

Parental Neglect and Attitude towards Marriage: Moderating Effect of Conscientiousness Trait among Young Adults in Ekiti State

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Abstract

Parental neglect may be underlying issue in young adult's attitude towards marriage. Therefore, conscientiousness trait may serve as buffer against the debilitating scars that may be left by negative childhood experiences. It is highly pertinent to investigate these moderating variables and its dimensions since they can cushion the effect of parental neglect, on attitude towards marriage. Adopting the cross sectional survey design, with elements of correlational design; a total of 966 undergraduates of public Universities in Ekiti State cutting across ages 18-28years participated in this study. Data were collected by means of standardized psychological instruments put together as a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprised General Attitudes towards Marriage Scale (GAMs), The Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOTR), The Multidimensional Neglectful Behaviour Scale (MNDS), Conscientiousness trait of the Big Five Inventory. While The Statistical Package for Social Science 20 (IBM SPSS version 20) was used to calculate descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and internal consistency reliability of measures were used to analyze the data. two hypotheses were tested through the use of structural equation modeling. Findings revealed that Parental neglect significantly predicted marital attitudes. ($\beta = -.25, p < .001$). An increase in parental neglect was associated with negative attitudes towards marriage. Only the covariates of gender ($\beta = -.19, p < .001$) and school ($\beta = .35, p < .001$) were significant in the model. Being a female and a student of BUESTI predicted a positive attitude towards marriage The model explained 30% variance in attitudes towards marriage. Furthermore, Parental neglect significantly predicted marital attitudes ($\beta = -.34, p < .001$) while the moderator, conscientiousness did not ($\beta = -.02, p = .66$). Results were discussed in line with previous literatures and it was mainly recommended that Government. Should formulate and enact law that regulates parental neglect. also, statutory bodies like the police force, Nigeria civil defense corps etc. should be made to be up to their tasks

Keywords: Parental Neglect, Consciousness Trait, Parental Neglect, Attitude towards Marriage, Young Adults

1.1 Introduction

Background to the study

Marriage has been a revered tradition that people have been looking up to since the inception of civilization. Marriage is founded on the belief that there is complementarity between men and women. It is a uniquely comprehensive union made possible by sexual complementarity (Raj, 2011). Marriage is also globally considered as a cultural phenomenon as it is practiced across different cultures around the world in diverse forms. Through the years, importance of marriage as an institution cannot be overemphasized, and in many cultures, marriage is regarded as a duty and a means of preserving families (Alhasan & Omar, 2020; Gilliland, 2020). It is a social construct wherein a man and a woman unite as spouses, assuming the role of parents to the offspring resulting from their union. It is a legally recognized institution that fosters societal order through responsible upbringing of children. However, in recent times, the value of marriage is declining. Men now get engaged to women and refuse to take the further step into marital union leading to what is called “baby mamas” in contemporary societies. Similarly, the scourge of feminism has crept into the consciousness of female folks of marriageable age informing situations in which women see marriage as a burden (Unutkan et al., 2016).

In family life, it is expected of parents to be responsible for the general wellbeing of their children in terms of provision of everything that will engender the development of such a child to be a responsible adult who will contribute meaningfully to the society. Taking a cursory look at the Nigerian society, it is realized that lots of children and young adults appear to be on their own. The streets are filled with young adults who most times act as if they are off the hook and engage in several activities (both legal and illegal) just to make out a living. They have practically taken up the duties their parents were supposed to assume, indicating a sign of parental neglect. A documentary by BBC in 2014 depicts a grave situation where lots of young adults in Nigeria are without shelter and live on the streets (Onuoha & Osameme 2019; Omonijo et al., 2014). The international labor organization report in 2016 depicted that Nigeria has over 300,000 children as child laborer (Huber et al., 2018). It is equally alarming that a good number of Nigerian children that are supposed to be given good education are out of school. The UNESCO reported in 2018 that over 10 million Nigerian children are out of school and lack basic healthcare.

Parental neglect is also observed among career parents especially the ones living in urban and densely populated cities. Most career parents have left their duties for caregivers in school and house-helpers at home. They know little or nothing about psychosocial development of their children and sadly, the children see these figures as parents and social models. Daniel et al., (2000) and Kobulski, (2020) observed that over time, the cumulative negative effects of parental neglect become progressively damaging to the child. In addition, an adolescent who witnesses their parents fighting frequently and using derogatory language may not look forward to marriage in an effort to prevent the parent from repeating these behaviours. Lack of parental care can make a child feel rebellious against social order and values, leading to the development of a somewhat personal view of marriage that is at odds with social expectations. A child who feels neglected by the parents may believe that marriage is pointless and see no reason to enter into it. Such people can believe marriage is pointless and unworthy.

