

# Religiosity, Gender and Personality Traits as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction among Christian couples

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*In this study, the effects of religiosity, gender and personality traits as predictors of marital satisfaction among married Christian couples were examined. The purpose of the study was to examine whether religiosity, gender and personality traits have a relationship with marital satisfaction among married Christian couples. A total number of 214 married couples, 55 males (25.70%) and 159 females (74.30%) with mean age 39.37 years and standard deviation of 9.6 years participated in the study. Three scales were used for data collection; Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS) developed by Omoluabi (1995), Big five Inventory Developed (BFI) by Oliver (1991) and Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) developed by Hudson (1982). Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and Multiple Regression Analysis were deployed for data management. Results of Multiple Regression analysis reveal that the study model significantly predicted marital satisfaction. ANOVA summary (F-ratio) shows that the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value was significant at F (7, 200) = 44.69, P < .01. Unstandardised better values shows that Religiosity was significant B = .72, P < .05; gender was not significant B = -.08, P < .05; and Personality Traits (Openness to experience) was significant B = .10, P < .05. It was concluded that Religiosity and Personality Traits predicted marital satisfaction. It was recommended that prospective marriage candidates should seek partners that have Openness to Experience trait to enable them enjoy marital satisfaction.*

**Keywords:** Religiosity, personality traits, gender, marital satisfaction

## Introduction

### Background to the study

It is believed that a stable marriage is associated with improved physical, intellectual, mental and emotional health of men, women, and children. Yet, each day both the newly married and older ones are seen in courts of law, struggling with legal battles on dissolution of marriage rephrase. Most often, several meetings are held to explore ways of ensuring that these marriages are preserved. Clergy, pastors and other religious group leaders struggle to no avail in ensuring that couples stick together and ensuring their marital relationship stabilises. In fact, most of the time, couples who were pressured to stick together against their wish may have been exposed to domestic violence. Some of the cases of domestic violence are caused by both genders, and sometimes lead to the death of either the male or

the female partner. Furthermore, cases of depression, poor health and decline in interpersonal relationships could be witnessed among these couples (Ezeme, Robam & Sunday, 2019). Furthermore, negative consequences of the ills of unstable marriages have been repeated among offspring of couples in challenged marriages, who are left with battered psychological challenges (Maroufizadeh, Hosseini, Foroushani, Omani-Samani, 2019). Hence, there is need to explore factors that predict marital satisfaction namely, religiosity, gender and personality traits as predictors of marital satisfaction among Christians.

A plethora of scholars have arrived at various definitions of marital satisfaction. For instance, Sinha and Mukerjee (1990) define marital satisfaction as, 'when the couple feels most satisfied with one another'. Ofovwe, Ofilli, Ojetu

& Okesun (2013) hold that marital satisfaction is an individual's positive assessment of his/her marital relationship. This implies that marital satisfaction is a subjective evaluation by an individual of the degree of happiness, pleasure, or love fulfillment experienced within the marital relationship. It appears that most authors do not agree to a common definition of what marital satisfaction should be. Perhaps, this misconception may seem to be the bedrock why marital satisfaction looks more like a lofty idea than an attainable goal. To this end, one may define marital satisfaction as the sum total of all positive and negative feelings an individual experience in marriage.

Indeed, the rise in the level of divorce within the last couple of years suggests that there has been a decline in the average level of marital satisfaction. (Amato, Booth, Johnson & Rogers, 2007; Amato, Booth, Johnson & Rogers, 2003). According to Bowman (1990), marital satisfaction has significant influence in the general wellbeing in families and was found to have a high correlation with overall life satisfaction. Perhaps, the nexus between marital satisfaction and life satisfaction propels couples in marital struggles to seek divorce in order to get some relief from marital challenges. Scholars have, in efforts to predict marital satisfaction, linked an association between religiosity and marital satisfaction (McDonald, Olson, Lamming, Goddard & Marshall, 2017). It is assumed that couples who practice religion may likely experience enhanced marital satisfaction more than other couples who do not practice it. Studies found that such enhanced marital satisfaction may be as a result of religious service attendance, forgiveness and spousal empathy (McDonald, Olson, Laning, Goddard & Marshall, 2017). Religiosity has been linked to religious commitment, which entails translating of what one believes into practical life situations (Kaman, Pinto & Selvan, 2017). Indeed, as couples affiliate with religion, they are influenced by teachings of such religious groups to the extent that it changes their attitude and behaviour: making the beliefs an intrinsic character of the couple's world view (Kaman *et al.*, 2017). According to Taylor & Croker (1981), religiosity plays a positive role in marital

