



Level of Education, Marital Longevity and Religion as Determinants of Marital Stability among Couples in Tamale Metropolis, Ghana

John N-yelbi ^{a*}, Sakina Acquah ^b, Yayra Dzakadzie ^c
and Peter Eshun ^c

^a Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Education, Winneba, Post Office Box 25, Winneba, West Africa, Ghana.

^b Department of Basic Education, University of Education, Winneba, Post Office Box 25, Winneba, West Africa Ghana.

^c Department of Educational Foundations, University of Education, Winneba, Post Office Box 25, Winneba, West Africa, Ghana.

Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration among all authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/AIR/2024/v25i31059

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/115086>

Original Research Article

Received: 26/01/2024

Accepted: 01/04/2024

Published: 09/04/2024

ABSTRACT

The study was a descriptive survey aimed at investigating couples' level of education, marital longevity and religion as determinants of marital stability among couples in the Tamale Metropolis. The population of the study were married couples drawn from the Metropolis who have been married for 1-25 years and could read and understand. A sample of 381 married couples aged between 30 to 50 years were drawn from the region using stratified random sampling. A

*Corresponding author: E-mail: jnyelbi@uew.edu.gh;

questionnaire was used to gather data for the study. Quantitative data was analysed by using one-way ANOVA. Hypothesis one revealed a statistically significant difference in marital stability of couples based on their level of education. Hypothesis two revealed a statistically significant difference in the length of marriage and marital stability of couples. For hypothesis 3, it was revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in marital stability among couples based on their religion. It was concluded that married couples' levels of education, how long they have been married and couples' religion were key determinants of marital stability among couples. It is therefore recommended that couples intending to marry should have some level of education to be able to effectively resolve conflicts during marriage. Also, couples should be educated on the need to stay longer in marriage despite conflicts and misunderstandings and adherence to religious practices, values and teachings on marriage should be adhered to.

Keywords: Level of education; marital longevity; religion; marriage; marital stability; determinants; couples; Tamale Metropolis; Ghana.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marriage, as an age-old institution, has some socio-demographic determinants that predict its stability. Dada and Idowu [1] reported some of the determinants as couples' educational level, the length of the marriage, and religion, where couples with less than a high school diploma had the lowest levels of marital stability. Thus, education broadens a person's horizons and teaches the individual to recognise and respect opposing viewpoints. These qualities are required in any stable marriage. As a result, the study hypothesised that when couples are categorised based on their educational attainment, there will be statistically significant differences in their marital stability [2].

Married couples by mutual consent are supposed to be compatible, devoted, and understanding in order to guarantee marital stability. The institution of marriage stands for all the conduct, expectations, roles, and moral principles connected to married couples' legal union [3]. Marriage is primarily an institution in which interpersonal interactions, typically intimate and sexual activity, are recognised. The definition of marriage differs depending on the culture [4]. Generally, marriage is regarded as a cultural and universal phenomenon, and in many cultures, it is typically established by a marriage ceremony. Aidoo-Dadzie [5] argued that matrimony, mostly referred to as wedlock, is a legally binding union between two people that establishes rights and duties for the couple, their children, their in-laws, and society at large. Social acceptance of the union exists. Marriage as a type of negotiation begins with a proclamation of the desire to marry. There are as many varieties of the custom in Ghana as there are ethnic groups.

Globally, the rate of marital instability is on the rise [6,7]. In Ghana, for instance, over 30% of households are headed by single parents [8]. Marital stability is the state in which married spouses live together in harmony that benefits both of them and society as a whole [9]. Modernisation has had a negative impact on African marriage stability, contributing to increased marital insecurity [6,10]. Children from unstable marriages characterised by divorce, conflicts and separations are more likely to engage in social deviances like bullying, fighting, stealing, and other disruptive behaviours. This is due to the possibility that their physiological, safety, and social needs will be jeopardised [10].

Barikani et al. [11] espoused that marital maladjustment and divorce was lower among highly educated couples. Similarly, Ojukwu et al. [3] attested that college educated men and women high levels of education predicted their marital stability. Relatedly, Kurdek [12] agreed that husbands and spouses with statistically significant lower levels of education had fewer stable marriages. Phillips and Sweeney [13] also shared a similar view that divorce rates are lower among highly educated women, even when age at marriage is controlled for. Most of the previous research on marital stability and its socio-demographic determinants were undertaken in Western civilizations, with less emphasis on developing countries such as Ghana. This could not adequately explain how socio-demographic variables such as spouse education level, marriage longevity, and couples' religion contributed to marital instability in Ghana. Many factors influence the marital institution, including marriage age, the educational level of spouses, and religion [2]. Zianah et al. [14] affirmed that demographic factors such as length of marriage, presence of children, and gender have a

significant impact on couples' marital stability. Usoroh et al. [15] discovered that educational attainment has a substantial influence on marital stability among civil servants in Nigeria's Akwa Ibom State.

