



Research Paper

The Influence of Religiosity on Marital Satisfaction and Stability Among Christians in Kenya.

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ABSTRACT: Various studies indicate that religious couples are more likely to enjoy stable and happy marriages. They are also less likely to experience conflict and violence, or to divorce perhaps because religion offers couples theologically grounded guidelines on how to handle marital conflicts when they arise. The present qualitative study was conducted using face to face interviews with nine participants in Kenya who had been identified as practicing Christians. The aim of the study was to explore how religiosity impacted the participant's marital satisfaction. Results indicated that specific attributes related to religiosity like individual and partner prayer, reading the Bible, church attendance, impacted participants and their spouses lives positively and in turn their experiences in marriage. Engaging in religious practices was reported by the participants as eliciting qualities like perseverance, forgiveness and humility which in turn assisted them in keeping their marriages stable and thus resulting in marital satisfaction.

Keywords: Christians, Kenya, Marital satisfaction, Marital Stability, Religiosity

I. INTRODUCTION

The divorce rate among church-going Christians remains a contested topic due to lack of adequate scientific studies to investigate the accuracy of the numbers. Feldhann and Whitehead (2014[1]) suggest the divorce rate among Americans Christians to be at between 15-20%. While these suggestions indicate that the church has not been spared by divorce, these statistics within the church appear lower than the 50% in the secular domain in the United States of America (Copen, Daniels, Vesper & Mosher, 2012[2]; Amato, 2010[3]; Cherlin, 2010[4]) and 42% in England (Office for National Statistics, 2013[5]). This would imply that Christians have more marital satisfaction (Barna Group, 2008)[6]. Religiosity is defined as representing the adherence to the practices and beliefs of an organized church or religious institution (Shafranske & Maloney, 1990[7]), having or showing belief in, and reverence for, a God or deity (Merriam – Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993[8]). Religiosity has been measured using several dimensions with the most common being Glock and Stark (1965[9]) five universal dimensions namely, public practice, private practice, religious experience, ideology and intellectual dimensions.

Many studies have been done on the association between religiosity and relationship satisfaction, with findings being highly inconsistent. Fincham et al. (2008[10]) found a positive correlation between religiosity and relationship satisfaction. They found that young couples who regularly engaged in religious prayer reported high levels of happiness and satisfaction in their relationship. Prayer contributed to their love, respect and commitment. Other studies show that religious couples are more likely to enjoy stable and happy marriages, less likely to experience conflict and violence, or to divorce (Bahr & Chadwick, 1985[11]; Ellison et al., 1999[12], 2002[13]; Kunz & Albrecht, 1997[14]; Curtis et al., 2002[15]). Sullivan (2001[16]) found that while religiosity was not related to marital satisfaction, it predicted more conservative attitudes toward divorce, increased commitment and increased likelihood of seeking help during marital distress. These findings support prior research that found that marital satisfaction was merely correlated with church attendance and religious influence in everyday life, and not religiosity itself (Booth et al., 1995[17]; Oranthinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2006[18]; Sussman & Alexander, 1999[19]; Wallin, 1957[20]; Zehrung, 1988[21]). Glenwright and Fowler (2013[22]) found that there was no significant difference between atheists and religious individuals, and that the religious were reported to be slightly less satisfied in their relationships although not significantly. Thus these conflicting studies indicate that it is still unclear whether a true relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction exists.

This current study investigates the influence of religiosity on marital satisfaction and stability among Christians in Kenya.

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

The present study is a qualitative study with a sample which comprised of 9 respondents identified as practicing “Protestant Christians” due to their self-report on their commitment to regular church attendance, participation of other Christian rituals like “fasting”, “tithing” and “daily prayer”. In Protestant circles, individuals with this nature of practice are referred to as “Born again” Christians. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants from a Christian organization and 3 different churches. They were from varied Christian denominations including Baptist, AIC, Deliverance and Pentecostal. Four of the participants were male, and five were female.

The participants were aged between 40 and 50 years and had been married for between 9 and 25 years and were living with their spouse. They each gave informed consent to participate in the study.

