

SEXUAL SATISFACTION OF MARITAL COUPLES: IMPLICATION FOR MARITAL HARMONY

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Abstract

Marital sex is important for a healthy marital relationship and happiness with life. It is expected to give marital couples physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction. This study sought to find out the quality of marital sex by examining the indices of sexual satisfaction of marital couples and to identify possible gender differences. Two research questions guided the study of 50 cohabiting marital couples purposively drawn from the Nwafor Orizu College community, and one null hypothesis was tested. The standardized Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) inventory was administered on the sample. The frequencies of those satisfied and those not satisfied were calculated and tabulated. As marital couples, the result showed significant differences between the spouses because relational factors do magnify the nuances of physiology and psychology of marital sex. The implications of the findings for marital harmony were highlighted. Among the recommendations made for the improvement of marital sex and overall marital harmony is that counsellors be aware that problems in marital sex of couples may underlie overt problems in marriage because sexual problems are much the cause as they are the effect of marital difficulties.

Key words: marital sex; marital couples; physical pleasure; emotional satisfaction; index of sexual satisfaction; spouses; relational factors;

Introduction

Marital sex is any form of sexual activity between a man and his wife or between a woman and her husband. However, it is only the penile-vaginal form of marital sex that is capable of resulting in pregnancy, subsequent birth of a child and fruitful marriage. Marital sex may take any form particularly when pregnancy is not contemplated. People preparing to marry seem to seek for a potential mate with whom to agree on matters relating to sex apparently because sex is domiciled within marriage. Marital fidelity is a statement of how marital spouses are sexually faithful to each other.

Sexual differences between marital spouses appear to be the underlying

factor in most marital disputes and account for the reason why singles are barred from participating in their arbitrations. Therefore, the effort to enhance marital harmony demands that sexual harmony of couples be first addressed. This study does so by examining the sexual satisfaction of marital couples.

Statement of the Problem

Given the strong correlations between happiness with marital sex and happiness with life, then the quality of marital sex reflects both the marital relationship of the couple and their overall marital life. Underlying the quality of marital life appears to be the amounts of satisfaction marital couples derive from sex in their marital live. Efforts have been made in this study to generate empirical data on the sexual

satisfaction of marital couples as the starting point to address the burning issue of sexual dysfunctions in marriage.

Purpose of the Study

This study, therefore, sought to find out the sexual satisfaction of marital couples, and specifically to:

1. determine the sexual satisfaction status of marital couples by examining the indices of their sexual satisfaction;
2. identify the possible pattern of the sexual satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) of the marital couples that may warrant sex therapy for remediation and restoration to marital harmony.

Significance of the Study

The outcome of the study would be of immense benefit to marital spouses, counsellors, church leaders, prospective mate selectors and the general public.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Two research questions were posed to guide the study namely:

1. what is the sexual satisfaction status of marital couples?
2. what is the frequency of sexual satisfaction pattern of marital couples?

Similarly, the one null hypothesis Chi-square (χ^2) tested at .05 level of significance is: There is no significant difference in the sexual satisfaction indices of marital couples.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

Marital sex actually satisfies the most as it gives couples pleasure (Micheal, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata, 1994). Many similarities exist in the

sexual responses between the sexes (Masters & Johnson, 1966). According to Lomanna and Reidman (1991) sexual needs and capacities of both men and women are basically the same. Although many couples appear to initially have relatively equal sexual interests, these sexual interests are affected by the quality of their marital relationship (Nietzel, Speltz, McCauley & Bernstein, n.d). Furthermore, relational factors such as anger, time pressure, stress, fatigue, unresolved conflict/resentment, including poor communication take their toll on quality marital sex and the overall marital quality (Roop, 2004).

The sizzle in marital sexual life may never go out if marital couples learn the importance of a good sexual life to a healthy marital relationship (Paros, 2010). Happiness with marital sex is linked to happiness with life – the correlations are clear and striking. Thus, virtually all the people who are happy in general also say they are happy with their sex lives – by finding physical pleasure and emotional satisfaction in their sexual lives (Michael et al, 1994). Those who report themselves happier also report more frequent sex. Conversely, people who are not happy tend to report being uninterested in sex, having trouble attaining orgasm, not finding sex pleasurable, having pains during sex and being anxious when they have sex.

As a matter of fact, frequent sex with a marital spouse is overwhelmingly important and desirable (Michael et al, 1994). A discrepancy in the level of sexual desire and frequency is a common complaint of marital couples (Simon & Carey, 2001). If one partner has a much stronger need for sexual contact than the other, “desire discrepancy” arises. This can cause distress, especially if the

desires of one partner are experienced as coercive as to cause feelings of “sexual rejection or guilt” (Roop, 2004 p.56). Desire discrepancy seems to be more common in couples where there is less experimentation with sexual behaviours and a low level of pleasure associated with such experimentation (Kelly, 2004) resulting in sexual monotony and boredom. To minimize conflicts arising from this “sexual desire discrepancy”, Simons and Carey (2001) recommend that marital couples should work out a compromise sexual frequency. Call it sexual calendar, if you wish.

