

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SPOUSAL SUPPORT AND MARITAL
SATISFACTION AMONG CHRISTIAN COUPLES: A CASE STUDY OF
TWO SELECTED CHURCHES IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: There exists high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, even among church couples. This study investigated the relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction in Christian married couples in two selected churches in Nairobi County.

Methodology: The study adopted a quantitative research method and used a descriptive study research design.

Findings: The findings revealed a statistically significant strong positive correlation between marital satisfaction and spousal support.

Recommendations: The study concluded that spousal support was important to the quality of a marriage. This implies that the greater the qualities of spousal support in a marriage, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction. The study recommended that the church should create pre-marital counseling; and the content and duration of such pre-marital sessions be designed to allow adequate coverage of all critical topics necessary to ensure quality spousal support. Couples in distress marriages should be encouraged to seek therapy from marriage and family therapists who can facilitate them in handling issues that bring conflicts in their marriages at a more personalized individual level.

Keywords: *Spousal Support, Marital Satisfaction, Christian Couples*

1.0 Introduction

Conflict is bound to occur in every person's life and as cited by Lulofs and Cahn (2000), this is true for those living together, those that are dating, and those in intimate and marital relationships. As Mohland (2011) observes, the closer the relationship (from a neighbor to a roommate), the more chances for conflict; and the more the smaller problems can develop into complicated problems, to the extent of involving intense feelings. Conflict in marriages is inevitable (Zeidner & Kloda, 2013), and marital distress often arises for those couples that cannot resolve their issues.

Research studies point to not only the inevitability of marital conflict but to the power of conflict to build or destroy marital relationship. For example, Tolorunleke (2014) researched on the causes of marital conflicts amongst couples and established that marital conflicts do exist. The stability of any marriage is crucial and one of the important aspects to ensure that this stability is maintained is by couples achieving a high marital satisfaction. Satisfaction in a marriage is crucial for the well-being of both the individual and the society and bad marriages or divorce pose risks such as negative effects on both psychological and physical health of the couple (Yucela & Koydermirb, 2015). Marital satisfaction is influenced by many factors key among them being conflicts. Conflict is an ever-present and damaging issue in many marriages, a lasting marriage results from a couple's ability to resolve the conflicts that are inevitable in any relationship (Gottman, 2012). Given that conflict is an ever-present factor in any marriage, one of the greatest problems the church faces today is that of the broken or unhappy families due to marital conflict (Onyango, 2013). As noted by Barongo and Ondieri (2018), the strength of the church lies in the unity of its constituent family units; a church with broken families is one that cannot be effective in its mission. Thus, the researcher was interested in investigating the relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction among Christian couples.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya is a Christian dominated country; approximately 70% of Kenyans are Christians (42% Protestant, 28% Catholic); about 24% are adherents of indigenous religions; 6% are Muslim (East Africa Living Encyclopedia). Statistics on the state of marriages in Kenya are shocking and this trend has taken an upward trajectory. Omoro (2018) cited an earlier InfoTrak survey of 2010

which showed that only 40% of Kenyans are happily married. The report further reported that 29% of marriages in Kenya are crumbling. A 2015 survey report published by Daystar University titled *-Redeeming Christian Marriage and Family in Kenya* brought to light more alarming statistics. The survey sampled 1200 Kenyans spread across different marital status (married, divorced, and separated), drawn from 46 out of the 47 counties. Key findings showed that 42% of divorced couples had divorced by their fifth anniversary; 77% had divorced by their 10th anniversary; and that only 23% divorced after the tenth anniversary. The study survey by Daystar University also established a 10% divorce rate across the nation (Daystar University Publication, 2015). As Onyango (2013) observes, there exists a high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, not even the church has been spared. Although people have associated high levels of religiosity with high levels of marital satisfaction, little is known as to the relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction among Christian couples. This study therefore sought to examine the relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction in Christian married couples in two selected churches in Nairobi County.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study was supported by the Family Systems Theory advanced by Kerr in 1981. The theory argues that family provides a primary context for understanding how individuals function in relationships with others and their behavior, and actions by an individual family member will influence all the other family members either negatively or positively (Okello, 2005). Under this model, individuals are best understood within the context of relationships (Turner & Pow, 1978), this is accomplished through assessing the interactions within an entire family. As Okello (2005) cites, symptoms such as poor relations are often viewed as an expression of dysfunction within a family.