satisfaction of married couples. In this perspective, couples who expect a satisfying marital relationship, are required to remain faithful and honest to each other (Bradbury, et.al, 2000). Earlier, previous studies indicated that strong a relationship exists between marital satisfaction and religiosity (Mullins, 2016; McDonald, Olson, Laning, Goddard & Marshall, 2017). Similarly, evidence of positive association between religion and genders has been reported (Young, 1987).

Gender has been a concept that has remained fluid over the years. Scholars have been quite unequivocal on the definition as roles men and women play and power relationships between them (Aquilas, 2004; Badola & Hussien, 2003). Social roles are roles prescribed by some cultures, especially in the African context. The African gender perspective stipulates that men and women have duties to perform in their respective localities. Perhaps, the assumption that gender is locality specific continues to brew the dynamics in understanding of gender as a social concept. According to UNESCO, gender is defined as roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in families, societies, and culture, which includes expectations held about the characteristics, aptitude and likely behaviours of both men and women (feminism and masculinity). Studies show a statistical significant difference in marital satisfaction, with wives being slightly less satisfied in marriage (Miller, Olea, Henry, 2018). According to Fowler (1991), gender is a product of socialisation. Therefore, gender is a language of the society which refers to duties and activities one does within his society (Butler, 1993). Studies reported significant gender differences in Neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness (South, Jarnecke & Vize, 2018). Gender has been associated positively with personality traits in previous studies (Tamban & Maningas, 2019).

Scholars define personality as a consistent set of characteristics that people display over time and across situations that distinguish individuals from each other (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2003). Earlier theorists held different views as to whether personality traits are stable. Accordingly, Buss and Crawle (1984) argue that personality traits were simply labels for

collections of behaviours, while Kenrick and Strongfield (1980), argue that everyone is consistent in some traits, but the particular trait in which people differ vary across individuals. Empirical evidence hold that personality trait has a significantly positive association with marital satisfaction (Claxton, O' Rourke, Smith & Delongis, 2012). Despite that, other scholars still argue that personality traits do not predict marital quality (positive component of marital satisfaction) of couples (Cirhinlioglu, Tepe & Cirhinlioglu, 2017).

Finally, as observed earlier, scholars have independently reported that religiosity may be a positive construct that has demonstrated significant positive association with marital satisfaction. However, gender was found to be inconsistent in predicting marital satisfaction and personality trait was established to have a direct link with marital satisfaction. Yet, these findings have not been proven among participants of the present study. Earlier works focused on couples, which is consistent with the present investigation, but differs with locality (Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State). An attempt was made in this study to throw more light that will lead to greater insight in the understanding of marital satisfaction and add to an existing body of knowledge.

#### ***Relationship between religious affiliation and marital satisfaction***

Fard Shahabi & Zardkhaneh (2013) reported a study on religiosity and marital satisfaction. Participants for the study were 156 married students. Statistics used was Pearson product moment correlation coefficient. Results show significant positive relationship between religious attitude and marital satisfaction. The present study has some similarities in the aspect of focus on religiosity and marital satisfaction and in the statistical tool (Pearson product movement correlation coefficient) which was also applied. However, there appears to be variation in aspect of locality. Ahmadi, Azad-Marzabadi & Ashrati (2008) reported a study on the influence of religiosity on marital satisfaction. Participants were 660 heterosexual couples from Tehram. Results show that Heterosexual couples who observe religious beliefs have a higher rate of marital satisfaction. There was significant

correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction. The work of Ahmadi et. al. (2008) seems similar to the work of Fard *et al.* (2013) in the aspect of participant's locality. Similarly, both Fard *et al.* (2013) and Ahmed *et al.* (2008) administered similar statistical tool and the results were consistent. Yet there appears to be difference with both works in relation with the present study. These differences were in the areas of statistical tools and choice of participants.