The duration of coitus is a very significant indicator of sexual satisfaction of marital couples. From sexual excitement through resolution may take only a few minutes or last for several hours (Tolman & Diamond, 2002). On the average males tend to reach orgasm more rapidly than females during intercourse (Kelly, 2004) and thus terminate coitus. However, each marital couple has to work out and moderate the duration of sexual activity most suitable to them (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael & Michaels, 1994). Bear in mind that “a woman needs adequate foreplay time (say 15-40 minutes) to become fully aroused. If her husband isn't willing to give her that time then she may feel that sex is one more thing on the already too full 'to do' list” (Roop, 2004 p.110). Therefore, when a woman is so “rushed”, she is less likely to have orgasm. Shay-Roop (2004) reports the direct correlation between how long a couple spends in foreplay and how frequently a woman reaches orgasm; and then how sexually satisfied she reports to be.

The lack of sexual satisfaction tends to bring a deviation to a good sexual life which, according to Paros (2010),

may come within two or more years of marriage. Majority of husbands claim that motherhood makes their wives disinterested in sexual life. Conversely, many wives complain that a busy schedule keeps their husbands away from a good sexual relationship. The deviation from a good sexual life that is evident of sexual dissatisfaction has adverse effects on marital life. Paros (2010) noted that partners may start to label each other as over-sexual or barren (inhibited) in accordance with their unmet needs. Similarly, some partners may even try to force the sexual relationship on their partners (marital rape) that may lead to major calamities. Worse still, a long interval for a good sexual relationship or outright denial of sex may prompt many partners to find solace in extra marital relationships. Men are more likely to engage in sex outside of a relationship than women; as are individuals of either gender who are unhappy with their relationship (Banfield & McCabe, 2001; Cann, Magnum & Wells, 2001). More often, extra-marital sex seems to be motivated by a need for a stronger emotional involvement and intimacy than what is being achieved with a spouse (Levine, 1998; Treas & Griesen, 2000) at home.

The sexual dissatisfaction of marital couples can be prevented only through a thorough understanding between the spouses (Bassan, 2002 b). Paros (2010) holds that when sexual relationship gets stale, the couple must sit down and talk to rekindle the flame of a sizzling relationship, Bassan, R. (2002b) proffers that hypoactive sexual disorder for women is rooted in intimacy difficulties within a relationship that need to be resolved before sexual interaction can improve and become

more frequent. In addition, if their responsibilities and tensions prevent them from enjoying a good sexual interaction, they must know how to share those responsibilities and to build the confidence in their spouse. There need not be a quarrel or use of force to re-stimulate a good sexual life as it will bring the opposite result (Paros, 2010) being counter-productive. Partners should work out a compromise sexual frequency (Simons & Carey, 2001) and then try some spice up tips or a long foreplay to keep their sexual relationships healthy for the overall improvement of the quality of their marital life (Roop, 2004).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of human sexual responses propounded by Masters and Johnson (1966) that detailed how males and females naturally respond to sexual stimulations. They pointed out that males and females have similar sexual response patterns with complementary differences occasioned by anatomy.

Methodology

The sample survey research design was employed in the study conducted at Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe. Married men and women in the College community constituted the population. A sample of 50 cohabiting marital couples was purposively drawn.

The instrument for data collection was the 25 item Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS) Inventory (Hudson, 1982) designed and standardized to measure on a 5 point scale the degree to which an individual derives satisfaction from sexual

relationship with his/her partner: satisfaction being evaluated in terms of an individual's attitude, feeling or preference for various forms and aspects of sexual behaviour.

The instrument was validated by Nwobi (1998) who provided the test norms for Nigerian samples as follows for interpretations

Young adult (M & F) (n=40); \bar{x} = 31.80

Middle age (M & F) (n=40); \bar{x} = 32.03

Scores higher than the norms (means) indicate poor or problematic sexual satisfaction while scores lower than the norms (means) indicate normal or adequate sexual satisfaction.

The reliability coefficient: the Cronbach alpha (α = 0.92) provided by Hudson (1982) was adopted for this study.

