



## Social and Personality Factors as Predictors of Marital Stability Among Couples in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja

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### ABSTRACT

The study investigated social and personality factors as predictors of marital stability among couples in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. Seven research questions guided the study and seven null hypotheses were formulated and tested for the study. The study adopted a correlational research design. The population of the study was 41,575 wedded couples from eight Dioceses of the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja from 2019-2023. The sample size was 380 wedded couples selected through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument for data collection was two sets of questionnaire titled "Social and Personality Factors Scale (SPFS)" adapted from the Big Five Factor Inventory with modification by the researcher and a self-structured questionnaire titled "Marital Stability Scale (MSS)". The instrument was validated by five experts with reliability coefficients of 0.98 and 0.97 respectively. A total of 380 copies of the questionnaire were taken to the field and administered to 380 respondents and 371 copies representing 98% were retrieved and used and there was mortality of 9 copies representing 2%. Data collected were analyzed using the Pearson Product Correlation Co-efficient to answer the research questions. Linear Regression was used to test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that couples' educational level is not a significant predictor of marital stability in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. However, the study revealed that couples' neuroticism, is a predictor of marital stability in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. This study concluded that social and personality factors are predictors of marital stability among couples in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations among others were made; that educational level does not significantly predict marital stability. Therefore marriage counsellors, religious leaders and other marriage-building institutions should prepare programs and counselling services that could prioritize teaching practical relationship skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution and emotional intelligence rather than emphasizing educational achievements.

**Keywords:** Social factor, Personality factor, Educational level, Neuroticism and Marital stability.

### INTRODUCTION

Marriage serves as the cornerstone of family life, representing the union between a man and a woman as husband and wife. This societal institution is often formalized by cultural customs and legal frameworks, occasionally being solemnized through religious rites. It functions as a conduit for meeting physiological, procreation, social, emotional, and security needs. As one of the oldest social institutions, marriage holds significant importance in various societies. In the context of Nigeria, the institution of marriage is regarded as a primary and sacred commitment. Here, a man and a woman enter into a contractual agreement, establishing reciprocal obligations as husband and wife. The essence of marriage lies in its role as a partnership for survival, with the primary objective of preserving and enhancing the human species. The success of marriage is contingent upon stability, and the prosperity and development of a society hinges on the peace experienced at the family level.

Every society aspires to achieve marital stability among couples for its development. However, reality often deviates, marked by instances of fractured marriages. This deviation may arise from various factors, including inadequate communication, financial challenges, extramarital affairs and a deficiency in both physical and emotional intimacy, unrealistic expectations, disparities in parenting styles, issues related to substance abuse, distinctions in cultural or religious backgrounds, and mental health concerns. Additionally, factors such as lack of support, challenges in maintaining work-life balance, domestic violence, the erosion of connection, divergent goals and values, inability to resolve conflicts, and external stressors like job loss, illness, or the loss of loved ones may contribute to the strain on marriages and potentially leading to instability (Mayeesha, 2020). These challenges affect marital stability at an alarming rate. Marital stability is the ability of a married couple to maintain a healthy and lasting marriage over time. It is also the strength and resilience of a marriage, indicating whether a couple is likely to stay together and experience a satisfying and enduring partnership. It is in this regard that, Ozyigit (2017) stated that social and personality factors are among those that make marriage stable. Social factors are circumstances or situations that affect people's lifestyles and well-being. These are also social categories that could affect a person's circumstances, experiences, and social position (Drew, 2021). These factors include economic status, education, communication, political affiliation, religion, race, one's birth circumstances, security, number of children, infrastructure and population density. These factors are often shaped by societal norms, cultural values and interpersonal

interactions. Understanding and navigating these social factors is essential for couples seeking to build and maintain a healthy and fulfilling marital relationship.

Furthermore, Karimi, Bakhtiyari and Abbas (2019) identified other social factors that predict marital stability to include attitudes towards marital relations, role of children, love, commitment, educational level, income status, occupational, intimacy, communication and conflict resolution support, attachment, loyalty, effective communication and trust. In this interactional process, spouses accept, respect and value each other's interests, attitudes, opinions, habits, values, offering gratifications and support for one another. However, this study focuses on social factors such as communication, income status and educational level. These variables are chosen because they are interrelated components that may collectively predict marital stability. These variables enable couples alleviate marital stress, hence allowing them to focus on maintaining a strong emotional bond through effective communication. It also creates a supportive environment that promotes a stable and enduring marriage.