. Conscientiousness, characterized by the capacity for self-regulation and determination in pursuing life objectives, might offset the detrimental impacts of parental neglect, empowering

individuals to sustain a harmonious marital relationship despite challenges stemming from their early upbringing. Therefore, it is essential to explore how conscientiousness, with its focus on goal orientation, discipline, and perseverance, can moderate and alleviate the impact of parental neglect on attitudes toward marriage.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

Attitudes towards Marriage

Attitude towards marriage refers to an individual's perspective and inclination toward the institution of marriage (Wood et al., 2008). According to Wood and colleagues, this attitude is primarily shaped by one's perceptions rather than objective reality, suggesting that personal experiences heavily influence one's views. Hippen (2016) adds that attitudes towards marriage encompass perceptions of its advantages and disadvantages, personal desires or aversions regarding marriage, the importance attributed to marriage, expectations regarding the timing of marriage, and the readiness required for marriage. He also suggests that an individual's attitude towards marriage is influenced by a cost-benefit analysis of the institution. Al-Gore and Sanders (2017) support this notion, finding that unmarried women who view marriage as a means to attain economic security are more likely to express intentions to marry.

Darren (2019) asserts that attitudes on marriage are significant since they impact behaviour going forward. According to Fishbein and Ajzen (2011), there is a correlation between behaviour and attitude, which aligns with Darren's perspective. Behaviours within relationships hold significance as they contribute to various aspects of contentment, fulfillment, physical health, and overall welfare, particularly within enduring partnerships such as marriage. (Musick & Bumpass 2012; Vanassche et al., 2012).

Nevertheless, remaining unmarried is not advantageous for either families or individuals, given that children raised in single-parent households are more prone to educational dropout and poverty compared to those from two-parent households (Gubernskaya, 2010). Single fathers, in particular, often display lower levels of involvement in their children's lives and demonstrate reduced accountability toward their families. The prevalence of single-parent households substantially contributes to child and family poverty, reliance on welfare services, and a range of related challenges (First Things First, 2013).

In spite of the clear benefits associated with marriage and the drawbacks of remaining single, modern studies indicate a diminishing regard for marriage and a declining inclination to pursue it. Gubernskaya (2010) noted that divorce, cohabitation, voluntary singlehood, out-of-wedlock childbearing, or choosing not to have children are increasingly common choices regarding marriage, with societal stigma around these choices diminishing.

Parental Neglect

Defining neglect presents significant challenges. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 1999), parental neglect can be defined as the inability to sufficiently cater to a child's growth and development across multiple areas, encompassing health, education, emotional welfare, nutrition, housing, and safety. Persistent neglect, marked by continual failure to fulfill a child's requirements and offer nurturing support, can result in accumulating negative consequences that exacerbate over time (Daniel, 2015). Neglect primarily involves acts of

caregiver omission, distinguishing it from abuse, which typically entails acts of commission. Legal definitions of parental neglect vary among jurisdictions, but generally involve the failure of a parent or caregiver to fulfill their duty, potentially endangering the child's well-being (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2019).

Several key considerations are integral to understanding neglect. Neglect can be described as the egregious conduct of caregivers, such as parents, that results in depriving children of their fundamental needs, including education, food, shelter, clothing, medical care, and supervision for engaging in safe activities. Neglect often involves repeated omissions, with the pattern of these omissions constituting neglectful behaviour (Olusegun & Adegbite, 2017). In Nigeria, a few are aware that child neglect is a form of abuse which has life-long implication on the children. For instance, while a single instance of missing a feeding may not necessarily result in harm, repeated instances can lead to failure to thrive or more severe health issues, even death. This pattern of neglect is unfortunately common in Nigeria, where it's not uncommon to observe school-age children aimlessly wandering the streets in unkempt conditions. This phenomenon often stems from the high levels of poverty plaguing the country; Nigeria ranks among the highest in global poverty indices, as reported by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2019). Neglect may be influenced by many factors which may include; finance, culture, physical and psychological health and personality of the care givers/parents (Karadağ et al., 2021; Tingberg & Nilsson, 2020)

In particular, dependence on financial support from relatives and receiving food donations from charitable organizations has been associated with higher occurrences of neglect (Slack et al., 2016), indicating that families relying on such assistance may be facing significant economic challenges. Additionally, some parents or caregivers may be dealing with physical health problems, cognitive limitations, mental health issues, or substance abuse problems that impede their capacity to provide safe and sufficient care for their children (Slack et al., 2011). Physical health problems can significantly hinder a caregiver's capacity to perform essential caregiving duties like bathing, cooking meals, and doing laundry. Cognitive, mental health and substance abuse challenges may affect the caregiver's understanding of the significance of addressing different aspects of care, spanning from medical attention to emotional support. Parents dealing with these issues may genuinely find it difficult to meet even their children's most basic daily needs, or they may be so impaired that they are unaware of their children's requirements.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives are to:

