

DETERMINANTS OF MARITAL INSTABILITY AMONG MARRIED WOMEN IN SOUTHWEST, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Marital instability has become an issue of concern in Nigeria. Most marriages have been under serious threat of disintegration. It is against this background that the study examined the determinants of marital instability among married women in Southwest, Nigeria. It determined the prevalence, level of marital instability and impacts on married women. The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study. The population consisted of married women in Government Ministries and Departments, Public Secondary Schools, and Local Government secretariat offices in Southwest, Nigeria. The sample for this study consisted of 1,703 married women selected through multi-stage sampling procedures. A self-developed questionnaire tagged Marital Instability Questionnaire (MIQ) was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was validated and a reliability co-efficient of 0.83 was obtained through Cronbach Alpha method. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as percentages and mean scores. The findings revealed that the most prevalent forms of marital instability experienced by married women included lack of sexual satisfaction, views not respected, lack of care for children and fighting. It further revealed that the level of marital instability among married women was moderate. The finding also showed that in-law interference and childlessness influenced marital instability while cultural belief, age difference at marriage and religion were not factors that determined marital instability among married women. It was recommended that married women should be encouraged to utilize the services of health educators, marriage counselors and office of the public defender for proper guidance.

Keywords: Marital, Instability, Determinant, Socio-cultural, Prevalence, Implication.

Introduction

Marriage is one of the oldest institutions in the world with all indications. It is as old as the world herself as it remains the only institution responsible for procreation, which is the basis for forming the society at large. It

entails the coming together of a man and a woman for companionship and most importantly for procreation considering the cultural belief and values in Nigeria.

Marriage varies according to different cultures, but it is principally an institution in which interpersonal

relationships usually intimate and sexual interaction are acknowledged (Bell, 2001). Marriage also called matrimony or wedlock is a socially or ritually recognized union or legal contract between spouses that establishes rights and obligations between themselves, their children and also their in-laws (Odebode, 2019). It involves legal rights, responsibilities, and duties that are enforced by both secular and sacred laws. As a legal contract ratified by the state, marriage can only be dissolved with state permission (Borgatta & Edgor, 2010).

Optimistically, everyone will expect that the love which is the sole origin of the union called marriage should be capable of making a lovable and harmonious marriage that can only be compared to a heavenly home or experience (heaven on earth). It is however disappointing to observe that as respected and cherished as the institution which is coupled with the eagerness on the part of every young women and men to be part of this institution alongside with the commitment thereof; yet many of the marriages are nothing but hell on earth.

Consequently, the institution of marriage has witnessed a dramatic decline in patronage by young persons. As a result of marital challenges and crises, the marriage institution is faced with a low

patronage and commitment to the causes of its survival (Okon, Oyibo, Tella and Tella, 2008). The researchers observed that young educated men and women are running away from getting into marriage relationship. A close look at the age, maturity and personality of graduate students revealed that many of the men who are matured enough and who should have been married are still out of the marriage institution.

Marital instability is the failure of husband and wife to perform their role obligations in marriage. Marital instability has become an issue of concern in Nigeria. It is associated with separation, divorce and single parenthood. It is a situation whereby there is marriage un-satisfaction which could lead to marriage breakdown, separation, desertion or divorce.

It is obvious that the increasing rate of divorce, cases of single parents, wife battering are among the resultant effects of marital instability in modern African society. Marital instability has made people to currently witness the invasion of many areas of human activity by a radical individualism; economic life, excessive competition among others. This individualism certainly does not encourage generous, faithful and permanent self-giving. This has resulted in marriages characterized by individualism and

excessive competition between spouses. It cuts across every race, economic status, educational and even religious status. The endemic nature of the factors that impede marriage stability made it alarming especially in Africa where marriage is religiously adored. This mind troubling issue has motivated the researchers to explore the factors that could threaten the stability of marriage.

It has been observed that some factors responsible for marital instability could be categorised under social and cultural factors. The social factors include the educational status, occupational status, income status and age difference while the cultural factors entails in-law interference, childlessness, religion, cultural belief, age at marriage.

The role of the man in the Nigerian culture is that of a master and controller of home. The man wants to maintain this role all the time and does not want a situation that will militate against it lest society sees him as a weakling. It appears that some men are weary of marrying women who have acquired higher education. Men in this group will contend that it will be easier for them to be able to have control over women who do not have more than a school certificate education or those who did not attend school at all regardless of their own educational background. This is

with the belief that such will not see them as equals and as such give them enough respect and thereby enabling them master of the home.

