

CONSIDERATIONS OF AGE PARAMETER IN MATE SELECTION: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRE-MARITAL COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This study sought to ascertain how much prospective mate selectors, typified by tertiary student respondents, consider the age parameter in their search for marriage partners by finding out empirical evidence of the likely amount of weightings, and the gender pattern of age parameter considerations. Three research questions guided the study while one null-hypothesis was ANOVA-tested at .05-level of significance. Descriptive Survey Design was used in the study of a sample of 1000 tertiary students from Nsugbe and Igbariam in Anambra State. The results show that the respondents attach a high level of premium, evident in their mean weighting of 6.59, to age considerations in mate selection. The mean gender weighting of considerations of age parameter is both higher in males than females and statistically significant. The counselling implications have been highlighted while the recommendations include that: tertiary level students should take proper cognizance of age parameter in their heterosexual interpersonal relationships and that prospective mate selectors should be properly guided on the import of large age disparity on reproductive success in marriage.

Key words: age parameter; mate selection; pre-marital counselling; mean weighting; heterosexual interpersonal relationship; reproductive success in marriage

Introduction

It appears that any marriage-bound heterosexual interpersonal relationship begins with an assessment of the ages of each other apparently in subtle compliance with the societal prescription that a man marries someone younger than himself, and the woman someone older. Statements like: 'the boy married his mother' and 'the girl married her father' are societal indictments of improper consideration of age in mate selection. The modern society appears to bring together people of diverse backgrounds making it nearly impossible to track individuals from their childhood days. It has now become the responsibility of prospective mate selectors to figure out how old each other are. This study has tried to ascertain how much prospective mate selectors consider the age parameter in their search

for marriage partners.

Statement of the Problem

People are free to marry from any part of the world and so cannot easily verify the age of any potential mate as physical looks may be deceptive. The problem becomes the readiness of the individual to give age parameter due consideration in the process. The present study sought to address the issue by finding out empirical evidence of the likely amount of weighting [importance] and the gender pattern of age parameter considerations in order to guide prospective mate selectors.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of the study was to ascertain the considerations given to age parameter in mate selection by prospective mate selectors.

Specifically the study sought to:

1. find out the mean weighting of the subjects on the considerations of age parameter in mate Selection
2. determine the frequency % of the considerations of age parameter in mate selection
3. determine the gender pattern of weightings of considerations of age parameter in mate Selection

Scope of the Study

The study was carried out in Anambra State of Nigeria. The subject matter was mate selection. The considerations of age parameter in mate selection was the main study variable. The researcher developed questionnaire was used to elicit responses from a sample of tertiary level student respondents. Percentage frequency, mean, standard deviation and ANOVA were the statistical tools used in the study.

Research Questions

1. What is the mean weighting of the subjects on the considerations of age parameter in mate selection?
2. What is the frequency % of the considerations of age parameter in mate selection?
3. What is the gender pattern of the weightings of the considerations of age parameter in mate selection?

Hypothesis

The null-hypothesis of no significant gender difference in their weightings of the considerations of age parameter in mate selection was tested in the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Framework

Age

Age in chronological terms is the number of completed years the individual has lived on earth. Age has both developmental and maturational effects that often determine the readiness for the individual to accomplish certain given tasks towards attaining the status of a mature adult. Age in chronological terms plays a mediatory role in fertility and reproductive vigour. Age per se tends to reflect the reproductive potential or fertility of the individual, and the generational divide psychologically (Nwankwo, 2016b).

Considerations of Age Parameter in Mate Selection

Age parameter in mate selection appears to be a reflection of both the chronological age of the individual as well as the psychological readiness to share his/her independence. Anagbogu, Nwachukwu and Nwudu (1995) see "youth as a stage, which bridges the transition between adolescence and adulthood" during which "people usually in their teens and twenties seem to prepare for adult responsibilities" - one of which is marriage. The period of youthfulness, as perceived by Anagbogu, Nwachukwu & Nwudu (1995), is for maturation and development of skills and competences. Thus the Nigerian youth has the right to live with the parents until he or she is able to complete his or her education and be in a position to build own family. Young people, especially males, have based their marriage readiness, "not upon chronological age but rather upon their readiness for independence" (Packard, 1970).