Additionally, Vaughlin et al. [16] found that marriages are more stable when couples have been married for a longer period of time, have not previously divorced, grew up in intact households, had a child during the interval, and the wife did not marry at a young age. Webbo et al. [17] are of the opinion that religious couples are more likely to have stable and happy marriages. They are also less likely to suffer conflict, violence, or divorce, maybe because religion provides couples with theologically grounded instructions for dealing with marital conflicts when they emerge. Nevertheless, the extent to which socio-demographic factors such as couples' level of education, marital longevity and religion have contributed to marital stability among couples in the Northern Region of Ghana seem not to have received much attention.

Similarly, if all the couples are highly educated, it is likely they will have a lower rate of marital maladjustment and divorce than low-educated couples [11]. As a result, college-educated men and women had particularly high levels of marital stability. Kurdek [12] carried out a 5-year longitudinal research on newlywed couples to better predict marital breakup. The findings revealed that husbands and wives with statistically lower levels of education had fewer stable marriages and were more likely to divorce. This could be due to fact that when couples have low levels of education, they may have limited knowledge in handling the views of their married partners, inability to deal with interference from their spouse's family, overly being dependent on their married partners, difficulty handling spousal cultural differences, and are likely to have issues of sexual challenges as compared to both couples being highly educated who may be well enlightened in handling such issues. Orbuch et al. [18] affirmed that education level predicted divorce for African American and Caucasian spouses, as well as Caucasian husbands; higher education reduced the risk of divorce, conflicts and separation. This means that a higher level of education leads to greater stability. Other studies have found a link between educational attainment and marital happiness [19,20,21]. Usoroh et al. [15] findings supported the assertion that education has a significant impact on marital stability among civil officials in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

On the other hand, the length of time that has passed from the day of marriage is referred to as marital longevity, and it is employed as a life cycle statistic [22]. In the literature, marital duration has been identified as a potential determinant in marital stability. According to Peleg [23] marital lifespan is especially important because family duration has been shown to be one of the most important characteristics pertaining to marriage stability. Marriages contracted within the first 1 year may have some cohesion, but marriages contracted over 25 years may also experience some pleasant moments [23].

It is worthy to note that previous research found that longer-term marriages have more positive relationships and fewer negative interactions [24]. Some studies reported that marital longevity is associated with marital stability [25]. Kulik, (2004). Some older couples' sexual intimacy has been found to be enhanced as their marriages last longer, hence promoting marital stability [12,26]. Relationship satisfaction is also expected to follow a curvilinear pattern over time, declining in the early years of marriage and increasing in the later years [27]. Rosen-Grandon et al. [28] found that gender and length of marriage had a significant impact on marital stability. Also, Vaughlin et al. [16] corroborated the assertion that marriages are more stable when couples have been married for a longer period of time, have not previously divorced, grew up in intact households, had a kid during the interval, and the wife did not marry at a young age.

Similarly, another finding from some cross-sectional studies corroborate the findings of Umberson et al. [29] that marital stability is high in the early pre-parental years, falls throughout the middle parental period, and then increases again during the latter post-parental period of married life Peleg, [23]. Jalovaara [22] argued that we may expect divorce rates to naturally drop as partners get older and their marriages stay longer. The author added that divorce should be more costly for long-term couples since spouses' material and intangible marriage-related investments can act as barriers to separation.

Besides, a plethora of researchers have found religion to be a significant determinant of marriage stability [30,31]. Bradbury et al. [32] posited that the Holy Books state that marriage must be founded on equality, friendship, and the

couples' love for these elements will result in a happy and stable marriage. As a result, those who adhere to Islamic beliefs are predicted to have greater marital adaptability, as religiosity is one of the major pillars of a happy existence. A person who neglects religious responsibilities may also neglect marriage responsibilities to the married partner and children [32]. Recent studies suggests that when moral values decline in a society, promiscuity increases, patriarchal ethical values as well as childrearing by both parents gradually fade, and separation, abortion, illegitimate children, prostitution, disloyalty, and extramarital relations take their place (Ahmadi et al., 2008).