Data Collection and Processing

Two copies of ISS Inventory were administered to each contact person of the 50 marital couples for completion: one for the self and the second copy for the spouse (at home). All the ISS inventory forms were recovered within two weeks of administration. Using a 5-point scale, the individual's raw score on the 25 items were summed up and processed in accordance with the test manual. As a result, the individuals final score was obtained by subtracting 25 from the total raw score i.e Raw Score – 25 = Final Score. In reference to the test norms, the verdict of Normal (N) or Problematic (P) was passed as appropriate on the individual spouse. For the couples, the female-male format was used to interpret the data. For instance, for the couple designated NP, the female was normal while the male has problem

sexually. In couple PN, the female was not satisfied sexually while the male was normal/satisfied. The frequencies of the normal (N) and problematic (P) respondents were calculated.

Results

The result presented in Table 1 shows that, among 24 out of the 50 marital couples studied, six designated (NN) reported satisfaction (or normal satisfaction level) with their marital sex. Within the remaining 18 marital couples

designated (NP), the females reported satisfaction (N) with their marital sex while their males reported no sexual satisfaction (P). However, among the remaining 26 marital couples, and within 15 couples designated (PN), the females reported not having sexual satisfaction in their marital sex or have problematic marital sex (P) while their male counterparts reported marital sexual satisfaction (N). Curiously, within the remaining 11 couples designated (PP), both the females and their male marital counterparts reported no satisfaction (P).

Table 1: Patterns of Sexual Satisfaction of Marital Couples

Males		Normal (N)	Problematic (P)	Total
		6 (NN)	18 (NP)	
Females	Normal (N)	15 (PN)	11 (PP)	26
	21	29	50	

From the foregoing, only 6 couples out of the 50 couples studied reported normal (satisfactory) marital sex while 11 couples reported dissatisfaction or problematic marital sex. Among the rest 33 couples, 18 females and 15 males reported satisfaction whereas 15 females and 18 males reported dissatisfaction with their marital sex. According to gender, a total of 24 females were found to be normal (sexually satisfied) while 26 females had problematic marital sex. When compared with their male counterparts there were a total of 21 sexually satisfied males and 29 with problematic marital sex.

When these frequency patterns of sexual satisfaction of marital couples were tested (null-hypothesis No. 1) using the Chi-square (χ^2) test statistics, the marital couples were found to differ significantly on their indices of satisfaction with marital sex. The

calculated $\chi^2 = 5.53 > \text{critical } \chi^2 = 3.84$ ($\alpha = 0.05$; $df = 1$ see Appendix A).

Discussion of the Results

Marital couples do seek sexual pleasures in marriage despite the individual differences that might still exist as evident from this study. Many similarities were found to exist in the responses of respondents on the items of the Index of Sexual Satisfaction (ISS). Masters and Johnson (1966) first reported such similarities in their study of the sexual responses of the sexes who also have similar expectations from their sexual lives. Both sexes could want more sex (item 24) or longer duration of coitus (item 7). Both sexes could complain of desire discrepancy (item 8), or monotonous/boring sex as part of their experiences with marital sex. Thus the sexual needs and capacities of both men and women are basically the same

(Lomanna & Raidman, 1991).

It is rather curious that when the sexuality of the female is related directly to that of her male marital companion as marital couple, the story changes. The otherwise minor gender differences between them takes on new dimensions and become deeply ingrained. Marital sex begins to be affected by the quality of their relationship (Nietzel, Speltz, McCanlay & Bernstein, n.d.). The relational factors take their toll on quality marital sex. (Roop, 2004) and marital quality also suffers. Then the discrepancy in the sexual desire and frequency becomes a common complaint of marital couples (Simon & Carey, 2001) and may pre-dispose spouses to feeling of sexual rejection or guilt (Roop, 2004) thereby heightening their differences on sexual satisfaction.

Implications for Marital Harmony

As sex gives couples pleasure and emotional satisfaction, individual spouses should seek to give and derive maximum sexual satisfaction from their marriage, and strive to achieve a balance in their sexual behaviours. This is because frequent sex is overwhelmingly important and desirable as it is an index of happiness in marriage and life (Michael et al., 1994). Sexual dissatisfaction can lead to name calling/labeling or sexual denials and marital rape in extreme cases (Paros, 2010). It can also lead to extra-marital affairs (Banfield & McCabe, 2010) when the individual would like to have sexual contact with someone other than the spouse.

It is paradoxical that the quality of marital relationship affects marital sex (Neitzel et al., n.d.). Therefore, sex should not be allowed to go stale as it

equally affects marital quality and happiness (Paros, 2010). It is, therefore, imperative that couples should monitor and moderate relational factors as they detract from sexual and marital qualities (Roop, 2004). Intimacy difficulties need to be resolved before sexual interaction can improve or become more frequent (Bassan, 2002b). Couples should create time, space and privacy (daily) for intimacy with each other and work out a compromise sexual frequency and duration of coitus (Roop, 2004). They should try spice-up tips or long foreplay and experimentations to improve marital sex. Couples should, therefore, identify those responsibilities and tensions that prevent them from enjoying good quality sex and work out how to share those responsibilities and obviate the dangers of extra marital sex.