A graduate marrying a primary school certificate holder, may soon realize that their varying social status could create gap between himself and the wife especially when relating to other people belonging to their varying social groups with varying societal values that cannot match. This could be a source of conflict and possible failure of their marriage. Nwokocha (2002) noted that a woman with primary school certificate who did not bother to know how to relate to people in her graduate husband's social class will with time learn more about her in her marriage if she has to succeed, and this also applies to man.

The researchers observed that when the man has a lower educational qualification than the wife and his financial standing is also lower, he may develop feeling of resentment, jealousy and incapability at being able to have a control over his household, especially if the man did not approve of such educational attainment. The situation may lead to instability, eventual separation or divorce in the marriage.

Women with better occupation or higher position in their professional line

are bounds to have access to more money and be fixed up with different obligations as demanded by their profession and designation which may not enable them to give a maximum attention to family matters while the husband if not considerate may take this up and becomes an issue.

In a situation where a woman is highly paid compared to what the husband earn, a jealous husband may springs into unreasonable actions and reactions to issues just to destabilize such woman to make sure she never develop any ego. It is culturally believed that the husband is ultimately supposed to be the bread winner of the family and anything different from this may generate chaos in such home.

From observation, it is noted that some in-laws, most often, see only the negative aspects of their sons or daughter in-laws. It would have been most beneficial to their children if they appreciated the virtues of their in-laws and de-emphasised the little faults since no human being is faultless. But some in-laws are after the fault of their sons or daughter in-laws which could end up making the marriage not stable. For example, when a man gets married, the anticipation by family members is having children in the nearest possible time. As the marriage progresses if there is no sign of pregnancy,

worries set in for the couples; the period of waiting for pregnancy is a time of anxiety and unsolicited advice and suggestions from relatives and friends. The woman who is unable to become pregnant is the focus of discussion by the in-laws. The in-laws never care to know who is the cause of the barrenness but would simply accuse the woman either of infidelity, teenage abortion or witchcraft. Such interference from the families of either of the spouse could end up having negative effects on the marriage.

One of the general cultural beliefs in Yoruba marriage is that procreation is the basic aim of marriage, for them marriage and procreation are inseparable. Children are regarded as great treasure to their parents, relations and their immediate community. The absence of supporting factors in a marriage may however signal failure. In a purely African setting, the status of a wife in her husband's family remains shaky and unpredictable until she begets a child. She becomes really secure after the birth of a male child. At this stage she is welcome as a responsible housewife in her husband's extended family. The birth of the child gives her the title— *wife*, prior to this time she may simply be referred to as a wife only in anticipation (Ani, 2009)

In a Yoruba society that encourages and promotes parenthood, with its current social norms and culture, childlessness can be stigmatizing. The traditional idea that couples should reproduce and want to reproduce is still widespread in Nigeria especially in Southwest. Childlessness is considered deviant behavior in marriage and this may lead to adverse effects on the relationship of the couple.

It is certain that every individual is a believer of one faith, religion or the other as the case may be. This however may range from one country or race to the other, meanwhile marriage in recent times has nothing to do with a particular a particular country or tribe. Never the less a man and woman from different tribe or religious background may come together to marry each other on the basis of love, however it is expected in most part of Nigeria as a country that the husband which is the head of the family dictates which religion the family as a whole will embrace, while any objection to this will generate or degenerate into problems.

Women who marry while still in their teens are twice as likely to have unstable marriage as women in their thirties (South, 2001). The author further observed that those who marry in their thirties are likely to experience divorce as

those who marry in their twenties. The researcher observed that women who enter their first marriage at a later age are at greater risk of doing so with a child from a previous informal union, or even delayed pregnancy which may be a destabilizing factor. They may likely enter into marriage with high level of education, a factor that could contribute to marital instability.

It therefore becomes inevitable to identify those factors that may determine instability in marriage. Based on this background, the study was designed to examine the determinants of marital instability among married women in Southwest, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The study is specifically designed to:

1. determine the prevalence of marital instability among married women in southwest, Nigeria;
2. assess the level of marital instability among married women;
3. explore the determinants of marital instability among married women;
4. examine the impacts of marital instability among married women

Research questions

The following research questions are generated to guide the study:

1. What is the prevalence of marital instability among married women in southwest, Nigeria?
2. What is the level of marital instability among married women?
3. What are the social-cultural determinants of marital instability among married women?
4. What are the impacts of marital instability among married women?