Several studies have been conducted to demonstrate the relationship between religion and marriage. In a study of heterosexual couples who had been married for roughly nine years, it was discovered that Catholic spouses who were committed to fulfilling their religious ceremonies, such as Mass attendance, were more contented Fieses & Tomcho, [31] and so, had more stable marriages. Bumpass [33] examined the effect of religious composition in partnerships as a factor of marital stability using data from the 1987-1988 National Survey of Families and Households. With the exception of Mormons and people who do not identify as religious, stability was found to be very similar throughout the various types of homogamous marriage.

Webbo et al. [17] conducted a qualitative study using face-to-face interviews with nine participants in Kenya who had been identified as practicing Christians. The findings indicated that specific attributes related to religiosity like individual and partner prayer, reading the Bible, and church attendance impacted participants and their spouses' lives positively and, in turn, their experiences in marriage. The authors added that religious practices were indicated by participants to evoke attributes such as perseverance, forgiveness, and humility, which aided them in maintaining marriage decision making process, resulting in marital stability. Studies emphasize the role of religion in improving emotional intimacy, which is associated to higher marital satisfaction and stability [34]. Also, if a couple's religion emphasizes the value of marriage, spouses may be more committed to the marriage [35]. Besides, some religions emphasize gender roles and the importance of a gender-based division of labour Peri-Roten, [36] and these attitudes that favour division of labour increase reliance on marriage partners and contribute to marital stability.

Finally, religious prohibitions on non-marital sex may operate as a barrier to divorce by lowering the acceptability of non-marital sex both before and after marriage [3].

Ojukwu et al. [3] researched into impact of educational attainment on marital stability among married persons in Imo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that there was a positive relationship between married person's low and high levels of educational attainment and marital stability while there was no significant relation between those with medium level of educational attainment and their marital stability. Moreover, Kraft and Neimann [37] conducted a related study on impact of educational and religious homogamy on marital stability using a panel data and the results indicated homogamy per ser does not increase marital stability but higher education and religiousness. However, in this present study, level of education, marital longevity and religiosity will be investigated as determinants of marital stability.

The Northern Region of Ghana is a Region with high illiteracy rate and Tamale Metropolis is not an exception. In the past, there existed a glass ceiling effect, which previously limited female participation in school with only a few of the males having the opportunity to formal education. This phenomenon resulted in most young men and women entering into marriages having no level of education and also not understanding the tenets of their religion. As a result, most of the inhabitants enter into marriage for a few years and if issues of misunderstandings, conflicts and infidelity sets in; divorce, separation or marital dissolution was the available option with its dire consequences. Recently, education is now a priority in the Region and most of the inhabitants also now adhered to religious practices. In view of this, marital instability in the Region has seen a significantly reduction from the statistics obtained from the 2023 Metropolitan Assembly records.

However, with the dawn of enlightenment, the phenomenon of unstable marriages is rapidly fading in the Tamale Metropolis and it appears that a greater number of both men and women are pursuing higher education and there seem to relatively stable marriages within the Metropolis. The posers that come to mind are that, could this relative stability in marriages within the Metropolis be as a result of couples' level of education? Is it due to how long the couples have been married? Is this as a result of religion?

It is on the basis of this that this study was set out to investigate whether couples' level of education, their marital longevity and religiosity has any influence on couples' couples' level of education, their marital longevity and religiosity has any influence on their marital stability in the Tamale Metropolis in the Northern Region of Ghana.

1.1 Research Hypotheses

1. **H₀**: There is no statistically significant differences in marital stability of couples based on their level of education in the Tamale Metropolis.
H₁: There is a statistically significant differences in marital stability of couples based on their level of education in the Tamale Metropolis.
2. **H₀**: There is no statistically significant differences in marital stability based on marital longevity of couples in the Tamale Metropolis.
H₁: There is a statistically significant differences in marital stability based on marital longevity of couples in the Tamale Metropolis.
3. **H₀**: There is no statistically significant differences in marital stability of couples based on their religion in the Tamale Metropolis.
H₁: There is a statistically significant differences in marital stability of couples based on their religion in the Tamale Metropolis.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey design of data collection. The researchers measured the variable of interest as they had occurred and there was no conscious attempt to manipulate any of the variables that were measured in the study. The population of the study were married couples drawn from the Metropolis who have been married for 1-25 years and could read and understand. A sample of 381 married couples aged between 30 to 50 years were drawn from the Metropolis using stratified random sampling. The Metropolis is located in the central part of the Region and shares boundaries with Sagnarigu District to the west and north, Mion District to the east, East Gonja to the south and Central Gonja to the south-west. 11 years and above constitute 60.1% literates and 39.9% non-literates [8]. The proportion of literate males (69.2%) is higher than that of females (51.52%).