The characteristics of the sample are represented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Characteristics of the sample

Respondent	Gender	Age	Denomination	Period Born again (Years)	Duration of marriage (Years)
1	Male	47	Pentecostal	27	17
2	Female	41	Pentecostal	30	17
3	Female	48	Deliverance	39	24
4	Male	44	Baptist	29	11
5	Female	42	Pentecostal	17	16
6	Male	48	Pentecostal	26	9
7	Male	41	African Inland Church	24	12
8	Female	47	African Inland Church	22	21
9	Female	50	Pentecostal	35	25

2.2 Instrument

An interview schedule with semi structured questions was used to interview the participants. The interviews were also recorded using an audio recorder. The interview schedule was developed by the researcher and comprised of 5 questions which required the participant to state the following;

1. The denomination they belonged to.
2. How important their faith was to them.
3. How long they had been born again.
4. How they lived out their faith in daily life.
5. How they perceived that their faith had impacted their marriages and spouses.

2.3 Data Analysis

The interviews were recorded using a recorder and then the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to written text. The researcher then thematically analyzed the content to identify the main themes that defined the respondent’s marital experiences and the implications for their marital satisfaction.

III. FINDINGS

The analysis led to six key themes that emerged as follows:

3.1 Theme 1: Prevention of problems in the relationship.

This was captured by respondents reporting that shared values like belief in one God and a Prayerful life helped in preventing problems in their life as the Relational Virtues inspired by their religiosity like Love, Peace and Patience were conducive for their marriage.

“My marriage would never have survived, I run to my faith....” (R 8)

“It keeps me calm, patient... reading the word helps me a lot” “Anger is dealt with through prayer”. “I enhance my marriage through Christian books, prayer and reading the word of God” (R6).

“I believe that marriage is created by God for men and women and there are certain principles one must live by in order to succeed” (R5).

“At least when you’re married and you encounter a problem as a mature Christian, there is where you go for support...other Christians, in prayer, faith... I have faith that God keeps my marriage together so it avoids a lot of issues”. “...so I believe through that we are blessed...so we have never had issues in our marriage...” (R4)

“The beatitudes remind me to be patient, have love and perseverance so when am tempted to be angry, I remind myself to love” (R2)

3.2 Theme 2: Resolve Conflicts

This emerged where respondents said that their religiosity helped them forgive and have humility, and when they obeyed Bible Scripture guidance in handling conflict, all was resolved easily.

“I run to my faith rather than throwing a tantrum or breaking away during tough times. It gives me perseverance and the ability to know there is a solution to a problem” (R 8).

“We serve in church together in the same department so there is no conflict” (R6).

“Marriage is ordained by God, decide in advance it will work, do not have a perception that it will not work, I learn from the marriages that I know work, I enhance my marriage through Christian books, prayer and reading the word of God (R6).

“I believe that relationship with God impacts marriage; despite the challenges, if one finds the one God ordained, God will make a way”. “My faith makes me a better person with a better outlook...more patience and perseverance” (R5)

“...and if they are to arise, we have a way of dealing with them, not like in the world, what other people do. We have scripture to refer to.” (R4).

“Being a Christian helps me want to get peace so let go of grudges” (R2)

“There is one goal and harmony” (R2)

“Marriage without spirituality is hopeless, with him at the center, you have purpose and are able to solve anything” (R1).

3.3 Theme 3: Working towards relational reconciliation

3.3.1 Commitment to relational permanence

Their religiosity made it easier for them to seek solutions and answers within their marriage rather than run away. It inspired commitment to find solutions which resulted in cultivation of humility, tolerance and perseverance.

“Rather than throwing a tantrum or breaking away during tough times.... it gives me perseverance and the ability to know there is a solution to a problem”. (R 8)

“I have faith that God keeps my marriage together so it avoids a lot of issues”. “It is the best place to be, any marriage founded on Christian principles as Christianity preaches love, forgiveness, patience endurance, honoring and uplifting one another (R4).

“If I was not a Christian, I would be keeping grudges and get angry all the time as am quick tempered”(R2).

3.4 Theme 4: Centrality of religiosity in life

Respondents felt that their faith was a very key factor in their lives as it gave them direction in daily life when they needed to make decisions and also guided their values and the choices they made in their daily lives.

“It comes number one, then followed by other things....it is what I run to for self-care when things are working or not working. Worship time is my best time” (R8).