Methods

The descriptive research design of the survey type was used in this study. The design was considered appropriate because it allows information to be obtained from a representative sample of the population in the actual situation as they exist and focuses on the observations and perception of the existing situation on issues. The population consisted of married women in Government Ministries and Departments, public Secondary Schools, and Local Government secretariat offices in Southwest, Nigeria. The married women are those between the age of 21 and 60 years. The States in Southwest region of Nigeria at the time of study were Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo and Ekiti. The samples consisted of 1800 married women from 15 Government Ministries and Departments, 75 public secondary schools and 15 Local Government secretariat

offices in Southwest, Nigeria. The samples were selected through multi stage sampling procedures.

In stage one, three States (Lagos, Osun and Ekiti) were selected from the six States in Southwest, Nigeria through random sampling technique. The second stage involved the selection of five Local Government Areas from each of the three States using simple random sampling technique. In stage three, 1 Ministry/ Department, 5 public Secondary Schools and 1 Local Government secretariat office were selected from each of the 15 Local Government Areas earlier selected through simple random sampling technique. In stage four, 20 married women were selected from Government Ministry/Department; 10 married women were selected from public Secondary Schools; and 50 married women were selected from Local Government Secretariat offices through proportional sampling technique. In all, 300 married women were selected from 15 Government Ministries/Departments; 750 married women were selected from 75 public Schools; and 750 married women were selected from 15 Local Government Secretariat offices. A total of 1800 respondents participated in the study. A self-developed questionnaire tagged “Marital Instability Questionnaire (MIQ)” was used to collect data for the study. The instrument consisted of three sections, the

first section was design to collect bio-data of the respondents, second section focused on items that borders on marital instability while the last borders on items related to the socio-cultural factors as it affect marital instability. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity while the reliability co-efficient of 0.83 was obtained for the instrument through

Cronbach Alpha method. Trained research assistants were responsible for the administration and collection of the instrument from the respondents under the supervision of the researchers. The research questions were answered using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, Bar chart and mean scores.

Results

Research Question 1:

What is the prevalence of marital instability among married women in Southwest, Nigeria?

The results on the prevalence of marital instability are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Marital instability among married women

S/N	ITEMS	Frequently	Sometimes	Never	Mean
1	My partner is unfaithful in the marriage	443 (26.0)	812 (47.7)	448 (26.3)	2.00
2	My partner disagrees with me on any issue	497 (29.2)	786 (46.2)	420 (24.7)	2.05
3	My partner fight me on slighted issue	619 (36.3)	618 (36.3)	466 (27.4)	2.09
4	My partner does not respect my views on sensitive family issues	624 (36.6)	677 (39.8)	402 (23.6)	2 . 1 3
5	My partner does not communicate with me	497 (29.2)	837 (49.1)	369 (21.7)	2 . 0 8
6	My partner does not satisfy me sexually	684 (40.2)	616 (36.2)	403 (23.7)	2 . 1 7
7	My parents interfere with the affairs of my family	525 (30.8)	802 (47.1)	376 (22.1)	2 . 0 9
8	My partner does not show respect to my parents	762 (44.7)	230 (13.5)	711 (41.7)	2 . 0 3
9	I have no access to my partner's belonging	726 (42.6)	180 (10.6)	797 (46.8)	1 . 9 6
10	My partner does not pay attention for our children welfare	684 (40.2)	573 (33.6)	446 (26.2)	2 . 1 4
11	M y p a r t n e r s m o k e s	432 (25.4)	513 (30.1)	758 (44.5)	1 . 8 1
12	M y p a r t n e r c o n s u m e s a l c o h o l	435 (25.5)	553 (32.5)	715 (42.0)	1 . 8 4
13	My partner spends too much money outside our family	496 (29.1)	350 (20.6)	857 (50.3)	1 . 7 9
14	My partner engages in extra-marital affairs	435 (25.5)	719 (42.2)	549 (32.2)	1 . 9 3
15	My partner does not contribute to financial obligation at home	519 (30.5)	291 (17.1)	893 (52.4)	1 . 7 8
16	My partner does not care for me	551 (32.4)	493 (28.9)	659 (38.7)	1 . 9 4