Jafari, Samani, Fatemi, Taavoni and Abolgharemi (2015) reported a study on marital satisfaction and adherence to religion (a positive component of religiosity). Three hundred and eighty-two couples in Tehram served as participants for the study. Average age for the females was 34 years and 38 years for males. Results show main direct relation between religiosity and marital satisfaction for women at  $r = .27$  and men at  $r = .20$ . The result of Jafari *et al.* (2015) was consistent with earlier works of Fard *et al.* (2008) and Ahmed *et al.* (2008). There appears to be similarity in choice of statistical tools in both studies, as regards variations in participants and location of the works. However, in relation with the present study, it was found that variations were noted in choice of statistical tools and participants' locality.

In a related study, Mullins (2016) reported a study on the effect of religion (a component of religiosity) on enduring marriages. The study includes qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with 43 married Christian couples. Results reveal that couples reported four predominant social contexts that gave sacred meanings to their marriage. Prayer and worship services, sermons, fasting, rituals and communion. The work of Mullin (2016) was different with the works of Fard *et al.* (2008), Ahmed *et al.* (2013) and Jafari *et al.* (2015) in the area of qualitative analysis. However, it appears similar with the present investigation in the area of choice of Christian participants. Also, Mullin (2016) differed in the choice of statistical tool.

Kamanu, Pinto and Selvan (2017) reported a study on association between Christian religious commitment (a positive component of religiosity) and marital satisfaction. A mixed method study among married individuals in Nairobi City County was adopted. A sample of 234 married Christians participated in the study. All participants were

drawn from Holy Family Metropolitan Church within Nairobi country. Qualitative results indicated that Christian commitment largely contributed to marital satisfaction, while the quantitative outcome recorded a positive correlation of  $r = .21$ , while regression analysis indicated a strong linear relationship where  $R^2 = 72$ . Kamanu *et al.* (2017) appears to take a similar approach with works of Mullin (2016) in the aspect of choice of participants (Christian Couples), and adoption of a qualitative approach, although the focus of both works varied. Also, Kamanu *et al.* (2017) is consistent in the adoption of qualitative analysis (Pearson product moment correlation coefficient) with earlier works of Fard *et al.* (2013), Ahmed *et al.* (2008) and Jafari (2015). However, Kamanu *et al.*'s (2017) work is consistent with the present study in the choice of statistical analysis and religious affiliation.

In another study, McDonald, Olson, Lanning, Goddard and Marshall (2017) reported a study on effects of religiosity, forgiveness, and spousal empathy on marital adjustment. Eight hundred and twenty-nine married couples participated in a cross sectional self-report telephone survey. Results indicated that religious service attendance and spousal empathy have direct positive effects on marital adjustment in European American married women. Among African American participants, only spousal empathy had direct effect on marital adjustment for both men and women. Finally, spousal empathy moderated the association between previous marriage and current marital adjustment among European American married women. McDonald *et al.* (2017) appears similar with earlier studies such as (Mullin, 2016; Kamanu *et al.*, 2017) which adopted qualitative approach but differed in the choice of approach (telephone survey). Furthermore, McDonald *et al.* (2017) is similar with the focus of interest of the present examination on gender, adoption of qualitative approach and statistical analysis.

### ***Relationship between gender and marital satisfaction***

Vivian (2017) reported a study in meta-analytic review of Gender – role dimensions and relationship satisfaction (a component of marital satisfaction). Multilevel meta-analytic techniques were used to examine the overall relationship

between self-reported gender-role dimensions (psychological femininity and psychological masculinity) and self-reported relationship satisfaction. Twenty-six studies (43 effect sizes) were included in the femininity-relationship satisfaction meta-analysis and 26 studies (43 effect sizes) were included in the masculinity relationship satisfaction. Meta-analysis results showed that femininity revealed stronger association with relationship satisfaction than masculinity. Gender was not a moderator in either meta-analysis. The findings of Vivian (2017) appears to be different from the present examination in the adoption of statistical tools, while the present investigation administered Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and Multiple regression analysis, Vivian (2017) employed multivariate analysis. Also, the area of variation was evident in participant characteristics, for example among Christian married couples.