- i. investigates the influence of parental neglect on attitude towards marriage;
- ii. examine if conscientiousness will moderate the relationship between parental neglect and attitudes towards marriage

3.0 Methodology

Research design

This is a cross-sectional survey design with correlational design examining the moderating roles of conscientiousness traits between parental neglect and attitude towards marriage.

Population

Sample used for this study were 966 undergraduates of public Universities in Ekiti State which comprises of Ekiti state University, Federal University Oye- Ekiti and Bamidele Olumilua University of Education cutting across ages 18-28yrs.

Sampling Method and Techniques

The study uses purposive sampling method to select 966 participants from the various faculties who are in their final year in the higher institutions. Within the age bracket of 18-28years.

Research Instruments

General Attitudes towards Marriage Scale (GAMS)

Marital attitudes were assessed utilizing the ATMS, devised by Kinnaird and Gerrard (1986), which measures both favorable and unfavorable attitudes toward marriage. Scheier et al. (1994) documented a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .78 and a test-retest reliability of .79 over a duration of 28 months for this scale. Liefbroer and Rijken (2019) employed a measure to ascertain discriminant validity at the individual level, consisting of three items assessing attitudes toward marriage. Participants indicated their level of agreement on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." And in this study, composite reliability is .74

average variance is .59 maximum reliability .78

The Multidimensional Neglectful Behaviour Scale (MNDS)

This is a 20-item scale designed to assess behaviours that suggest neglect. Developed by Murray (2016), it encompasses various domains including physical needs (loading factor: .03), emotional needs (loading factor: -.06), cognitive needs (loading factor: -.03), and supervisory needs (loading factor: -.03), as confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis. In this study, composite reliability is .87 Average variance is .63 and max. reliability is .88

Conscientiousness trait of the Big Five Inventory

The big five (5) inventories is a 44 item inventory which measures personality from a five dimensional perspective. The nine (9) items measuring conscientiousness trait was extracted out for the purpose of this study.

American (Male and Female) = 711 Nigerian (male 60) and (female 60) = 120

Conscientiousness: 32.40 29.10 29.60

Reliability

The co-efficient of reliability provided by John et al (1991) are:

Type	Co-efficient
Cronbach alpha	.80
3-month test –re-test	.85

Validity

The divergent validity coefficient calculated by Umeh (2004) using the University Maladjustment Scale (Kleinmuntz, 1961) for conscientiousness is .11. In this study composite reliability is .69 average variance is .36 and max. Reliability .70

Interpretation

The Nigerian norms or average scores serve as the reference point for interpreting participants' scores. Scores that match or exceed the norms imply that the clients exhibit the particular

personality type, whereas lower scores indicate that the client does not display certain personality traits.

Procedure

The research instruments were distributed by the researcher together with a research assistant from each department used. And it was given to the participants in the classroom during leisure periods in form of a questionnaire package prior to participation, selected individuals were informed about the voluntary nature of their involvement and their right to withdraw from the study at any point. Ethical considerations of the study, including informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were discussed during the initial sessions with the adolescents at each school. Additionally, participants were assured that the data collected would be stored securely to facilitate analysis, with access limited to the researcher alone.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical clearance was granted by the Research and Ethics Committee of the Ekiti State University. Participants were preemptively informed about the potential for certain statements in the research questionnaire to evoke unpleasant memories. Prior to participation, their informed consent was obtained. As per standard procedure, counseling was made available to any participant who experienced psychological distress as a result of responding to the questionnaire. Additionally, participants were assured that they could reach out to the researcher, who could refer them to professional therapists or counselors if needed.

Statistical Method

The Statistical Package for Social Science 25 (IBM SPSS version 25) calculated descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation and internal consistency reliability of measures. All three hypotheses and six sub-hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in the Mplus software.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Discussion of Findings

The first hypothesis aimed to determine whether parental neglect would predict attitude towards marriage significantly. The findings indicated that parental neglect had an independent significant predictive effect on attitudes towards marriage, whereas Furthermore, being a student at BUESTI was associated with a positive attitude towards marriage.