The age at which a person marries

does tell the chances for success as teenage marriages are high risks whereby a few succeed, most fail (Landis, 1977; Kieren, Henton, & Marotz, 1975; Papalia Olds & Feldman, 1989). In contrast, adults can more often carry marital responsibilities and find them a challenge to their stamina and to their self-image (Landis, 1977). In discussing the age when normal people are old enough to marry, Landis (1977) has prescribed that "the girl needs to be nearing twenty years" noting that the risks are less if she is older, but below nineteen years the chances of success and happiness are greatly reduced. "The boy is old enough when he is twenty-two years". His chances of success and happiness increase if older but greatly reduce if younger than twenty-two years. For Packard (1970) however, "the ideal age for girls to marry ranges from 21-26 yrs with a mean of 23.5yrs, while boys have 24-26 yrs range and a mean of 25yrs". In many societies, "there is a strong cultural pressure on women to marry older men and men to marry younger women" (Strean, 1980) and frequent warning to girls to "hurry before they lose out" (Packard, 1970). Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata (1994) posit that most people choose partners whose age is within 5 years of their own. Most women want to marry a man who is older than they are while most men want to marry a woman who is younger. Iredu, (1997) has warned that "a man should not marry a woman older than himself and certainly not out of sympathy".

In terms of evolutionary success, which translates into success in reproducing, men want to find mates who will likely bear children (Kelly, 2004). Michael, Gagnon, Laumann & Kolata (1994) are afraid that the older woman is

likely to have passed her most fertile period, so the younger man cannot look forward to having his own family. On the age difference of the pair, Landis (1977) observes that the husband is usually a year or so older than the wife adding that the father-daughter type of relationship may be established if the husband is much older than the wife with the wife risking early widowhood. A similar mother-son type of relationship could exist if the wife is a great deal older than the husband who might expect a childless marriage. Strean (1980) has explained that "many people marry with the unconscious purpose of finding a parent in which the man may seek an older woman in a son-mother type of relationship and the woman an older man in a daughter-father type of relationship".

According to Landis & Landis (1970) there is no evidence that a few years difference in the ages of the pair has any effect on happiness in marriage particularly as most men do marry girls 2 or 3 years younger than they. Nevertheless, there is a close relationship between early marriage and a high divorce rate (Landis & Landis, 1970).

Theoretical Framework

Parental image theory

People search for mates that remind them of their opposite sex- parents (Kelly, 2004). The boy, thus, seeks someone like his mother and the girl seeks someone like her father (Eckland, 1980). This reflects parental image theory of mate selection. Therefore, many people marry with the unconscious purposes of finding a parent-substitute. Thus the "woman may seek an older man who would treat her as a daughter reflecting daughter-father type of marital relationship. On the other hand, the man

may seek an older woman who would treat him as a son” (Strean, 1980) that reflects son-mother type of marital relationships. Besides, children are routinely brought up to believe that girls should marry someone older than younger than themselves while a man should be at least a little older than the woman he marries (Eckland 1980).

Like Attracts Like

There is a general notion that “likes attract” (Alvarez & Jaffe 2004) as people want mates who have qualities or characteristics similar to their own. Significant correlations exist between husband and wife on age, such that they look like siblings. The correlations are substantially higher among the stable couples. The closeness or similarity in age allows for reinforcement, consistency and social comparison.

Social Stratification and Class Endogamy Theory

The field of eligible mates is largely confined to the most immediate social networks involving friends, families, classmates and co-workers (Kelly, 2004). Social networks play a significant part in the process of mate selection as it affords the opportunity for self-verifying evaluations that are especially important in marriage (Swann, De La Ronde & Hixon, 1994). **Even within a large social network**, people still aggregate along age strata, such that the younger ones tend to cluster together. Persons from the same class (stratum) tend to marry because they share the same values which reflect class differences (Eckland, 1980). Santrock (2000) agrees that “similarity is rewarding as it validates our view of reality and makes it easier for us to

predict how the other person will behave”. Particularly for age, similarity reflects generational closeness that would ensure uniform fertility and aging process.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The Descriptive Survey Design was used in this study. Tertiary students in Anambra State were the study respondents. The data collected from a representative sample of the student respondents were analysed to find out how the age parameter is given the appropriate consideration in mate selection.

Area of the Study Anambra State was the area of the study, with a focus on the nine tertiary institutions. The instrument reliability was tested in one tertiary institution while two other institutions provided student samples for the actual study.