The instrument of data collection was an adopted marital stability questionnaire of 24-items. It is in the Likert format, with responses ranging from 'Never' (1) – 'Very Often' (5). An alpha reliability of 0.83 was established for this study. Data was personally collected by the researchers and the sample consisted of couples who were still staying in their marriages. Prior arrangements were made with the couples and places of convergence such as churches and mosques were used for this purpose. Participants were duly informed of the purpose of the study and voluntary nature of their participation. They were further informed that they could voluntarily withdraw from the study at any point in time. Verbal consent was sought from participants and they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The questionnaire was administered and collected back the same day. The approximate time of response to the questionnaire was 25 minutes. Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 were analysed using one-way ANOVA.

3. RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

There will be statistically significant differences in marital stability of couples based on their level of education in the Tamale Metropolis.

A one-way between group analysis of variance was conducted to examine the impact of level of education on marital stability as measured by a structured questionnaire. Subjects were divided into three groups according to the levels of their education (Level 1: Basic; Level 2: SHS/TVET and Level 3: College). There was a statistically significant differences at the $p < .05$ level in the questionnaire for the three levels of education [$F(3, 378) = 26.881, P = .000$]. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The actual effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .02. Post-hoc test comparison using the Tukey HSD test was used to determine which set of marriage couples differed statistically in terms of their education. The ANOVA test in Table 2 indicated that the differences in reported means for Basic Level was statistically significant ($F(3, 378) = 26.881, P = .000$) from SHS/TVET and College Levels.

Hypothesis 2

There will be statistically significant differences in marital stability based on marital longevity of couples in the Tamale Metropolis.

A one-way between group analysis of variance was conducted to assess the impact of marital longevity on marital stability as measured by a structured questionnaire. Participants were divided into three groups according to how long they have been in marriage (Group 1: 1-5 years; Group 2: 6-10 years; Group 3: 11-15 years; Group 4: 16-20 years and Group 5: 21-25 years). There was a statistically significant difference at $p < .05$ length in the questionnaire for the five length of marriage [F (5, 376 = 6.152, P < .001)]. Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The actual effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .02. Post-hoc test comparison using the Tukey HSD test was used to determine which set of marriage couples differed statistically in terms of their education.

Results of a post-hoc test using Tukey HSD was used to determine which set of marriage couples differed statistically in terms of marital longevity. The ANOVA test in Table 4 revealed that the differences in reported means approached statistical significance (F (5, 376 = 6.152, P < .001).

Table 4 shows that there are differences in mean scores between participants who have been married for 21 years or more and those who have been married for 1-5 years (MD = 6.233,

SE = 2.134, P < .43), 6-10 years (MD = 9.673, SE = 2.078, P < .001), and 11-15 years (MD = 8.226, SE = 2.196, P < .003).

Hypothesis 3

There will be statistically significant differences in marital stability of couples in the Tamale Metropolis based on their religion.

As shown in Table 5, participants with Traditional religion experience low level of marital stability (M = 80.56, SD = 17.49). Participants with Islamic faith experienced relatively high marital stability (M = 86.49, SD = 18.96). Participants with Christian faith seemed to enjoy increased amount of marital stability (M = 90.34, SD = 17.56). It can therefore be concluded that there are differences in the reported marital stability mean scores of the participants with respect to participants' religion in the Metropolis. Table 6 presents One-way ANOVA test to determine whether differences in the reported means have reached statistical significance.

A one-way between group analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of religion on marital stability as measured by a structured questionnaire. Participants were divided into three groups according to their religion (Religion 1: Traditional; Religion 2: Islamic and Religion 3: Christianity). There was a statistically significant

Table 1. One-way ANOVA of level of education and marital stability

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4732.623	3	1577.541	26.881*	.000
Within Groups	22183.243	378	58.686		
Total	26915.866	381			

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed)
Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 2. Tukey HSD post-Hoc test of level of education and marital stability

Level of Education		Mean Difference	Sig.
Graduates	Basic	8.550*	.000
	SHS/TVET	6.896*	.000
	College	4.141*	.004

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed)
Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 3. One-way ANOVA test for marital longevity and marital stability