Summary and Conclusion

From the findings of the study, six out of the 50 couples had satisfactory marital sex while 11 were dissatisfied the rest being mixed grid of satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Generically, marital couples are capable of enjoying and deriving satisfaction from their sex. Whatever differences in the satisfaction derivable from their sex may be traceable to the quality of their relationship.

With couples, these subtle gender differences take on new dimensions and proportions. As evident from this study, very few couples reported satisfaction with their marital sex. In most cases either of the two spouses was not deriving satisfaction. With some couples, both spouses reported outright dissatisfaction with their sex. In effect, couples do differ significantly on their satisfaction with their sex. There is the need for couples to address the differences in their

satisfaction with sex to improve both sexual and marital qualities.

Recommendations

1. Marital couples should fully appreciate the importance of good quality sex to their well-being and then make the necessary sexual adjustment that is fundamental to marital adjustment.
2. Marital couples should realize the delicate balance between marital sex and overall marital harmony and endeavour to make their marriage equitable.
3. Marital couples should open up and share both their positive and the negative feelings about their relationship including those of marital sex with their spouses for mutual improvement.
4. The counsellor should be aware that problems in marital sex of couples may underlie overt problems in marriage because sexual problems are much the cause as they are the effect of marital difficulties.

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Appendix A

Sexual Satisfaction of Marital Couples

		Normal	Problem	Total
Females	Normal	6 (10.)	18 (13.9)	24
	Problem	$\frac{15}{21}$ (10.)	$\frac{11}{29}$ (15.1)	$\frac{26}{50}$

() = expected frequency in each case

$$\frac{21}{50} \times 24 = (10.1); \quad \frac{29}{50} \times 24 = (13.9)$$

$$\frac{21}{50} \times 26 = (10.9); \quad \frac{29}{50} \times 26 = (15.1)$$

$$\begin{aligned} x^2 &= \frac{\mathbf{F_0 - F_e}}{\mathbf{F_0}}^2 \\ &= \frac{(6 - 10.1)^2}{10.1} + \frac{(18 - 13.9)^2}{13.9} \\ &+ \frac{(15 - 10.9)^2}{10.9} + \frac{(11 - 15.1)^2}{15.1} \\ &= \frac{(-4.1)^2}{10.1} + \frac{(4.1)^2}{13.9} + \frac{(4.1)^2}{10.9} + \frac{(-4.1)^2}{15.1} \\ &= \frac{16.81}{10.1} + \frac{16.81}{13.9} + \frac{16.81}{10.9} + \frac{16.81}{15.1} \\ &= 1.664 + 1.542 + 1.21 + 1.113 \\ x^2 &= 5.53 \end{aligned}$$

But critical x^2 ($\alpha = 0.05$; $df = 1$) = 3.84

Since calculated x^2 (5.53) > critical x^2 (3.84) the null hypothesis of no significant difference is rejected. So the difference is significant

APPENDIX B

ISS Name **Sex** **Age** **Date**
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INSTRUCTIONS: These items are designed to measure the degree of satisfaction you have in the sexual relationship with your partner. It is not a test, so there is no right or wrong answers. Answer each item as carefully and accurately as you can by SHADING only one of the numbers in front of each item to indicate the degree of your sexual satisfaction.

The numbers stand for:

- 1. - Rarely or none of the time
- 2. - A little of the time
- 3. - Some of the time
- 4. - Good part of the time
- 5. - Most or all of the time

- | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I feel that my partner enjoys our sex life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | My sex life is very exciting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | Sex is fun for my partner and me | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | I feel that my partner sees little in me except for the sex I can give. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | I feel that sex is dirty and disgusting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | My sex life is monotonous. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | When we have sex it is too rushed and hurriedly completed. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I feel that my sex life is lacking in quality. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | My partner is sexually very exciting. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. | I enjoy the sex techniques that my partner likes or uses. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. | I feel that my partner wants too much sex from me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. | I think that sex is wonderful. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. | My partner dwells on sex too much. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. | I feel that sex is something that has to be endured in our relationship. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. | My partner is too rough or brutal when we have sex. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. | My partner observes good personal hygiene. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. | I feel that sex is a normal function of our relationship . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. | My partner does not want sex when I do. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. | I feel that our sex life really adds a lot to our relationship. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. | I would like to have sexual contact with someone other than my partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. | It is easy for me to get sexually excited by my partner. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. | I feel that my partner is sexually pleased with me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. | My partner is very sensitive to my sexual needs and desires. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. | I feel that I should have sex more often . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. | I feel that my sex life is boring . | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Developed by W.W Hudson (1982)