“My faith is everything, there is no other way. It guides my values and decisions” (R9)

“My spirituality has helped me a lot, before I take any actions in my marriage, my faith is helping me know how to handle issues”. “Christ is my example” (R6).

“I cannot imagine how life would be without my faith, I would have gone on with life without thinking, it would have been difficult, what power I would run to....maybe alcohol....no seeking God in decisions” (R9)

“I grew up in church, I have always been around God. I tell God everything and strive to do what he says” “My faith give me a better outlook, choices and decisions”. “It has transformed my heart, priorities, it has made me be in the earth but not of the earth....principles of God are the foundation of the earth and must be lived by”. (R5).

“Spirituality means everything, it is my life. Everything holds together on account of my Christianity. The power of the Holy Spirit guides me and leads me.” (R4).

They reported that their faith gave them stability, grounding and that they depended on God for everything. This gave them hope that things would be well even during difficulty as they were not alone.

“It guides me and gives me strength in daily work even in my counseling work” (R8)

There is hope of eternal life” The safest place for any marriage is one founded on Christian principals, the divine power keeps it in check, I believe God defends those who are his and preserves marriages of those who are Christians...”. “For any human being to thrive, he needs that kind of environment provided by the Christian environment in the church” (R4).

“I am always aware that my faith is the basis for my walk, I do things differently, it is my roadmap”. (R2)

3.5 Theme 5: Action oriented evidence of religiosity

The respondents indicated that they lived out their spirituality in daily life practically through specific activities and rituals.

“ I practice my faith by hanging out in fellowships, serving, using the gifting God has given me and constantly trying to do what the bible says like taking care of the poor” (R9)

“I allow it to lead, I pray about things to do which gives me peace about it” (R8).

“Reading the word helps me a lot”. “The teachings help me a lot, my family prays together every morning and we have bible study with the children in the evening”. (R6)

“ We serve in church together in the same department..., I help her wake up and assist with the children to ensure we make it to church in good time” (R6).

“I read the bible daily even if I do not read, I feel a longing, and it is part of my life, a priority. I give to God in money, fasting, prayer, seminars and however the holy spirit empowers” (R5).

I live my spirituality out through the practice of prayer, fellowship through going to church, fellowship through cell groups, reading the bible, participating in devotion and also serving in church” “ I honor God by honoring my marriage” (R4).

“I pray and read the word of God” (R2).

“I live out my faith as a practical lifestyle, a consciousness to be like Christ. It is my mirror for taking stock” (R1).

3.6 Theme 6: Impact of spirituality on marriage and life in general

The respondents reported that spirituality had impacted their marriages and family positively.

“ Although my spouse is not born again, when he acknowledges that God is important, when he says that it is God that provides not hard work....taking small changes and making them count, like when he leads prayer....it is powerful for me....he impacts his children when they see him pray even in restaurants”. “He says that I have shown him the value of believing and depending on God. Seeing him read the bible, pray, lead prayer, which he didn’t before.” (R8)

“My spouse was not always born again, his anger and fighting has been overcome through my influence; he has learnt to deal with them a certain way”. “During difficulty, he helps us turn to God, helps the children see that God is higher than man. He taught the children to pray” (R9)

“My marriage would never have survived, I run to my faith....” (R8)

“My marriage would have been quite different as I would have used culture or traditions to manage. I would have learnt from my parents. I now learn from scripture and others who have made it in marriage. My faith has set a new standard in marriage” (R6)

“My spouse prays with me, she challenges me to pray, during decision making when I forget to pray about it, she reminds me”. “We take our children to church within 3- 4 days of their birth”. “I do not regret marriage and I am happy”. “ Marriage is ordained by God, decide in advance it will work, do not have a perception that it will not work, I learn from the marriages that I know work, I enhance my marriage through Christian books, prayer and reading the word of God (R6).

“If I did not have my faith, I would have married the wrong person as marriage is ordained by God. I had to pray for a life partner. I would have been Clubbing. If I was not married to a believer, I would struggle, we strive to do the right thing”. “When am down and cannot pray, he sets the example he shows the children how to read scripture, he counsels them...as a man of God, he brings the family to God”. “Women shape men, during first years of marriage, we went to different churches, I prayed and we ended up in a neutral church. I believe reading the bible and going to church influenced him and shaped the marriage”. “There are challenges I would not have overcome without my faith” (R5).