Terry and Scott (2007) reported a study in Gender differences as correlates of marital satisfaction. Participants for the study were 51 couples. Results show that among traditional couples, discrepancy between preferred and actual roles, and appraisal of partner's performance of sex typed roles were more highly related to females, than to male's marital satisfaction, while job satisfaction was a significant correlate of marital satisfaction among males but not among females. There was no gender difference observed in dual-career couples. Self-esteem was related to marital satisfaction among males and females in both sub samples. Terry & Scott's (2007) work appears to be similar with Vivian (2017) investigation in the area of gender on marital satisfaction among married couples. However, both works differ in area of scope. Vivian (2017) for instance, focused on meta-analytic approach and employed Multi level meta-analytic techniques while Terry & Scope (2007) deployed Pearson moment correlation coefficient. Both works share similarities in the positive association between gender and marital satisfaction, feminism scoring higher than masculinity. Both works are similar to this study in the aspect of gender.

Jackson, Miller, Oka & Henry (2014) reported a study on gender difference in marital satisfaction: A Meta-analysis. Participants for the study were

226 independent samples while a combined sum of 101,110 served as samples. Results indicated statistically significant yet very small gender difference in marital satisfaction between wives and husbands, with wives slightly less satisfied than their husbands; moderator analysis indicated that these differences were due to inclusion of clinical samples, with wives in marital therapy. The effect size for non-clinical community-based samples indicated no significant gender differences among couples in the general population. There was also no gender difference when levels of marital satisfaction of husbands and wives in the same relationship were compared. The study conducted by Jackson *et al.* (2014) was not consistent with the works of Vivian (2017) and Terry and Scott (2007) in the area of no gender difference. Though Jackson *et al.*'s (2014) work was consistent with the present investigation on relationship between gender and marital satisfaction.

Maryam & Mahmood (2014) reported a study in gender differences on marital satisfaction and social relations among diabetic patients. Participants for the study were 200 diabetics (100 males and 100 females). Results show that there was significant difference in the basis of gender in marital satisfaction. Male diabetic patients showed more marital satisfaction as compared to the female diabetic patients. The result of Maryam & Mahmood (2014) was inconsistent with earlier studies on the aspect of male married couples reporting higher levels of marital satisfaction than female (Vivian, 2017; Terry & Scott, 2007; Jackson *et al.*, 2014). However, the reason for such inconsistencies may have been in the choice of participants. The participants in Maryam & Mahmood's (2014) study were basically diabetics males and females, hence the result of higher marital satisfaction reported by males. In contrast, earlier studies deployed healthy married couples in their respective studies. However, the consistent aspect of the work with present study is on gender and marital satisfaction. Furthermore, the areas of difference with the present work are choice of participants (Christian couples) and statistical analysis.

#### ***Personality traits and marital satisfaction***

Claxton, A. O., Rourke, N., Smith, J. & Delongis, A. (2012) reported a study on personality traits and

marital satisfaction within enduring relationship: An intra-couple discrepancy approach. Participants for the study were 125 heterosexual couples. Results show that each of the Big Five personality traits that emerged has significant association with marital satisfaction. Claxton *et al.* (2012) appears to have close similarity with the present study in the application of the Big Five Personality Inventory.

Kamal and Hasan (2018) reported a study on personality variables and marital satisfaction. Research studies, from the relevant research literature on the relationship between personality variables and marital satisfaction were explored. Result showed that neuroticism, agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, openness to experience, impulsivity, immature, defence mechanism, communication, attachment, emotional stability, and spousal support were most frequently predictors of marital satisfaction. Kamal & Hasan's (2018) work is similar with the present investigation on personality traits and marital satisfaction but differs with respect to participants' characteristics. However, the study differs from the present investigation and that of Claxton *et al.* (2012) in the aspect of number of personality traits under examination. Again similarity exists in the aspect of result of both works, which stated that personality traits revealed positive association with marital satisfaction.

Gerlach, Driebe and Reinhard (2018) reported a study on personality and relationship satisfaction (a component of marital satisfaction). Result revealed that high level of conscientiousness predicts higher relationship satisfaction. This finding is consistent with earlier studies on the aspect of positive association between personality traits and marital satisfaction (Claxton *et al.*, 2012; Kamal & Hasan, 2018; Claxton *et al.*, 2012). However, Gerlach *et al.* (2018) differs specifically from other studies that found positive association with components of the Big Five Personality Inventory on marital satisfaction (Kamal & Hasan, 2018).