The model accounted for 30% of the variance in attitude towards marriage, suggesting that parental neglect, characterized by a parent's failure to fulfill various aspects of a child's development, including health, education, emotional well-being, nutrition, shelter, and safety, might have influenced their marital attitudes. Over time, individuals may have overcome

The finding is consistent with the previous studies that have investigated parental neglect. For example, Collins (2021) found out that American young adults who did not experience parental warmth and nurturance also exhibit negative attitude towards marriage. Supporting the result of this study, Abrol (2021) found out that positive parental and family dynamics are strong predictors of more positive attitudes to marriage. Similarly, studies by Riggio and Weiser (2008), Chitsaz (2021) also echo the consensus in literature that young adults often take cue from marital experiences around them to form an impression about the marriage institution. One may argue that recent report of domestic violence also adds to the negative attitude of young adults towards marriage. It seems to be that adolescents have come to the conclusion that the importance

attached to marriage in the society is a ploy to keep them procreating while neglecting their personal goals.

The overall significant impact of parental neglect on attitude towards marriage as revealed in this study aligns with the findings of Wagner (2022), who identified childhood maltreatment as a robust predictor of perceived marital quality. Wagner argued that individuals who have experienced maltreatment during childhood or adolescence are more likely to encounter increased disagreements, feelings of mistrust, and higher rates of separation and divorce in their relationships. During childhood, development occurs rapidly, and any disruptions such as a lack of warmth and care from parents or significant others can have repercussions on subsequent social relationships and contribute to the formation of schemas that influence interpretations within romantic relationships. In line with these observations, Wagner (2022) suggested that emotional neglect and physical neglect during childhood may foster a pattern of fear and mistrust.

The second hypothesis tested whether or not conscientiousness will significantly moderate the relationship between parental neglect and attitude towards marriage. Result showed that conscientiousness did not significantly moderate the relationship between parental neglect and attitude towards marriage. This finding seems to negate the research outcome of Nwoke and Oparaocha (2012) who demonstrated that conscientiousness significantly and positively predicted marital satisfaction which implies that an increase in the level of conscientiousness brings about positive marital outcomes among couples. This result seems to suggest that people who are goal-oriented, competent and disciplined in behaviours, are expected to derive more marital outcomes. Despite the aforementioned positive influence of conscientiousness on positive relationship outcomes, research has been inconsistent in demonstrating the effects of conscientiousness on interpersonal outcomes. Some studies have shown that conscientiousness is associated with positive marital attitudes (e.g. Donnellan, Conger, & Bryant, 2004; Shackelford, Besser, & Goetz, 2008) whereas, other studies have demonstrated either inconsistent benefits of conscientiousness (Gigue`re, Fortin, & Sabourin, 2006) or no benefits of conscientiousness (Demir, 2008).

In fact, in agreement with present study, Karney and Bradbury's (1995) meta-analysis of the association between conscientiousness and marital outcomes indicated that conscientiousness tends to be rather weakly associated with positive marital attitudes. These weak and inconsistent main effects may reflect several interpersonal costs of conscientiousness. They found out that individuals high in conscientiousness often possess a high need for individual achievement, especially regarding their work performance that may interfere with their interpersonal relationships. Indeed, the dutiful nature of conscientious individuals may propel them to spend considerable time at work to the detriment of social or family activities, thereby leading to aversion for marriage. Similarly, individuals high in conscientiousness are more likely than individuals low in conscientiousness to report greater stress from work (e.g., Tyssen et al., 2009), this stress that may negatively impact their relationships. Given that those high in conscientiousness have unrealistically high expectations for themselves and others, they risk that their actual relationships may fall short of their expectations. Indeed, having positive relationship expectations that are out of reach may lead to negative marital attitudes and thus lead to frustration in romantic relationships. Similarly, Sayehmiri (2020) found out that conscientiousness has a positive relationship with marital satisfaction. They contended that because conscientious people are self-disciplined,

principled, and able to effectively handle relationship issues, they also experience high levels of marital satisfaction. In the same vein, Engel et al. (2002) found that conscientiousness was the best predictor of couple intimacy and commitment. They maintained that individuals high in conscientiousness traits exhibit higher levels of intimacy in their relationships and are, hence able to build successful relationships.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings the study concludes that Conscientiousness trait did not moderate the relationship between parental neglect and attitude towards marriage. Lastly, Parental neglect and childhood adversity did not significantly predict attitude towards marriage.

Recommendations

Some sessions of therapy can be arranged to resolve repressed trauma that can affect attitude towards marriage.

Furthermore, Policy formation should enact law that regulates parental neglect. Also centers for rehabilitation for self-esteem should be created in higher institutions.

Lastly, psychological intervention like therapy session should be given to people who have experienced parental neglect to resolve repressed trauma that can affect young adults' attitude towards marriage.

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