“If I was not born again, I imagine I would have succumbed to the usual immorality, I would handle issues of marriage differently, if faced with marital issues”. “The kind of respect and honor I hold my marriage with is due to my Christian life. (R4)

“My spouse’s faith affects my marriage through the issue of accountability, there is support and edifying and encouraging each other in the Christian walk, when I feel down, she holds my hand and we pray, when am feeling too tired to go to church, she helps me go to church, even correcting me when I deviate....we check each other.” “I have impacted her positively... she was a catholic when we were dating, she converted. As a priest of the home, she looks up to me for direction, she honors me in relation to bible instruction, so I feel honored and respected, she knows her place in the marriage as a Christian, wife and marriage. My impact on her has caused her to grown, serve in church. I am a deacon, she then supports in other areas as wife of a deacon.” “ Just by the fact that we are Christians means walking in alignment with God helps us keep our marriage in check; God honors the institution so I believe through that we are blessed...so we have never had issues in our marriage, and if they are to arise, we have a way of dealing with them, not like in the world what other people do. We have scripture to refer to, we are also bringing up our children in the ways of The Lord, we have taken them to church to learn the word, their character is shaped by the word of God, fortified by when they see us going to church, serving in church, so we are demonstrating” (R4).

“Being a Christian has brought a lot of order and transparency and accountability and my spouse supports me as he knows am in church; there is growth, one goal and harmony”. “I learnt from my spouse” as when she watched him serve in church, she became eager as she admired the commitment. “I feel secure due to the values in my marriage, it gives security and trust” (R2).

“ Without my faith, I would live by dictates of life, no foundation, what you think in marriage as opposed to God’s terms of humility and listening as a husband” “ Jesus is the Centre, marriage without spirituality is hopeless, with him at the center, you have purpose and are able to solve anything. It defines my life” (R1).

IV. DISCUSSION

The above findings indicated that indeed being committed to their religion improved the marital relationship as the participants reported that it made them more united, humble, accountable and honest with each other. It helped them have patience, forgiveness and strength to overcome the challenges they encountered in their marriage. The above findings are in agreement with previous studies. Scanzoni and Arnett (1987 [23]) found that public and private religious activities helped partners cultivate purpose and values centered on loving, caring and forgiveness (Holeman 2003[24]); meaning that religious participation enhances relational qualities that reduce marital conflict. Lambert and Dollahite (2006[25]) study of 57 married couples from Christian, Judaism and Islam denominations indicated that highly religious couple’s beliefs and practices helped them (a) prevent problems in the relationship (b) resolve conflict and (c) work toward relational reconciliation after conflict. It appears that religion offers couples theologically grounded guidelines on how to handle marital conflicts when they arise (Mahoney et al., 2003[26]).

Some of the respondents reported that they prayed together, read the bible together, served in church together and held each other accountable on living out their faith. Research findings indicate that shared religious goals enhance the quality of marriage. Dudley and Kosinki (1990[27]) report that marital satisfaction is linked to correspondence between spouses about church attendance and spirituality rather than religiosity itself. Further research suggests that perceived relationship between marital satisfaction and religiosity is likely due to spousal homogeneity and similarities, which are factors conducive to more stable and satisfying marriages (Lehrer & Chiswick, 1993[28]).

V. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

A limitation of the study is that the research depended on self-reports of the individuals rather than independent reports by other people who would be able to give an objective evaluation on how religiosity has impacted the respondents marriages. The respondents may be giving positive reports even if the reality was negative as they know they are expected to behave in line with Christian ideals.

VI. CONCLUSION

The emergent overall concept was that religiosity impacted the marital relationship by inspiring positive attitudes and attributes within the individuals. These attributes resulted in behaviors that created conducive conditions for marital satisfaction amidst the daily challenges of conflict, and maintaining commitment and faithfulness within the marriage. The study clearly identified that certain attributes associated with religiosity had a positive impact on how the participants experienced their marriages and related with their partner; and that the practice of religiosity impacted the participants positively in the way they handled issues and how they related with their spouses which in turn led to marital satisfaction. Further research to establish more reliable figures of divorces within the church will assist to confirm if religiosity translates into fewer divorces in church when compared to the secular population.

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