Draham and Yusof (2018) reported a study on the relationship between personality traits and marital satisfaction on quality of marriage (a component of marital satisfaction) among married couples in Schangor. Participants for the study were 110 people in urban, sub urban and rural areas in Selangor. Result showed that married people in

the urban areas had highest level of openness to experience ( $M = 33.38$ ) while married couples in rural areas had the highest level of consensus in marital satisfaction ( $M = 53.00$ ). Married couples in the urban area had the highest score from quality of marriage on conflict management level ( $M = 1972$ ). Finally, findings indicated there was significant relationship between personality types and marital satisfaction among married people in the three localities. Furthermore, result reveal that openness to experience relates positively with marital satisfaction. In as much as Draham & Yusof's (2018) work has closeness with other studies (Claxton *et al.*, 2012; Kamal & Hasan, 2018; Claxton *et al.*, 2012), it has inconsistency with other studies in the aspect of specific personality trait conscientiousness (Gerlach *et al.*, 2018).

### ***Dynamic goal theory***

The dynamic goal theory argues that people have multiple goals to achieve in their marriage (Li & Fing, 2011). Their marital goal can be classified into three categories: Personal growth goals, Companionship goals and Instrumental goals. The priority of the three types of marital goals is the dynamic goal which holds that there are changes across adulthood. Generally, young couples emphasise the personal growth goals, middle-aged couples prioritise the instrumental goals, and old couples are drawn to the companionship goals. Therefore, the achievement of prioritised marital goals may determine marital satisfaction.

### **Theoretical framework**

Marital goals refer to the goals individuals have before setting out to marry. Marital goal is a core element of the dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction. The dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction was developed by Li & Fing (2011). The dynamic goal theory posits that whether marital goals, especially the prioritised ones are achieved in the marriage is the most essential determinant of marital satisfaction. Furthermore, the four key assumptions of dynamic goal theory are: people have multiple goals that they want to achieve in their marriage, the priority of different marital goals changes dynamically across adulthood, whether the prioritised marital goals

in a certain developmental stage are met in the marriage determines marital satisfaction; and other factors can also affect marital satisfaction by either the priority of different marital goals or by facilitating the achievement of the prioritised marital goals.

### **Hypotheses**

- i. Religiosity will significantly and positively predict marital satisfaction among married couples.
- ii. Gender will significantly and positively predict marital satisfaction among married couples.
- iii. Personality traits will significantly and positively predict marital satisfaction among married couples.

### **Method**

#### ***Participants***

Two hundred and fourteen (214) heterosexual married couples who volunteered from a randomly selected church participated in the study. The participants for the study were randomly selected from Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Awka-South using simple random sampling (deep stick). This randomly selected church was drawn from 28 Parishes in Awka-South Local government area of Anambra State. Participants' mean age was 39.9 years and standard deviation was 9.62 years. Participants comprised of 55(25.70%) males and 159(74.30%) females.

#### **Instruments**

Three scales were used for data collection: Religious Affiliation Scale (RAS), Big Five Inventory (BFI), and Index of marital satisfaction (IMS). Religious Affiliation scale was developed by Omoluabi (1995). Religious Affiliation Scale measures levels of an individual's commitment to religious activities. The religious affiliation scale is a 21-item scale and response options are True or False only. The psychometric properties of the RAS were provided by Omoluabi (1995) and Okunola (1995). Omoluabi (1995) reported a test retest reliability coefficient of .97, while Erinoso (1996) reported validity coefficient of .26. Religious Affiliation Scale showed positive association with index of self-esteem (ISE). The

