have many daughters is to have many people

to call into one's services in the form of sons -in-law". Delana (2001) is very much in agreement with this investigator's view. He goes further to explain that although people have spoken of a lineage of an "Idile" that is family as composed of both sexes, it is the male members who constitute the pillar for the lineage group. A woman's home is with her husband lineage and she cannot conveniently participate in her own lineage council decisions. Delana opined that, there is customary restriction of the inheritance by a female, of property and certain rights held collectively by her "Idile" (family). Such things as farmlands, compound houses and wives cannot normally be inherited by a female member of the family in Yoruba culture.

The Yoruba culture and tradition is hundred percent in favour of the men. This is why most, if not all families desire to have male children within the family. When a son is born into a family in Yoruba cultural setting; especially among the Ijebus, members of the family rejoice. The mother's problems are believed to be over, the parents will now have a son to care for them in their old age. Their social security is guaranteed. But if she gives birth to a girl, she will be seen as a failure, that is, as if she merely brought another burden into the world – but is this true? Moreover, Nigeria society, especially the Yoruba culture and tradition looks up to male children partly as a yardstick for measuring the scope of success of marriage. Apart from bearing no children, if a woman bears only female children without a single male child, the husband may feel disappointed and look for another woman with a view to having male children. Many are ignorant of the fact that the sex of a child is determined by the chromosome a man donates during sexual intercourse and they deliberately put the blame on the woman.

#### Statement of the Problem

Most marriages have broken up due to the conflicts of a boy-child or gender of the children and the resultant of which may be divorce. In a situation where there is conflict, the children always suffer psychological setbacks because of the rancor going on between their parents. Since ages, the undue preference for male children by couples especially emanating from the husband has remained one of the greatest causes of marital conflicts especially in Yoruba culture. Husbands may continue to pressurize the wife to "try one more time

for a boy" after having seven daughters. Dimkpa (2010) investigate the effect of marital counseling and women's attitude towards marital stability. Ambakederemo and Ganagana (2006) conducted a study on the causes of marital instability in Port-Harcourt Municipality, Nigeria. His results indicated that these causes are absence of trust, anti-social vices, economic, social-cultural, and self control. However, none of these researchers pay ultimate attention to gender issue as determinant of marital stability, which is the gap that this study intends to fill. Therefore, this study examined the perception of gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability among couples in Ijebu-Ode Local Government Area of Ogun State.

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were generated to guide the study:

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their gender.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their religion.
- Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their qualification.
- Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their experience as couples.

### Method

The study employed the survey design. The population for this study comprised of married people of Ijebu-Ode Local Government of Ogun State. A total of 160 married were selected for the selected using the stratified random sampling technique. The use of this procedure was informed by the diversified background of the population such as sex, qualification and age of marriage of the respondents. The instrument

used for the collection of data for this study was a questionnaire. The instrument which was constructed by the researcher contains items that are capable of giving information relating to marriage stability. A 4-point Likert type scale measuring levels of agreements on issues on marriage stability was used to collect data for the study. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using t-test statistical calculation and percentages. Below are the tabulation and analysis of respondents' demographic variables. Table 1 – 3

Table 1: Frequency distribution of respondents by sex

Sex	No of Respondents	Percentage
Male	68	42.5
Female	92	57.5
Total	160	100

The questionnaire was given to one hundred and sixty (160) respondents out of which the male respondents were 68 in number and the female respondents were 92 in number 42.5 and 57.5 respectively.

Table 2: Frequency distribution of respondents by qualification

Qualification	No of Respondents	Percentage
Graduate (Married Couple)	64	40
Non-graduate (Married Couple)	96	60
Total	160	100

Table 2 shows that 40% of the respondents are graduate married couple while 60% of the respondents are non-graduate married couple.

Table 3: Frequency distribution of respondents by age of marriage

Age of Marriage	No of Respondents	Percentage



Newly Married Couple	72	45
Experienced Married Couple	88	55
Total	160	100

Table 3 shows that 45% of the respondents are newly married couple while 55% of the respondents are experienced married couple marriage stability.

Results		
Hypothesis One:		
Ho <sub>1</sub> : There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their gender.		

Table 4: Differences in the perception of male and female respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	't' Calculated	Critical 't' value	P
Male	68	65.4	6.0		2.62	1.98	0.05
Female	92	67.6	5.5	1.58			
Total	160						

The result on table 4 above shows that the 't'- calculated of (2.62) is greater than the tabulated 't' – value of (1.98) thus the null hypothesis which says there is no significantly statistical significant difference between the perception of male and female married couple is rejected. Thus, there is significant difference in the perception of male and female married couple on the gender of their children.

Hypothesis 2:		
Ho <sub>2</sub> : There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their religion .		

Table 5: difference in the perception of respondent on gender of

children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their religion.