Mean Cut-off: 2.00 Percentages in Parenthesis

Table 1 showed the prevalence of marital instability among the respondents. Using the criterion mean score of 2.0 as cut-off to determine the affirmative of each statement, the respondents indicated that the most marital instability experienced were frequent fighting ($\bar{x}$ = 2.09), views

not respected ($\bar{x}$ = 2.13),

communication gap ($\bar{x}$ = 2.08), lack of sexual satisfaction ($\bar{x}$ = 2.17), parental interference ($\bar{x}$ = 2.09) and lack of care for the children ($\bar{x}$ = 2.14). The least factors of marital instability experienced by the respondents included lack of home financial support ($\bar{x}$ = 1.78), spending

money outside ($\bar{x} = 1.79$) and partner smoking habit ($\bar{x} = 1.81$).

Research Question 2:

What is the level of marital instability among married women in Southwest, Nigeria?

Marital instability is measured and grouped into low, high and moderate as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Level of marital instability

Levels of marital instability	No of Respondents			Percentage
Low (16.00 – 24.25)	4	2	0	24.7
Moderate (24.26 – 39.34)	9	9	0	58.1
High (39.35 – 48.00)	2	9	3	17.2
T o t a l	15	11	3	100

Table 2 revealed the level of marital instability experienced by the respondents. The mean score and standard deviation of the responses were used to determine the levels as either low, moderate or high. The low level of marital instability was determined by subtracting the standard deviation from the mean score ($31.80 - 7.55 = 24.25$). The moderate level of marital instability was determined by the mean score (31.80) while the high level of marital instability was determined

by adding the mean score and standard deviation ($31.80 + 7.55 = 39.35$). Therefore, low level of marital instability starts from 16.00 to 24.25, the moderate level starts from 24.26 to 39.34 and the high level of marital instability is from 39.35 to 48.00. The findings showed that the level of marital instability among married women in Southwest Nigeria was moderate. Figure i further revealed the level of marital instability at a glance