reliability of the Religious Affiliation Scale for the present sample was .87 alpha co-efficient. Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) was developed by Hudson (1982). Index of marital satisfaction measures the degree to which one is satisfied with one's present marriage. Index showed positive association with Life Satisfaction Scale by Diener, Suh, Smith & Shao (1995). The IMS is a 25-item scale, with a 5-point response category (1- rarely or none of the time to 5- most of or all of the time). Items: 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 7 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 24 and 25 were reversed while other items were normally scored. The psychometric properties of the IMS was provided by Hudson (1982) and Anene (1994). The reliability coefficient of .96 and concurrent validity of .48 were provided respectively. The reliability of the index of Marital Satisfaction Inventory for the present sample was established at .90 alpha coefficient. The Big Five Inventory (BFI) was developed by John, Donahue & Kentle (1991). The Big Five Inventory measures and defines human personality and accounts for individual differences. The BFI response category ranges from 1- strongly disagree to 7- strongly agree. The Big Five Inventory consists of 44 items and five-sub scales. Items 2, 6, 8, 9, 12, 18, 21, 23, 24, 27, 31, 34, 35, 37, 41 and 43 were reversed and scored, while other items were normally scored. Sub scales of the big five inventory are: Extraversion: 1, 6, 11, 16, 21, 26, 31, 36; Agreeableness:

2, 7, 12, 17, 22, 27, 32, 37, 42; Conscientiousness: 3, 8, 13, 18, 23, 28, 33, 38, 43; Neuroticism: 4, 9, 14, 19, 24, 29, 34, 39; and Openness: 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 41, 44. John and Srivastava (1999) reported the inter-judge reliability coefficient alpha of .94. alpha coefficient.

### **Procedure**

The researchers consulted with the management of the church and made their intention known to them. The parish priest gave approval to the researchers and the heterosexual married couples in the church were issued copies of the questionnaire items. Thereafter, the researchers met with the couples within the church premises after Sunday service and those who volunteered were issued copies of the questionnaires. Distribution and collection of the questionnaires

were done within thirty minutes as researchers were up to four in number. In the end, the researchers thanked the parish priest and assured him that the study was for academic purposes. Out of a total of 260 copies of the questionnaires distributed 230 were returned and 214 were properly filled. Therefore 214 copies of the questionnaires were used for data analysis.

### **Statistics**

Correction Predictive Design was adopted in this study. Statistics appropriate for the study was Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient and multiple regression analysis (enter method). Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 was deployed for data analysis.

**Result**

**Table 1: Correlation between religious affiliation, gender and personality traits on marital satisfaction**

	1	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1 Gender	1								
2 Marital satisfaction	-.20 <sup>xx</sup>	1							
3 Religiosity	.13 <sup>*</sup>	.76 <sup>**</sup>	1						
4 Openness	-.17 <sup>*</sup>	.27 <sup>**</sup>	-.24 <sup>*</sup>	1					
5 Conscientiousness	.01	.03	.03	.33 <sup>**</sup>	1				
6 Extraversion	-.19 <sup>**</sup>	-.25 <sup>**</sup>	.46 <sup>**</sup>	.25 <sup>**</sup>	.29 <sup>**</sup>	1			
7 Agreeableness	.02	-.19 <sup>**</sup>	.18 <sup>**</sup>	.25 <sup>**</sup>	.57 <sup>**</sup>	.24 <sup>*</sup>	1		
8 Neuroticism	.03	-.18 <sup>*</sup>	.17 <sup>*</sup>	.17 <sup>**</sup>	.57 <sup>**</sup>	.18 <sup>**</sup>	.99 <sup>**</sup>	1	

**Table 2: Standardised coefficients results of religious affiliation, gender and personality traits on marital satisfaction**

Predictor	Variables	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Df1 (df2)	F	B	Std error
Model	1 (MS)	.59	7(206)	44.69		
A.	Gender				.08	.80
B.	Religiosity				.72 <sup>**</sup>	.05
C.	Openness to experience				.10 <sup>*</sup>	.06
D.	Conscientiousness				.07	.06
E.	Extraversion		∞		.07	.07
F.	Agreeableness				-.40	.40
G.	Neuroticism				.27	.42

\*\* P<.01\*\*, P<.05\*, Adjusted R<sup>2</sup>, Marital Satisfaction

Table 1 above showed zero order correlation of coefficients of the studies variables. There was significant positive correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction at  $r = .76^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ . There was significant negative correlation between gender and marital satisfaction at  $r = -.20^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ . openness to experience correlated significantly with marital satisfaction at  $r = .27^{**}$ ,  $P < .01$ , conscientiousness correlated positively but not significantly with marital satisfaction at  $r = -.19$ ,  $P < .05$  while neuroticism also correlated significantly and negatively with marital satisfaction at  $r = -.18^*$ ,  $P < .05$ .