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2035.382	5	407.076	6.152*	.000
Within Groups	24880.484	376	66.172		
Total	26915.866	381			

* $p < .05$ (2-tailed)
Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 4. Tukey HSD post-Hoc test for marital longevity and marital stability of couples

Marital Longevity	Mean Difference	Sig.
1-5 years	6.233*	.043
6-10 years	9.673*	.000
11-15 years	8.226*	.003
16-20 years	6.665	.072
21-25 years	2.686	.982

*p<.05 (2-tailed)

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of marital stability

Religion	N	Level of Marital Stability		
		Mean	SD	Std. Error
Traditional	43	80.56	17.49	1.14
Islamic	59	86.49	18.96	1.17
Christianity	280	90.34	17.56	1.45

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 6. One-way ANOVA test of religion and marital stability

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3886.073	2	1943.037	31.976*	.000
Within Groups	23029.793	372	60.765		
Total	26915.866	381			

*p<.05 (2-tailed)

Source: Field Data (2023)

Table 7. Tukey HSD post-Hoc test of religion and marital stability

	(I) Religion	(J) Religion	Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.
Tukey HSD	African tradition	Islamic	-5.933*	.001
		Christian	-9.778*	.000
	Islamic	African tradition	5.933*	.001
		Christian	-3.844*	.002
	Christian	African tradition	9.778*	.000
		Islamic	3.844*	.002

Source: Field Data (2023)

differences at the p<.05 level in the questionnaire for the three groups of religion [F (2, 372) = 31.976, P<.001). Despite reaching statistical significance, the actual difference in mean scores between the groups was quite small. The actual effect size, calculated using eta squared, was .02. Post-hoc test comparison using the Tukey HSD test was used to determine which set of marriage couples differed statistically in terms of their religion.

The ANOVA test in Table 6 showed that the differences in the reported means have reached statistical significance (F (2,372) = 31.976, p<.001) and were not due to chance. To check where differences in the means are located in the distribution, the Post-Hoc test was performed on the data and it is presented in Table 7 above.

The Post-Hoc test in Table 7 revealed that, there are differences in reported means. The results revealed that there is an inverse difference in the means of African Traditionalists and Islamic participants (MD = -5.118, SE = 1.563, p<.001). Similarly, an inverse mean difference was reported between African Traditionalists and Islamic participants (MD = -9.778, SE = 1.277, p<.001). Also, there are differences in the mean scores of Islamic participants and African Traditionalists (MD = 5.933, SE = 1.563, p<.001) and participants with Christian faith (MD = -3.844, SE = 1.117, p<.001).

Finally, when Christian faith is used as the yardstick, then significant mean differences are also established. From the results, it showed that the mean difference between the Christians and

African Traditionalists is significant (MD = 9.778, SE = 1.278, $p < .001$) and that of Christians and Muslims is significant (MD = 3.844, SE = 1.117, $p < .001$). The hypothesis is therefore accepted because the computed significance levels were less than the set value of 0.05. The results indicate that stability of marriage increases in tandem with religion of couples.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings from the analysis show that couples' level of education, marital longevity and religion significantly predicted marital stability among couples in the sample. Level of education increase couples' level of understanding and appreciating of each other's contribution and sacrifices made to sustain their marriages. However, if there are conflicts, because of enlightenment from education, couples are able to handle and resolve their marital differences better, hence leading to more stable marriages. Another possible explanation is that couples understand the effects of unstable marriages on the upbringing of their children, and this could account for them learning to make sacrifices and commitments to keep their marriage intact. The findings confirmed Barikani et al. [11] who reported that marital maladjustment and divorce was lower among highly educated couples. This assertion is further supported by Ojukwu et al. [3] who affirmed that college educated men and women have high levels of marital stability. Relatedly, Kurdek [12] agreed that husbands and spouses with statistically significant lower levels of education had fewer stable marriages. The findings are further corroborated with Phillips and Sweeney [13] who posited that divorce rates are lower among highly educated women, even when age at marriage is controlled for.

Additionally, the results revealed that marital longevity was a key determinant of marital stability of couples in the sample. As couples stay together for a long time, they begin to understand their unique strengths and weaknesses as individuals who have something good to contribute to the sustenance of their marriage. Marital instability appears to be a significant expense for long-term couples because the tangible and intangible marriage-related investments made by couples during these years can operate as an anchor for secure relationships. This finding supports an earlier study by Charles and Carstensen [27] which showed that marriage stability only declines in the early years but improve in later years. This is

further affirmed by Jansen et al. (2006) who found that long-term marriage increased sexual intimacy in older couples leading to marital stability among couples. This is due to the fact that the longer the marriage, the more stable and sexually satisfying it will be for the couples. Furthermore, there may be a lot of personal sacrifices, resulting in some relative degree of marriage stability.