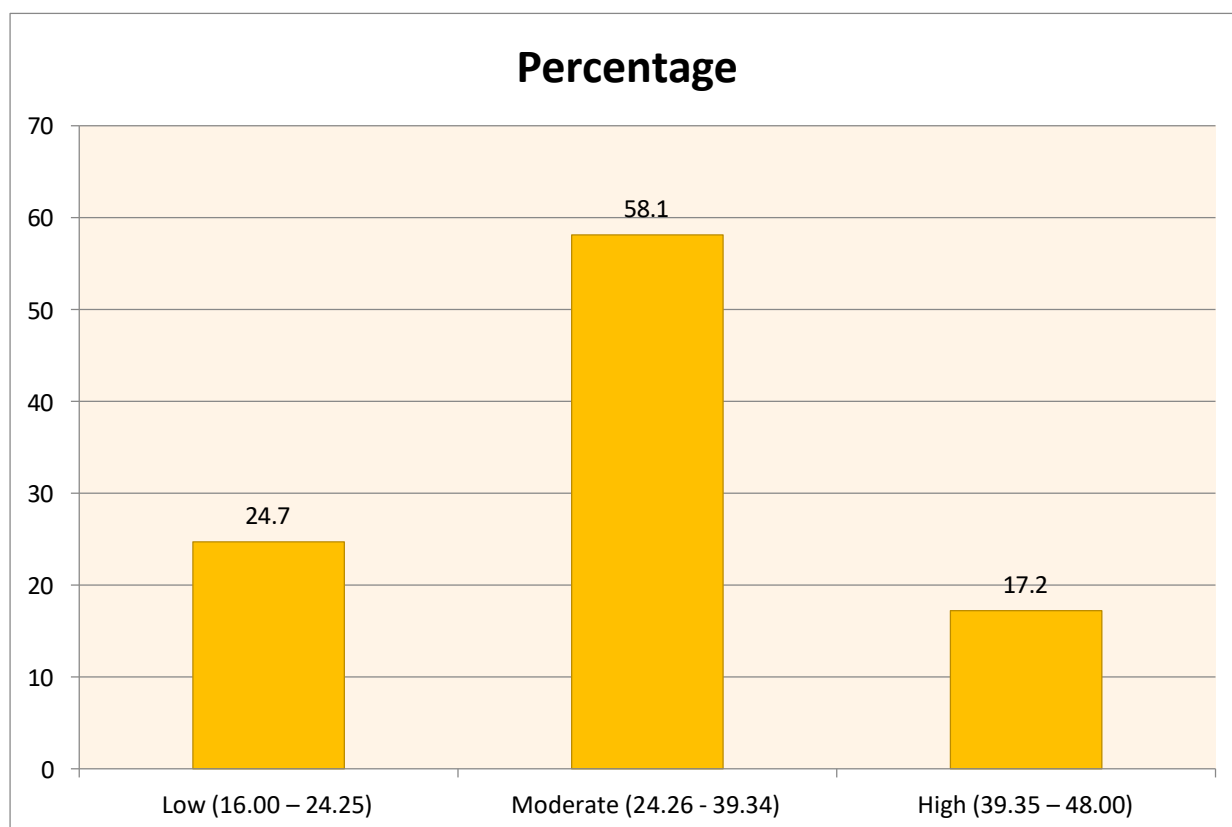


Figure i: Bar Chart Showing Level of marital instability among the respondents

Research Question 3:

What are the socio-cultural determinants of marital instability among married women?
The results of socio-cultural determinants of marital instability are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Socio-cultural determinants marital instability among married women

S/ N	I	T	E	M	S	S	A	A	D	S	D	Mean
1.	In-laws interference in decision making do cause marital instability	134 (7.9)	411 (24.1)	957 (56.2)	201 (11.8)	2.2	8					
2.	Overstaying of in-laws do generate problems in marriage	68 (4.0)	510 (29.9)	886 (52.0)	239 (14.0)	2.2	4					
3.	Educational background of in-laws can influence marital instability	66 (3.9)	274 (16.1)	614 (36.1)	749 (44.0)	1.8	0					
4.	Delay in child bearing do influence problem in marriage	241 (14.2)	834 (49.0)	561 (32.9)	67 (3.9)	2.7	3					
5.	Inability to have a particular child sex can generate problems in marriage	37 (2.2)	610 (35.8)	933 (54.8)	123 (7.2)	2.3	3					
6.	Issues on number of children to have in the family could lead to problems in marriage	226 (13.3)	799 (46.9)	622 (36.5)	56 (3.3)	2.7	0					
7.	Having little or no regard for husband or wife could be as a result of age gap	0 (0.0)	237 (13.9)	1055 (61.9)	411 (24.1)	1.9	0					
8.	Disparity in level of couples education can generate issues	37 (2.2)	610 (35.8)	933 (54.8)	123 (7.2)	2.3	3					
9.	Occupational schedule do affect family	233 (13.7)	734 (43.1)	692 (40.6)	44 (2.6)	2.6	2					
10	Nature of occupation women engages in could dictate marital instability	37 (2.2)	610 (35.8)	933 (54.8)	123 (7.2)	2.5	1					
11	Distance of primary place of assignment could generate problems in marriage	426 (25.01)	599 (35.2)	521 (30.6)	157 (9.2)	2.8	7					
12	Poverty do contribute to marital instability	224 (13.2)	801 (47.0)	610 (35.8)	68 (4.0)	2.7	2					
13	High disparity in the income of couples can generate issues in marriage	64 (3.7)	475 (27.9)	928 (54.5)	236 (13.9)	2.1	9					
14	High demand from the wife's or husband's family can generate problems in marriage	97 (5.8)	424 (24.9)	979 (57.5)	203 (11.9)	2.2	3					

Mean Cut-off: 2.50 Percentages in Parenthesis

Table 3 showed the socio-cultural determinants of marital instability among

the respondents. Using the criterion mean score of 2.50 as cut-off to determine the

affirmative of each statement, the respondents indicated that the major determinants of marital instability are delay in child bearing ($\bar{x}$ 2.73), decision on the number of children ($\bar{x}$ = 2.70), occupational schedule of couples ($\bar{x}$ = 2.62), distance of the primary place of assignment ($\bar{x}$ = 2.87) and poverty ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72). The least factors that could determine marital instability included

educational backgrounds of in-laws ($\bar{x}$ =1.80) and inability to have a particular child sex ($\bar{x}$ =2.33), lack of regard for husband ($\bar{x}$ = 1.90).

Research question 4:

What are the impacts of marital instability among married women?

The results of impacts on marital instability are presented in Table4.