Population of the Study

The population studied was a total of 10,500 students comprising 4513 students of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe (Statistics Unit, Registrar's Office) and 5987 of Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University (formerly Anambra State University), Igbariam Campus (Registrar's Office).

Sample and Sampling Technique

The research sample was made up of 1000 students. By simple random sampling, Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe and Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University, Uli (then Anambra State University) were drawn out of the nine to constitute two

areas/clusters for the study. From each area/cluster a sample of 500 student respondents were drawn giving a total of 1000 for the two clusters. For the Nsugbe cluster, multi-stage random sampling method was used to first draw one school from the 6 schools. From that drawn school, one Department was drawn out of the constituent departments. From that drawn department, 500 respondents were selected purposively. A similar multi-stage random sampling method was carried out at Igbariam Campus to draw the 500 respondents for that cluster.

Instruments for Data Collection

The researcher-developed instrument used in this study designated as Considerations of Age Parameter in Mate Selection Questionnaire (CAMSQUE) with two sections in A-B format. Section A elicited information on the personal characteristics of the respondents. Section B elicited the weightings of the age parameter based on a 9-point expanded Likert-type scale.

Validation of the instrument: The face validation of the instrument was done by the team of experts who inspected the items to ascertain that they would adequately measure the considerations/weightings of age

RESULTS:

Table 1: Frequency and Mean Weighting of the Respondents on the Considerations of Age Parameter in Mate Selection

Parameter	Weights for Quantification									
	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	(\bar{x})
Age Considerations	328	137	104	99	114	104	38	42	34	6.59

Table 1: shows a mean weighting of 6.59 of considerations of age parameter in mate selection and a preponderance of weighting at the highest weighting point of 9 with a frequency of 32.8%.

parameter sought to be measured (Bernstein, Clark-Stuart, Roy Srull & Wickens, 1994; Okoye, 1996; Onunkwo, 2002) for mate selection capability.

Reliability of the Instrument

The validated research instrument was tested for reliability on 80 students of Federal College of Education Technical, Umuze. Cronbach alpha α reliability technique was used. The calculated Cronbach Alpha $\alpha = 0.86$ reliability coefficient was found to be “very high” using Nwana's (1979) Field Guide (Okoye, 1996).

Method of Data Collection

The research instrument was administered on the sample of 1000 students made up of 500 students of Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe, and 500 students of the Igbariam Campus. The class representatives assisted in the administration and recovery of the questionnaires.

Method of Data Analysis

Simple mean and percentage frequency were used in answering the research questions 1 and 2 while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used in testing the null hypotheses.

Subsequently, there is a very sharp drop that tapers towards the minimum weighting of 1.0. This tends to suggest the high level of premium attached to age considerations in mate selection.

Table 2: Frequency-% of Weighting of the Considerations of Age Parameter in Mate Selection

9-point weighting	Frequency	%	Cumulative %
Valid 9.00	328	32.8	32.8
8.00	137	13.7	46.5
7.00	104	10.4	56.9
6.00	99	9.9	66.8
5.00	114	11.4	78.2
4.00	104	10.4	88.6
3.00	38	3.8	92.4
2.00	42	4.2	96.6
1.00	34	3.4	100.0
Total	1000	100.0	

Table 2. shows that a total of 78.20% of the respondents weighted considerations of age above the scaling mid-point of 4.50 while a paltry 21.80% of the respondents rated below the mid-point. In fact a cumulative of more than 78.2% was from mid-scaling point and above.

Table 3: Mean and Std-Dev. of Gender Considerations of Age Parameter in Mate Selection

	GENDER		TOTAL
	Male	Female	
Mean	6.9696	6.4740	6.5880
N	230	770	1000
Std-Dev	2.3815	2.3674	2.3786

Table 3 hows that the mean weighting of age parameter for males as 6.97 as compared to the mean of 6.47 for females with the overall mean as 6.59. The mean for the males is higher than both the overall mean and that of the females which is slightly lower than the overall mean. The variability of the weighting by males is generally slightly higher than both the total and the females—that appear similar. The observed gender difference is subsequently tested for significance.