The model was analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis (Enter Method). Thereafter, the following outcomes were obtained. Table 2 showed that when Enter Method was applied to marital satisfaction for the three independent variables (gender, religiosity and domains of personality traits) the adjusted  $R^2$  was equal to .59. This means that the multiple models contributed 59% in understanding marital satisfaction. The ANOVA summary ( $F$  ratio shows that the adjusted

$R^2$  value was significant at  $F(7,206) = 44.69$ ,  $P < .01$ . Specifically, the unstandardised beta values for each of the predictor factors were for religiosity  $B = .72$ ,  $P < .01$ , openness  $B = .10$ ,  $P < .05$ , conscientiousness  $B = .07$ ,  $P < .05$ , extraversion  $B = .07$ ,  $P < .05$ , Agreeableness  $B = -.40$ ,  $P < .05$ , and neuroticism  $B = .27$ . Results show that religiosity and openness to experience were significant predictors of marital satisfactory among Christian married couples.

**Discussion and conclusion**

In the study, religiosity, gender and personality traits as predictors of marital satisfaction among heterosexual marriage couples in Awka Anambra state were examined. Hypothesis one which states that religiosity will positively and significantly predict marital satisfaction was confirmed. The finding is consistent with earlier studies in the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. For instance, Ahmadu, Azad-Marzabadi & Ashraffi (2008) reported that heterosexual couples who observe religious beliefs



have higher rate of marital satisfaction. Perhaps, the finding may be anchored in the fact that the couple may decide to observe some common laws and ordinances as prescribed by the religious group they believe in. Hence, mutual acceptance and decision to live by the rules could help the couples cope effectively with marital stress. Religiosity, however enables couple assign human weakness and peculiarities to a supreme being. This perception and cognitive rewiring of existence does make it to an extent difficult to hold parties responsible for actions. Again, it becomes impossible to relate actions of couples to personality characteristics because every misdemeanour is usually attributed to the devil. Furthermore, a common theory in this line of thought is that “God understands”, and “humans should not judge”. Hence, religious married couples may always explore non direct approach to marital stresses as a result of rules established by religious group where they observe their ordinances. Consistent with earlier studies, Mullins (2006) observed that the social/religious contexts that give satisfactory marriage among sampled participants were prayer, worships, services and sermons. In such perspective, religiosity may appear as a form of coping strategy in pursuit of marital satisfaction. Furthermore, there appears to be a controversy on religiosity between women and men on marital satisfaction. According to Jafro *et al.* (2015) women have a statistically higher level of marital satisfaction than men. Higher level of marital satisfaction reported by women could be as a result of the assumptions that women are more emotional than men. Therefore, most women seem to believe more without facts than men. In the practice of religion, the women appear to go to the extreme in carrying out religious ordinances thereby assuming without actual fact of the existence of marital satisfaction. Accordingly, women believe that even if the males are not empathic, caring and helpful, that someday the Supreme Being will intervene and bring change. This perception continues to serve as a motivator for as long as it could last. At this point, such women may report being satisfied with marriage by faith. Regrettably, such report come as a reflection of expected state which is futuristic and may not be tapped by self-report instruments. To an extent, women who expect to achieve result of belief in emergence of a satisfied marriage, and were not

able to achieve it sooner than it is realised may report elements of poor physical and psychological health. Other scholars reported that Christian commitment contributes to marital satisfaction (Kamanu *et al.*, 2017) and religious service attendance have direct positive effects on marital satisfaction (McDonald *et al.*, 2017). Likewise, a comparative study revealed that the marital satisfaction group had significantly higher mean age and longer length of marriage than the marital dissatisfaction group (Naz *et al.*, 2017).