These dysfunctional patterns are often perceived as being passed down across several generations (Cook & Frartz, 1984). Becvar and Becvar (1996) as cited by (Okello, 2005), stated that marital conflict might be an indication of the partners undergoing marital challenges and psychosocial development. Thus, under Family System Theory a couple's behavior may contribute a great deal towards a functional or dysfunctional family.

2.1 Empirical Review

Bradbury et al. (2000) posit that research on marital satisfaction falls into two broad categories interpersonal processes within marriage and micro/macro contexts. According to Bradbury et al. interpersonal processes focus primarily on interactions between partners in a marital relationship, while micro context aspects identify the behavioral interaction between the spouses in the perspective of the broader social context of couples' lives (2000). Spousal support is vital in achieving and maintaining marital satisfaction. Also, other interpersonal processes are influenced by the support among the spouses.

Spousal support aids in conflict situation and subsequent marital satisfaction as success of the resolution of every marital conflict needs the willingness of both parties to reach a compromising point. Conflict resolution is a very key aspect as in most cases it goes beyond the couples to further affect children. When the children are involved, it gives more reason why the conflict should be resolved. Thus, spousal support plays a crucial role as a mediator and/or facilitator of marital satisfaction and by extension stability of a family.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research method and used a descriptive study research design. The target population of the study was 450 married church members, in which the researcher used Yaro Yamane formulae to derive a sample of 212 married church members. A structured questionnaire was used to undertake the survey; Marital Satisfaction Scale and Conflict Resolution Style Inventory was the main tool for data collection. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and more specifically Pearson's and Spearman correlation technique was used to establish the correlation between the study variables. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic techniques.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Marital Satisfaction

This study sought to establish the levels of marital satisfaction among Christian couples in the two selected churches in Nairobi County. To measure and score marital satisfaction the study

used the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) questionnaire. The RDAS questionnaire is made up of three subscales namely; *dyadic consensus*- degree to which one is in agreement with the spouse; *dyadic satisfaction*- degree that spouse feels satisfied with the partner; and *dyadic cohesion*- degree to which a spouse participates in activities with the partner. The scale has 14 items that rate aspects of marital satisfaction on a 6 or 5 Likert scale. Scores range from 0 to 69 whereby higher scores are an indication of greater relationship satisfaction while lower scores indicate greater relationship distress. The cut-off score for the RDAS is 48 such that scores of 48 and above indicate marital non-distress and scores of 47 and below indicate marital/relationship distress (Crane et al, 2000). Table 1 below presents the frequency of distress marriages and non-distress marital relationships among respondents in the two selected churches in Nairobi County; Distress marriages (RDAS sum score < than 48); Non-distress (RDAS sum score > than 48).

Table 1: Marital distress case summary

Satisfaction category		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Distress marriage	113	53.3
	Non-distress marriage	99	46.7
	Total	212	100.0

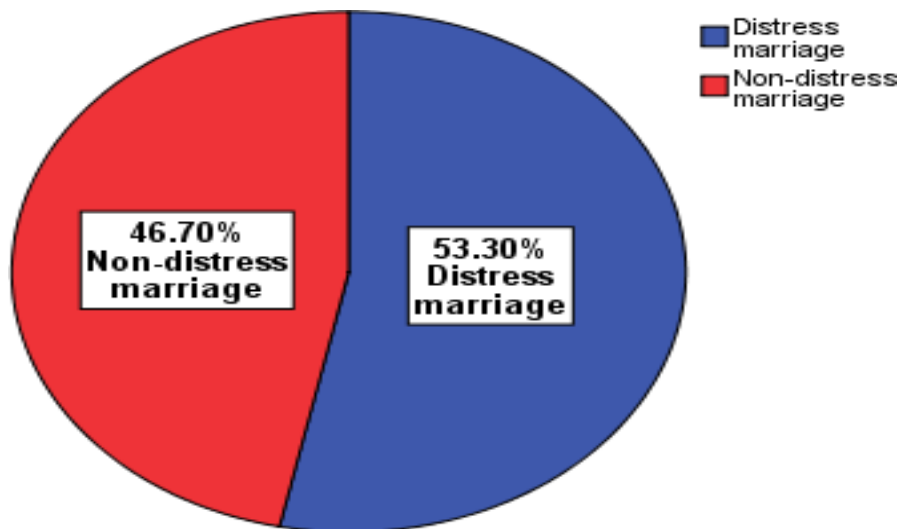


Figure 1: Distribution of distress and non-distress marriages

4.1.1 Relationship between spousal support and Marital Satisfaction

The study sought to determine the relationship between spousal support and marital satisfaction. Table 2 presents a summary of Spearman correlation coefficients results for the relationship factors.