Education is an experience that influences the way people perceive themselves in relation to their social, cultural and physical environments; a complex and purposeful process for expediting learning (Modeste & Tamayose, 2014). The authors add that educational level represents educational attainments of a given individual, frequently expressed in years of formal schooling or certificates attained. These include First School Leaving Certificates (FLSC), Senior School Certificates Examination (SSCE), National Certificate in Education/Diploma, (NCE/ND) Degree or Higher National Diploma (HND), and Postgraduate Degrees. According to Ogunrinde (2020), couples believe that educated couples are able to communicate effectively and have easy understanding. Higher income status, achieved through better educational qualifications, provides financial stability and reduces stress in the marriage. Apart from social factors, other factors that may contribute to marital stability among couples are the personality factors.

Personality is the dynamic interaction of physical, mental and psychological attributes that make one individual distinct from all others in terms of their usual mood, temperament and behaviour (Shiner, 2015). Trait is a specific component of personality that describes particular tendencies of a person to feel, think, and act in certain ways. A personality trait is a characteristic pattern of thinking, feeling, or behaving that tends to remain consistent over time and across relevant situations. It is a collection of traits that describes how a person generally, tends to feel, think and behave. Personality traits seem to be an influential factor of marital stability. According to Claxton and DeLongis (2012), personality traits predict marital stability and are anchored on the Big Five factors or personality traits also known as the five factors model (FFM). This is a model based on common language descriptors of personality (lexical hypothesis).

The Big Five factors, also known as the Big Five personality traits, are a set of five broad dimensions that are commonly used to describe human personality. The Big Five which include extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness to experience, represent a set of five broad, bipolar trait dimensions. These factors provide a comprehensive framework for understanding and categorizing individual differences in personality. These five factors are often referred to as the OCEAN model, with each letter representing one of the traits. The Big Five model is widely used in marriage counselling due to its ability to capture and describe the major dimensions of personality of couples. This model constitutes the most widely used framework for understanding personality structure (Ani, 2021). This indicates that many couples are in marriages with different personality traits.

Couples have different reasons for getting married, and as such may project their personality traits onto their partners, which can create additional stress in their marital relationship. In addition, personality traits seem to play a crucial role in determining important life outcomes such as marital happiness. According to Sadeghi, Mootabi and Dehghani (2016), personality characteristics such as extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness are positively correlated with marital stability. As every married couple have different personality traits, these traits may become challenges or enhance successful marriage. In this study the Big Five factors that would be considered is Neuroticism.

Neuroticism is the tendency to experience negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and depression (Jeronimus, Riese, Sanderman & Ormel, 2014). It is characterized by emotional instability, moodiness, and a tendency to experience negative emotions more frequently and intensely than individuals lower in neuroticism. Neuroticism is linked with a low tolerance for stress or aversive stimuli. It can make it challenging for couples to regulate their emotions, leading to mood swings and emotional outbursts that create a stressful environment in the marriage. This can make it harder to maintain stability and harmony, and affect the partners of well-being and happiness within the marriage. The constant exposure to a neurotic partner's, negative emotions could lead to emotional exhaustion and dissatisfaction, which can, in turn, predict marital stability. According to Jeronimus, Ormel, Aleman, Pennix and Riese (2013), couples who are neurotic tend to experience more negative life events, which often make them change from negative responses to positive experiences. In trying to control their negative experience in life so that they become calm, emotionally stable, and free from persistent negative feelings which usually make them to open up to their partner in marriage.

In contemporary times, it becomes apparent that social and personality factors play a pivotal role in determining the stability of marriages. A notable number of couples seem to be grappling with challenges related to commitment, effective communication, respect and submission. These factors seem to predict marital stability and have discernible effects on the overall stability of the relationships. It is against this background that the study sought to delve into the investigation of social and personality factors as predictors of marital stability among couples in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Marriage is a legally recognized union between two people, often a man and a woman. It is built on love, trust, mutual respect and is expected to last a life time. For marriage to last, it must be stable. A stable marriage is characterized by security, strong communication, conflicts resolution skills, mutual respect, trust shared values and understanding, but in recent times, there is no day one listens to radio broadcast, TV, read news papers or browse

social media platforms without witnessing stories that may suggest marital instability among couples in Nigeria. Instability occurs when challenges, tensions and conflicts arise within a marriage, creating uncertainty and the potential for a breakdown. It also appear that there is a breakdown, deterioration or collapse of the marital relationship, which may lead to separation, divorce, or emotional disconnection. Observing casually, it becomes evident that many couples are facing instability in their marriages.