Moreover, considering religion and marital stability of couples, it was revealed that religion greatly determines the marital stability of couples in the sample. Many previous studies focused on and investigated the idea that the relationship between religiosity level and marital satisfaction is positively associated; more religious married couples have a happier, more stable married life compared with other couples. Findings from the analysis shows lack of respect, lack of responsibility, differences in decision-making, family interference, differences in values and beliefs, infidelity, and miscommunication were identified as reasons for the breakdown of marriages among young couples. Traditionally, marriages in Ghana were arranged by the parents of the couple, who would select a suitable partner based on their family background, financial stability, and social status. However, in modern times, many Ghanaians choose to marry for love, and the decision is often made by the couple themselves.

An explanation that could be advance for this is that religion is founded on good morals, values and practices. Marriage instability is an affront of couples' religion. The findings are in line with a study by Webbo et al. [17] which indicated that participation in Christian religious practices such as prayers, reading of the bible and church attendance impacted participants and their spouses' lives positively and, in turn, and their experiences in marriage. Engaging in religious practices may elicit qualities like perseverance, forgiveness, and humility, which can assist them in keeping their marriages stable. The result is also in support of the findings that there is a positive relationship between religion and marital happiness, and that couples who attend church together and participate in religious activities are more patient with each other, more forgiving, quicker to get over anger and more supportive in their relationship [9].

Yusuf [38] concurred that the Qur'an mentioned that marriages must be based on equality, friendship and love of the couple. Those who are

faithful to Islamic values will have more marital adjustability, for religiosity is one of the main pillars of a happy life in Islam. Individuals who do not perform their religious duties might as well ignore to perform their marital duties toward their spouses and children. It can be deduced that many marriages in the Tamale Metropolis are entered within similar religion. Religious compatibility may create a bond between a husband and wife that enhances marital satisfaction, and feeling of greater commitment to the marriage [39].

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to the study's findings, there are considerable inequalities in the degree of education and marital stability of couples in Tamale Metropolis. As a result, married couples with a higher level of education have more stable marriages than married couples with a lower level of education. Hence, more marriages will achieve high levels of stability as couples pursue higher education in colleges and universities. This has the potential to raise the general literacy level of residents of Tamale Metropolis. Also, it is worth noting that couples seek information and services to help them maintain their marriages. It is therefore recommended that couples intending to marry should have some level of education to be able to effectively resolve conflicts during marriage.

Furthermore, the study revealed that there are disparities in the marital longevity and marital stability of couples in Tamale Metropolis. Therefore, there is stability in marriage among couples during the first 1 year and after 25 years. As a result, during the tumultuous years of their marriage, couples would re-evaluate their acts and behaviours in the marital union in order to adhere to social order and natural justice. It is however recommended that; couples should be educated on the need to stay longer in marriage to enhance marital stability despite conflicts and misunderstandings.

Additionally, it emerged from the findings that religion still represents one of the potent forces in cementing marriages. Religious beliefs, norms and customs are good control measures that are helping to check against vicious display of brutality and infidelity in marriages. The emergent overall concept was that religiosity impacted the marital relationship by inspiring positive attitudes and attributes within the

individuals and it therefore recommended that, couples should adhere to religious practices, values and teachings on marriage.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING PRACTICE

This study has important consequences for married couples, marriage counsellors, clergy, and society as a whole. Marriage counsellors should be more visible and accessible to married couples and those preparing for marriage. In the Tamale Metropolis, marriage counselling for couples and those intending to get married are usually administered by clergy, imams and traditional authorities who lack the essential skills, techniques and theoretical foundations to be able to assess and offer appropriate interventions to couples. Counsellors and psychologists within the Metropolis should complement the efforts made by these Christians, Muslims and Traditionalist by providing both pre-marital and post-marital counselling in order to build more stable marriages within the Metropolis.

Furthermore, marriage counsellors should also emphasise marital sustenance when providing counselling to unstable couples. This is because if couples are counselled to recognise their flaws in marriage, marital conflict stemming from marital discontent will be lessened and marriage bonds would be strengthened, hence, couples will be less susceptible to marital instability.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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