Table 2: Spearman Correlation between spousal support and marital satisfaction

		Communication	Marital satisfaction
Marital satisfaction	Correlation	.907**	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.
	N	212	212
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 2 shows a statistically significant strong positive correlation between marital satisfaction and spousal support ($r=.907, p<.05$). This implies that spousal support among couples has a great influence on marital satisfaction. This in turn implies that the greater the quality of spousal support, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction. This agrees with research that the evidence of a healthy marital relationship is pegged on having a feeling of security in a marriage (Okhakhume, et al., 2016).

4.2 Spousal Support

Spousal support was indicated through respondents’ responses to questionnaire items RDAS 3 (Agreement/ disagreement on making major decisions); RDAS 6 (Agreement/ disagreement on career decisions); and item RDAS 13 (How often do you and your mate work together on a project).

On making major decisions distress marriages reported more disagreements 38.9 % -Frequently disagree whereas non-distress marriages reported 1%. Respondents in non- distress marriages reported greater congruence of agreement 24.2% —almost always agree and 65.7 % —Always agree; distress marriage posted 6.2 % —almost always agree and a 1% —Always agree. Figure 2 summarizes agreements/disagreements in the two categories.

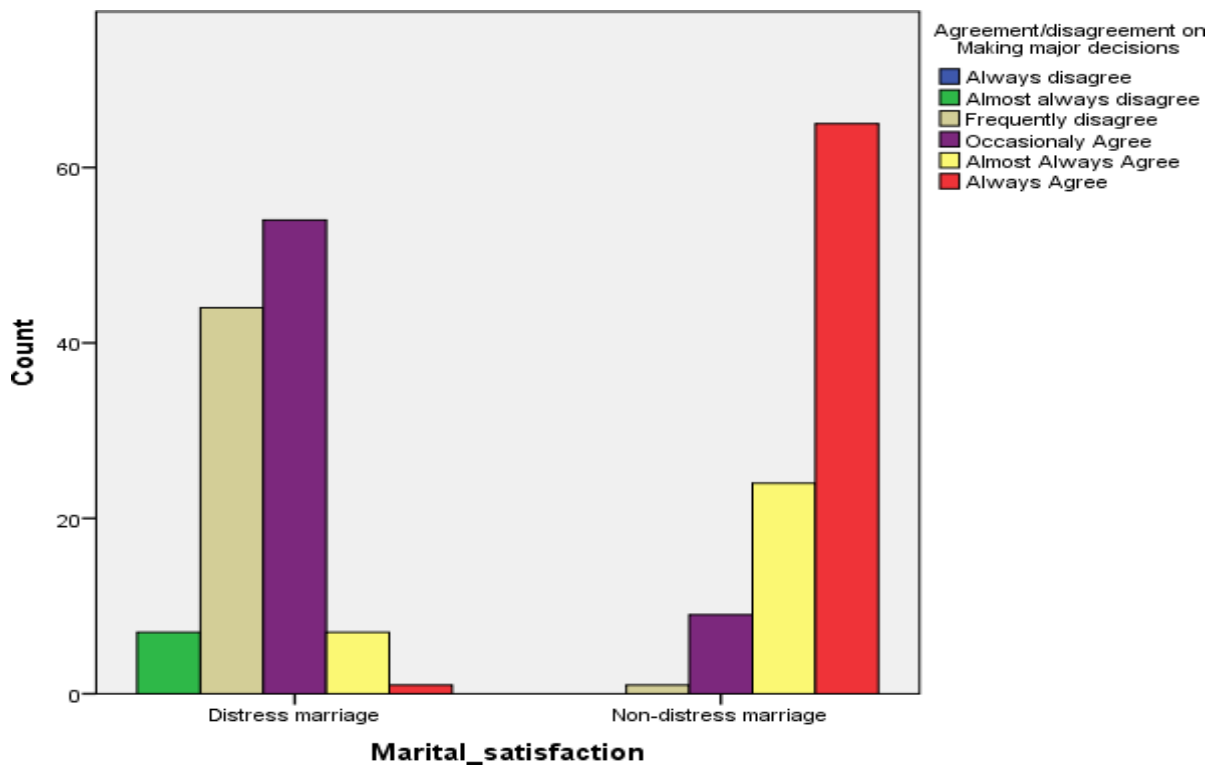


Figure 2: Major decisions distress vs. non-distress marriages

About career decisions non-distress marriages indicate greater congruence of agreements 26.5% —Almost always agree and 60.2% —Always agree; and significantly less disagreements 1% —frequently disagree. Distressed marriages reported significantly high disagreements 4.4% —Always disagree 8% —almost always disagree 49.6% —frequently disagree; and low congruence of agreements 3.5% —almost always agree and 12.4% —Always agree.