As counsellors, the researchers observed such behaviours as frequent conflicts, argument, agreeing on issues, even among couples in church. Bothered by these issues the researchers wondered what could be responsible for this kind of behaviours which is contrary to the expectation of the individuals and the church before they married. It is on this note that the researchers has decided to investigate social and personality factors as predictors of marital stability among couples in catholic ecclesiastical province of Abuja. The choice of Abuja province is because it comprises of three states namely Benue, Kogi, Nasarawa and Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

### Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to investigate social and personality factors as predictors of marital stability among couples in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine educational level of couples as predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.
2. ascertain neuroticism of couples as predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How does educational level of couples predict marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja?
2. How does neuroticism of couples predict marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja?

### Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. Educational level of couples is not a significant predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.
2. Neuroticism of couples does not significantly predict marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

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## METHODOLOGY

This study adopted correlational research design. Correlational research design investigates one or more characteristics of variables to discover the extent to which the characteristics are related. It examines variables in their natural environments and does not include researcher-imposed treatments (Marilyn & Jim, 2011). The population was comprised 41,575 wedded couples from eight Dioceses of Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja from 2019-2023 (Catholic Secretariat Abuja, Desk Office, 2023). The sample size for the study was 380 wedded couples selected from the total population of 41,575 couples from eight dioceses of the Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) table for determining sample size from a given population. The study employed a multi-stage sampling procedure for the selection of the sample size. The first stage involved the use of a purposive sampling technique whereby 5 parishes were purposively chosen from each Diocese, making a total of 40 Parishes. The second stage involved the use of a proportionate stratified sampling technique where the sample of 380 respondents (Wedded Couples) was shred into 40 sampled Parishes in 8 Dioceses in the Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja proportionately. The third stage involved the use of an accidental sampling technique. The researchers selected available wedded couples in various sampled parishes based on the sample allocation fraction.

The instruments used for data collection were two sets of questionnaires titled: "Social and Personality Factors Scale (SPFS), adapted from the Big Factor Inventory with modifications by the researchers, and a self-structured questionnaire titled "Marital Stability Scale (MSS)". The questionnaires were structured into two sections: A and B. Section A contained general instructions to the respondents on how to use the instruments, while section B elicited information on the seven (7) variables (objectives) of the study.

The first set of questionnaires consisted of categorical data such as Educational Level and Cluster B, containing items 9-14, elicited information on neuroticism. The second questionnaire on the Marital Stability Scale contained 18 items. All the items were structured on a four-point Likert Scale with response options of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4, Agree (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. The instrument was validated by five experts, two in Guidance and Counselling, one in Department of Educational Foundations, Benue State University, Makurdi and one in Guidance and Counselling and three Measurement and Evaluation, Department of Guidance and Counselling, College of Education, Joseph Sarwuan Tarka University, Makurdi for scrutiny with educational level of couples of 0.73, neuroticism of 0.81 and Marital Stability Scale 0.88. The data was collected with the aid of six research assistants (Holy Family Society of Nigeria) who were chosen from eight sampled Dioceses in the Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. The data collected were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient to answer the research questions and linear regression was used to test the null hypotheses.

## Results and Discussion

**Research Question 1:** How does educational level predict marital stability among couples in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja?

**Table 1:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on Educational Level as a Predictor of Marital Stability among Couples in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja

		Educational Level	Marital Stability
<b>Educational Level</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	-.06
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.22
	N	371	371
<b>Marital Stability</b>	Pearson Correlation	-.06	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.22	
	N	371	371

Table 1 indicates the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of educational level of couples and marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja ( $r = -.06$ ,  $p=0.22$ ), with this result, it means that educational level of couples is not a predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

**Research Question 2:** How does neuroticism of couples predict marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja?

**Table 2:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient on Neuroticism of Couples and Marital Stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja

		Neuroticism of Couples	Marital Stability
<b>Neuroticism of couples</b>	Pearson Correlation	1	0.79**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.00
	N	371	371
<b>Marital Stability</b>	Pearson Correlation	0.79**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.00	
	N	371	371

Table 2 shows the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient of neuroticism of couples and marital stability in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja ( $r=.79^{**}$ ,  $p= 0.00$ ), with this result, this means that neuroticism of couples is a predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

**Hypothesis 1:** Educational level of couples is not a significant predictor of marital stability in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

**Table 3:** Summary of Linear Regression on Educational Level of Couples as a Predictor of Marital Stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Df	SS	MS	B	$\beta$	t	P
<b>Constant</b>							2.607		19.022	
<b>Educational Level</b>	.064 <sup>a</sup>	.004	1.497	370	1.043	1.043	-.043	-.064	-1.224	.222