The empirical findings in hypothesis one may find theoretical explanation in the dynamic goal theory of marital satisfaction. According to the Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction individuals enter the marriage union with some kinds of expectation in mind. Therefore, if the couple perceive that their respective expectations are met they report satisfaction in marriage. Indeed, couples who score high on religiosity and consider religion as one of the expected goals in marriage may report satisfactory marriage relations. This assumption is advanced on the basis that when couples at any stage of their life perceive that their respective expectations before marriage would be met by adopting to live by the ordinances and precepts of religious group, they are more likely to report satisfactory marriage. Therefore, such couples may show interest in detects of the religious organisation which is assumed to enable them achieve their expectation at a particular stage of the individual life. On the contrary, if a couple perceives that religiosity has nothing to do with possibility of achieving an expectation in life, they may not continue with religious practices and ordinances and this may resort in report of marital dissatisfaction.

Hypothesis two was not confirmed in the present study. The finding is consistent with some earlier scholars’ report and at variance with others. For instance, in a meta-analysis report by Vivian (2017), the overall results showed a significant difference in gender of couples on marital satisfaction. Thus, females were found to report higher level of marital satisfaction than males. The meta-analytic report may further suggest that the sample may have been drawn from western culture. However, Terry and Scott (2007) earlier reported areas where males and females vary in gender difference on marital satisfaction. For instance, it was noted that females report higher levels of

marital satisfaction on the discrepancy between preferred and actual roles and appraisal of partner's performance of sex type roles. However, males report higher levels of marital satisfaction when job satisfaction is under consideration.

Meanwhile, Jackson *et al.* (2014) reported gender difference in marital satisfaction between husband and wives, with wives slightly less satisfied than their husbands. It seems that the result must have been as a result adoption of clinical samples of wives undergoing marital therapy as research participants. Thus, report of less marital satisfaction could have been as a result of their psychological state and not a reflection of an overall assessment of marital relationship. However, among couples in the same relationship no gender difference was found on marital satisfaction. Also, Maryam and Mahmood (2014) revealed that husbands who were diabetics were reported higher levels of marital satisfaction than their wives. The findings may be as a result of state of health of the men which may have varied if they were healthy. In relation to the present investigation, scholars who reported significant association between gender and marital satisfaction may have sampled, therapeutic or diabetic couples.

These findings may be explained in the framework of dynamic goal theory of material satisfaction. Accordingly, males and females approach marital union with some sets of goals to be fulfilled at a particular stage in their lives. Therefore, if these sets of goals are gender related and both parties are determined to actualise them, the males and females may report marital satisfaction. However, if the gender roles are properly met, for instance if a situation arises that the woman perceives that the husband is incapable or has refused to meet up with his roles as the head of the family, she may report lower level of marital satisfaction. On the other side of the husband perceives that the wife is incapable of discharging her duties effectively well, he may feel dissatisfied with the marriage.

Finally, the result of hypothesis three was confirmed. Personality (Openness to experience) of the sampled participants did predict marital satisfaction of couples. This finding was not consistent with earlier studies by scholars. For instant, Claxton *et al.* (2012) may have found that the Big Five factors associated positively with

marital satisfaction but only conscientiousness proved significant association. Similarly, Kamal and Hasan (2018) reported that personality factors predicted marital satisfaction, just like Claxton *et al.* (2012). The variation between kamal and Hasan's (2018) findings and the present work may have risen from participant choice. Accordingly, in the present study, openness to experience, and conscientiousness associated positively with marital satisfaction but only openness to experience predicted marital satisfaction at a significant level. Similarly, Draham and Yusof (2018) also reported personality traits related significantly with marital satisfaction. In the present study, it appears that couples reported high level of open to experience, since it was a necessary part of their religious belief. Also, being open to experience enhances trust, acceptance and hope which reduces ambiguity and increases the possibility of the Supreme Being to give answers to marital problem thereby achieving marital satisfaction. Perhaps, openness provides emotional security and trust that is necessary to lasting marital satisfaction among couples. It is no surprise that such couples report satisfaction associated with this trait.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, it was concluded that religiosity predicted marital satisfaction among married couples. Gender was not a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Personality traits were significant only on the openness to experience domain. The study was concluded with the assertion that married couples who are religious and are very open to experience may report higher levels of marital satisfaction if their respective goals in marriage are met at different stages.

### **Recommendations**

1. It was recommended that religious leaders should encourage couples to adhere to religious ordinances in order to achieve their respective goals in marriage.
2. Intending couples are recommended to seek partners who are open to experience in order to achieve a satisfactory marriage.

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