Figure 3 summarizes agreements/disagreements on career decisions across both marital satisfaction categories.

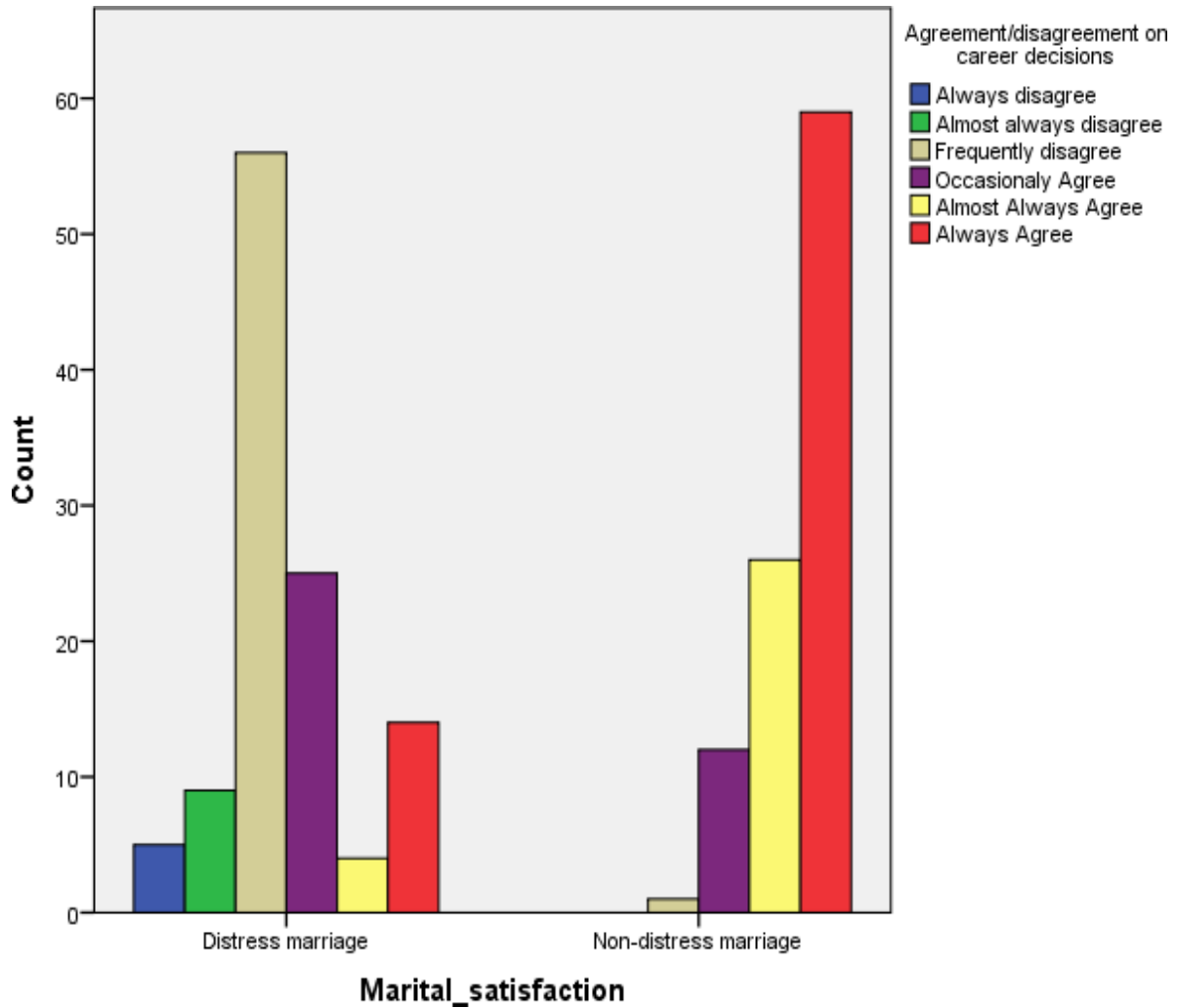


Figure 3: Career decisions distress vs. non-distress marriages

Respondents in non-distress marriages reported working together on a project with their spouses more frequently 1% -Never and 7.1% -More often; than respondents in distress marriages 42.5% -Never and 0 -More often. Figure 4 presents a summary of disagreements/agreement comparison across the two marital satisfaction groups.