Table 4: Impacts of Marital Instability among Married Women

S / N	I T E M S	S	A A	D	S D	Mean
1.	Infertility could be as result of marital instability	29 (1.7)	133 (7.8)	646 (37.9)	895 (52.6)	1 . 5 9
2.	Maternal mortality and death	96 (5.6)	205 (12.0)	893 (52.4)	509 (29.9)	1 . 9 3
3.	Drug abuse is noticeable among couples with marital challenges	97 (5.7)	99 (5.8)	1033 (60.7)	474 (27.8)	1 . 8 9
4.	Marital instability could lead to exhibition of fear	0 (0.0)	754 (44.3)	688 (40.4)	261 (15.3)	2 . 2 9
5.	Demonstration of anxiety could be as a result of marital instability	0 (0.0)	754 (44.3)	688 (40.4)	261 (15.3)	2 . 2 9
6.	Marital manifestation of hysteria could be a result of marital instability	93 (5.5)	1349 (79.2)	0 (0.0)	261 (15.3)	2 . 7 5
7.	Depression could be as a result of marital problems	114 (6.7)	582 (34.2)	828 (48.6)	179 (10.5)	2 . 3 7
8.	Aggressive and hostility could be as a result of marital instability	26 (1.5)	1029 (60.4)	648 (38.1)	0 (0.0)	2 . 6 3
9.	Marital instability affect the well-being of the children	9 (0.5)	1581 (92.8)	112 (6.6)	1 (0.1)	2 . 9 4
10.	Marital instability could make the children prone to drug abuse	21 (1.2)	1626 (95.5)	35 (2.1)	21 (1.2)	2 . 9 7
11.	Marital instability could lead to chronic diseases and stroke (hypertension)	3 (0.2)	938 (55.1)	759 (44.6)	3 (0.2)	2 . 5 5
12.	Marital instability could lead to extra marital affairs	26 (1.5)	1674 (98.3)	1 (0.1)	2 (0.1)	3 . 0 1

Mean Cut-off: 2.50 Percentages in Parenthesis

Table 4 showed the impacts of marital instability in the marriage affairs of the respondents. Using the criterion mean score of 2.50 as cut-off to determine the affirmative of each statement, the respondents indicated that the major health implications of marital instability are hysteria ($\bar{x} = 2.75$), aggressiveness and hostility ($\bar{x} = 2.63$), affects well-being of children ($\bar{x} = 2.94$), children prone to drug abuse ($\bar{x} = 2.97$), chronic diseases ($\bar{x} = 2.55$) and extra-marital affairs ($\bar{x}=3.01$). The least impacts of marital instability included infertility ($\bar{x} = 1.59$), maternal mortality and death ($\bar{x} = 1.93$) and drug abuse among couples ($\bar{x} = 1.89$).

Discussion

The study having examined the determinants of marital instability among married women in southwest, Nigeria revealed that the most prevalent forms of marital instability experienced by married women included frequent fighting, views not respected, communication gap, lack of sexual satisfaction, parental interference, lack of respect to parents and lack of care for the children. This findings confirmed the

report of Odebode (2019) who found out that sexual incompatibility, in-law interference were part of factors responsible for marital stress in Kwara state, Nigeria. The study revealed that level of marital instability among married women in Southwest, Nigeria was moderate. The probable reason for this could be as a result of socio-cultural factors surrounding marriages. This finding was in line with the earlier study of Agupugo (2008) who found out that factors such as in-law interference, sexual incompatibility, and childlessness constituted family instability among couples. This finding contradicted the report of Asa and Nkan (2017) who found out a low level of marital instability among married women in Akwa Ibom state, Nigeria.

The study revealed that the health implications of marital instability are manifestation of hysteria, aggressiveness and hostility, poor well-being of the children, drug abuse and extra-marital affairs. This finding is in agreement with the study of Evelyn and Yeon (2017) who submitted that marital instability affect children's well-being. Marital instability has health effects on the husband, wives and children. The findings also confirmed the study of Ojukwu (2013) who revealed that indulging in sexual excesses, children outside wedlock, drug abuse and high

blood pressure were the implications of marital instability.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that frequent fighting, communication gap, lack of sexual satisfaction and parental interference were the major prevalence of marital instability. The level of marital instability was low. Delay in child bearing, occupational schedules of couples and poverty were the major determinants of marital instability while the impacts included hysteria, indulging in extramarital affairs and exposure of children to drug abuse. It was recommended that married women should be encouraged to utilize the services of health educators, marriage counselors and office of public defender.

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