The 't' calculated (0.56) is less than the critical value of 't' (1.98); thus the observed difference was found to show no statistical significance difference. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significantly difference in the perception of Christian and Muslim

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	't' Calculated	Critical 't' value	P
Christian married couple	64	66.36	6.1		0.56	1.98	0.05
Muslim Married Couple	96	66.85	5.1	1.58			
Total	160						

stability based on their qualification.

Table 6: Difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their qualifications.

Since calculated 't' (1.04) is less than the table value of 't' (1.98); thus the observed difference was found to show no statistical significance difference. Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no statistically significance difference in the perception of graduate married couple and non - graduate married couple was accepted.

Hypothesis 4:

Ho<sub>4</sub>: There is no statistically significant difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their experience.

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	't' Calculated	Critical 't' value	P
Graduate Married Couples.	72	66.06	5.7		1.04	1.98	0.05
Non -graduate Married Couples	88	67.15	6.4	1.58			
Total	160						

Table 6: Difference in the perception of respondent on gender of children as a determinant of marriage stability based on their experience.

N.M.C = Newly married couples  
E.M.C = Experienced Married couples

Since calculated 't' (1.04) is less than the table value of 't' (1.98); thus

Variables	N	X	SD	DF	't' Calculated	Critical 't' value	P
N.M.C	66	60.60	0.3		1.04	1.98	0.05
E.M.C	94	67.15	12.4	1.58			
Total	160						

this study investigated the Parents Perception childrens gender as a determinant of marriage stability among couples in Yoruba culture using Ijebu-Ode Local Government as a case study. In this study the hypotheses were tested and the results were presented below.

Hypothesis one which stated that there is no statistically significance difference in the perception of male and female married couple concerning the sex of their children was rejected. The result shows that there is significant difference between the perception of male and female married couple on the sex of their children. This corroborates the findings of Marlean and Maheu (1998) who concluded in their findings in which men and women have had to state a preference for the sex of their children if they were allowed to have only one child. Men were found to state a preference for a child of their own sex very often while the women were less clear.

The other two hypotheses, which state that there is no statistically

significant difference between the perception of newly and old; graduate and non-graduate married couple concerning the sex of their children were accepted. The result shows that there is no significant difference in their perception of the sex of their children. Certain reasons may be responsible, this may be cultural because it is the belief of African society that male inherited and continue the family lineage. They believed that male child would take over family wealth and sustain their ancestors' names, while female children will get married and drop their family names. For example, from earliest times, male children were needed to help as future farm-land, to succeed their fathers and continue the family tree, to fight inter-tribal wars, to hunt and fish for the family consumption. Some of these reasons may not be justified today but the preferences for male still continue even among graduate. This statement agrees very much with the conclusion reached by Morgan et al (1998) they found out that men with male children are more committed to their families than men with female children only. American fathers indeed are more involved in childbearing if they have kids of their own sex. Relationship between marital stability and sex of children has been expressed throughout the world in different ways, at different periods of history. Couples from different backgrounds (old or new couple, graduate or non-graduate) have made various attempts to influence and if possible, select the sex of the unborn child.

#### Conclusion

Generally all couples like to have children of both sexes in the family and the sex of these children has both positive and negative influence on the stability of their parent's marriages. Also, that even parent will love to have children of both sexes; they would rather like males to be in greater number. Moreover, if they were faced with a choice about getting children of the same sex, most parents would prefer having males only. At the same times, the continued birth of female children only has a negative effect on the marriage of such couple, as it is believed that female children drop their family names when they get married.

Above all, the result of the study also show that husband are more upset and sad if the children are all females, and in fact they

blame the wives more for the situation while the families tend to feel happy, stable and peaceful when the children are of both sexes. Finally, among other things, the study also reveal that it is possible for marriage to disintegrate for the very reason that such families cannot have children of the required sex and the situation is more prevalent among married couples in Yoruba land.

#### Recommendation(s)

The findings of this study will be very useful to marriage counselor, married couples, prospective parents, social workers and the society as a whole. First, it goes to confirm that the problem of the sex of the children on marriage stability is real and actually exist among us today as it had been in ages past. It is the belief of the researcher that more findings and better results could be obtained if a study of this nature is conducted in future on a wider scope and with better instruments. Such results could bring more information to the society on marriage, children's sex and peaceful co-existence between couples. The need to educate husbands and wives to understand the situation and adjust to it through self-acceptance is very necessary. The time has come for husbands to be told clearly that it is the chromosome of the male partner in marriage relationship that determine the sex of the children and not that of the female. This knowledge could help reduce the tendency for husbands to blame their wives or seek divorce for the simple reason of children's sex. It is also the duty of our society to appreciate one important fact, that it is not the sex of the children in one family that matters most; but the type of opportunities provided in the home, school and the society. For children to grow and live well, they should be happy and healthy. They should be properly trained and guided in morals and conduct. They should also be well educated and properly trained to grow up to become good, disciplined and productive members of their families and citizens of the society. This will help to have happy, stable and well-adjusted families in our society.

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