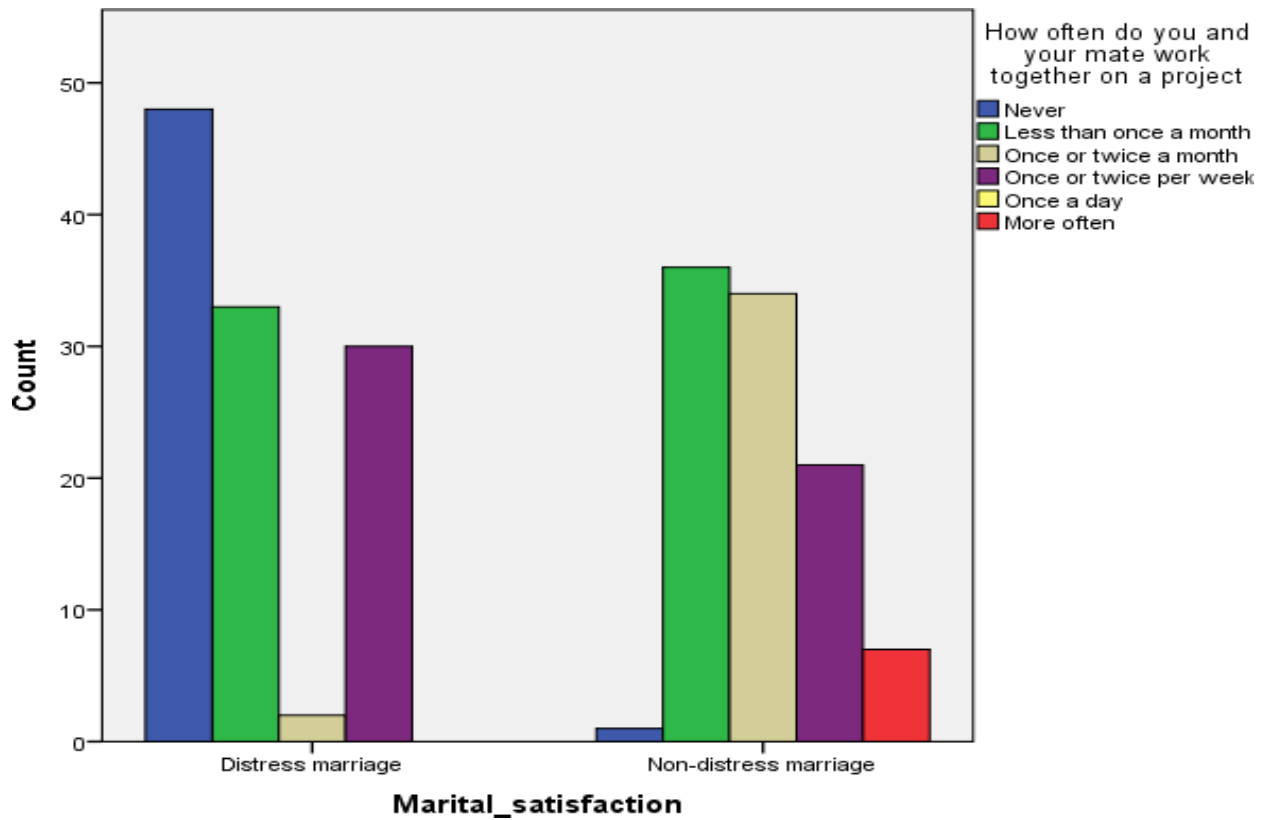


Figure 4: Working together distress vs. non-distress marriages

5.0 Conclusion

The study findings have underscored the importance of spousal support to the quality of a marriage. Findings have proved that there exists a strong positive correlation between spousal support and marital satisfaction; this implies that the greater the qualities of spousal support in a marriage, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction in that marriage. This then calls for Christian couples to find ways to build on the quality of their spousal support as this enhances the satisfaction of their individual marriages.

6.0 Recommendations

The church should create pre-marital counseling; and the content and duration of such pre-marital sessions be designed to allow adequate coverage of all critical topics necessary to ensure quality spousal support. Couples in distress marriages should be encouraged to seek therapy from marriage and family therapists who can facilitate them in handling issues that bring conflicts in their marriages at a more personalized individual level.

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