Table 4: ANOVA of Gender Considerations of Age Parameter in Mate Selection

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	Cal F	Crit F	P>0.05
Between Groups	43.489	1	43.489		3.84	S
Within Groups	5608.767	998	5.620	7.74		
Total	5652.256	999				

Table 4: shows that at .05 level of significance, 1df (numerator) and 998 df (denominator) the Calculated F 7.74 is greater than Critical F (3.84). Therefore, the null-hypothesis is rejected. Then the researchers concluded that there is significant gender difference in their weightings of considerations of age parameter in mate selection.

Summary of major findings

1. The respondents attach a high level of premium to age considerations in mate selection empirically evident in their mean weighting of 6.59
2. Most of the respondents (78.20%) weighted considerations of age above the scaling mid-point of 4.50
3. The mean weighting of considerations of age parameter for the males (6.99) is higher than both the overall mean (6.59) and that of the females (6.47) which is slightly lower than the overall mean
4. There is significant gender difference in their weightings of considerations of age parameter in mate selection: the males being higher than the females

DISCUSSIONS

The study respondents who are tertiary level students are certainly ripe enough for marriage as their age ranges fall within those suggested in the literature by Landis (1977) that the girl needs to be nearing 20 and the boy 22 years; and Packard (1970) that the ideal age range for girls is 21-26yrs and for boys 24-26yrs. The respondents seem to be fully conscious of their maturity for marriage by posting a mean weighting of

6.59 to age considerations in mate selection thereby attaching a very high level of premium to age parameter.

That 78.20% of the respondents weighted considerations of age above the scaling midpoint of 4.50 appears to reflect their concern for reproductive success and raising their own families. This is in apparent appreciation of Kelly's (2004) position that men want to find mates who would likely bear children, and Packard's (1970) warning to girls to hurry before they lose out.

The mean weighting of considerations of age parameter for the males (6.99) is higher than that of the females (6.47) and statistically significant. This may suggest that males are more concerned about finding females who are younger than them to beat Iredu's (1997) warning that a man should not marry a woman older than himself and certainly not out of sympathy. Besides, the males may be heeding the caution by Michael, Gagnon, Laumann and Kolata (1994) and Kelly (2004) that the older female is likely to have passed her most fertile period with the result that the younger male may not look forward to having his own family. However, the position of Michael et al (1994) that most people choose partners within 5-years of their own age may be consolatory given the difficulty for the male to always find a younger female to marry.

Counselling Implications

Heterosexual interpersonal relationships of tertiary level students and youths in general should be geared towards marriage. As a result, tertiary students should be adequately guided towards utilizing the age parameter in mate selection. Youths need not wait

further to ready themselves for marriage. It is apparent from this study that males desire to find younger females to marry. This may translate to older males settling for younger female students and female undergraduates settling for already graduate males.

The implications of the range of age difference between prospective mate selectors have to be brought to the full awareness of the youths in heterosexual inter-personal relationships. Within reasonable age range of 5-yrs, the male should strive to opt for a younger female who should in contrast go for an older male in order to ensure reproductive success.

Extreme age differences between suitors should be discouraged thereby urging individuals to ready themselves for marriage at reasonably young ages. Otherwise, father-daughter or mother-son types of marital relationships would result. Early widowhood may result in father-daughter type of marriage while child-deprivation is most likely in mother-son type of marital relationship.

Conclusion

The tertiary level students are certainly ripe enough for marriage as their age ranges fall within those suggested in the literature. The respondents seem to be fully conscious of their maturity for marriage by posting a mean weighting of 6.59 to age considerations in mate selection thereby attaching a very high level of premium to age parameter.

Most of the respondents (78.20%) reflect their concern for reproductive success and raising their own families by weighting considerations of age parameter above the scaling midpoint of 4.50. Thus men want to find mates who

would likely bear children.

The mean gender weighting of considerations of age parameter in mate selection is significantly higher for the males. Thus males appear to be more concerned about finding younger females to marry.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were proffered:

1. tertiary level students, particularly females, should ready themselves for marriage by taking cognizance of age parameter in their heterosexual interpersonal relationships;
2. heterosexual interpersonal relationships of tertiary level students and youths in general should be geared towards marriage; they should be encouraged to engage in marriage bound relationships;
3. prospective mate selectors should be properly guided on the import of large age disparity on reproductive success in marriage;
4. youths should be strongly guided against father-daughter or mother-son types of marital relationships that are inimical to marital success and happiness.

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