Note: R<sup>2</sup> adjusted=.04, CI=confidence interval for B=0.95

Table 3 indicates that the predictor variables in the model;  $F(1, 370) = 1.497$ ,  $\beta = -.064$ ,  $P.22 > 0.05$ ), indicates that educational level is not statistically significant in explaining variations in marital stability. Furthermore, the predictor accounts for only 0.4% of the variance in marital stability, which is negligible. Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that educational level of couples is not a significant predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja, is accepted. This confirms that educational level of couples is not a significant predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

**Hypothesis 2:** Neuroticism of couples does not significantly predict marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

Variable	R	R <sup>2</sup>	F	Df	SS	MS	B	$\beta$	t	P
Constant							.938		14.243	
Neuroticism of Couples	.794a	.630	627.479	370	162.485	162.485	.712	.794	25.050	0.000

Note: R<sup>2</sup> adjusted=63% CI=confidence interval for B=0.95%

Table 11 indicates the predictor variables in the model;  $F(1, 370) = 627.479$ ,  $\beta = .794$ ,  $P.00 < 0.05$ ), this indicates that neuroticism is statistically significant in explaining variations in marital stability. Furthermore, the predictor accounts for only 63% of the variance in marital stability, which is considerable. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which states that neuroticism is not a significant predictor of marital stability among couples in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja, is rejected. This confirms that neuroticism is a significant predictor of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

### Discussion of Findings

Hypothesis one states that educational level of couples is not a significant predictor of marital stability in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. This finding disagrees with the findings of Nwamadi (2022) who reported that income level, couples level of education and occupational level of couples are determinant factors for marital stability among couples in the area. This result also contradicts the findings by Obiekwe et al (2020) who found that educational level is a weak positive significant predictor of marital stability among married persons. According to the scholars highly educated people look for spouses who are also well educated so that when they marry their family income and occupational status would be at par and complementary to each other. This result also disagrees with the findings by Ojukwu et al (2016) who found that there was a positive relationship between married persons' low and high levels of educational attainment and marital stability, while there was no significant relationship between those with medium level of educational attainment and their marital stability. This result correlates with the findings by Maciver et al (2012) who discovered that their educational level is not a significant factor that determines the length of the marriage. In retrospect, this finding showed that factors other than education played a more prominent role in determining the stability of marriages. The common assumption that higher educational attainment correlates with greater marital stability is not ideal.

In addition, hypothesis two states that neuroticism of couples is a significant predictor of marital stability in the Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. This is because when couples are anxious about their marriage, they make an effort to keep it stable, and they work to prevent depression from affecting their relationship. According to participants, when their spouses feel vulnerable, they ensure that they provide support in all aspects, which helps strengthen their marital bond. This finding supports the results by Sayehmiri et al (2020) who found that there is a positive relationship between marital stability and personality traits such as neuroticism. However, this disagrees with the findings by Farhoodi et al (2016) who found that neuroticism trait had a negative and significant relationship with marital satisfaction. Similarly, the result of this study disagrees with the findings by Gholam et al (2016) who indicated that the neuroticism dimension is a power predictive of marital satisfaction and there is a significant negative relationship between neuroticism and marital satisfaction. According to the scholars, neuroticism leads to marital dissatisfaction. This result also disagrees with the findings by Shoaib et al (2020) who found that neuroticism had a significant negative correlation with marital stability. In the researcher's opinion, while many studies suggest that neuroticism has a negative relationship with marital stability, the researchers found that, many couples remain in marriage due to various factors. These factors include concerns about leaving their children behind or facing societal stigmas such as being labelled a single mother or father, a divorcee, or "second-hand material." As a result, these individuals often stay in their marriages, which can lead to a form of marital stability.

### Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that educational level of couples is not a significant predictors of marital stability in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. This is because of its crucial role in fostering understanding, resolving conflicts and maintaining a stable marital relationship. Also, personality factors such as neuroticism of couples significantly predict marital stability among couples in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja. This study concluded that certain social and personality factors are predictors of marital stability among couples in Catholic Ecclesiastical Province of Abuja.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Since educational level does not significantly predict marital stability, marriage counsellors, religious leaders and other marriage building institutions should prepare programmes and counselling services that could prioritize teaching practical relationship skills such as effective communication, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence rather than emphasizing educational achievements.
2. Neuroticism should be incorporated into the Catholic Church's premarital counselling curriculum to equip religious leaders with the skills to identify signs of neuroticism during counselling sessions or marriage course teachings.

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