

How to Assess the Stability Status of Your Marriage

Dr. Eliud O. Oyoo, PhD.

Department of Psychology and Science Education, Rongo University

Abstract: The marriage institution ideally is expected to be stable, full of love and care for each other. However, the holy institution seems to be under attack from several quarters and is in serious problems as is evidenced by increased marital violence, high divorce rates, numerous separations and many other family problems. By all standards, the desire to marry or get married and hence stay in the institution is still statistically significant in all human kind. This study investigated perceptions of marriage counselors on protective factors of marriage stability, how to detect the stability status of any marriage and hence fix the marriage problem. It was a cross-sectional survey research design done under mixed method research approaches as well as document analysis. The sample comprised 123 participants drawn from church ministers, church elders, advocates of marriage and marriage counselors. A questionnaire developed by the researcher was used in data collection. Check list was used for filtering key themes from past document research analysis. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics-means and percentages. Qualitative data was analyzed by synchronizing developing themes from research document analysis. Ethical considerations were strictly observed to the acceptable standards of behavioural sciences. Protective factors of marriage stability were identified as: Fidelity, sexual satisfaction, Respect and honor, presence of biological children of the desired sex, narrow difference in educational level between the married partners, financial ability of the couple especially the husband, ease of communication between the married partners, similarities in cultural attitudes and that of their close friends, dialogue conflict resolution approach, commitment to common spiritual beliefs, healthy and well groomed married partners especially the wife, creation and planning time for each other, loving intimacy, narrow age gap and legalizing the marriage. Marriage stability assessment tool was developed and generally accepted to be efficient in predicting the stability status of any marriage. The instrument can be used to diagnose any unique problem of any marriage and hence through competent counseling offered to willing marriage partners, their marriage can be rejuvenated to a near stable and happy institution.

Key words: Marriage stability, marriage dissolution, divorce, couple, satisfaction

I. INTRODUCTION

Many marriages are instituted through the prevailing religious doctrines, legislative laws, cohabitation or the customary system of marriage of persons of the opposite sex which all stand for prevalence and hence the stability of the marriages. There has been a marked increase in divorce rates in most Western societies over the last 50 years (Gun-Mette, Kari, Espen & Kristian, 2013). In Africa, though the marriages are a bit stable compared to the Western world, many of these marriages are increasingly getting into a state of turmoil as is evidenced by increased marital violence, high divorce rates and numerous separations among other family

problems. Even then, people still have the desire to marry, many are still marrying and many others still staying in marriage.

Research findings by Gun-Mette, Kari, Espen and Kristian (2013) show that on average married people enjoy better and physical health than do unmarried people. Relationship dissolution is associated with negative consequences both for adults and children; therefore it is important to develop a frame-work of assessing the stability status of any marriage at any time with the aim of making them stable through necessary adjustments. Reza, Maryam and Abbas (2019) note that due to high prevalence of divorce in numerous countries and the detrimental aftermath thereof, it has become increasingly important to develop an assessment tool to help indicate if marriage is on the path of divorce.

According to Killewald (2016), despite a large literature investigating how spouses' earnings and division of labor relate to their risk of divorce, findings remain mixed and conclusions elusive on how to fix the many unique marriage problems. The stability of marriage institution is further compounded by many core unresolved issues which include: Effects of economic empowerment of women on marriage stability, early differential sexual exposure on marriage stability and the presence or absence of children on marriage stability. These and other aspects of marriage from several research documents need to be conclusively investigated so as to provide a reference point to those with marriage difficulties.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To investigate protective factors of marriage stability.
2. To diagnose and fix marriage problems.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

It was a mixed research method approach, which was conducted using a cross-sectional survey design as well as document analysis. The study targeted officers that dealt with marriage issues and document analysis of marriage research findings. These sources were expected to provide the information needed for this research. The respondents included church elders, church ministers, advocates of marriage and marriage counselors. These respondents were identified as the usual handlers and facilitators of marriage disputes in Homa Bay County, Kenya. Table 3.1 shows the target and sample population involved in the study.

Table 3.1: Population involved in the study

Stratum	Target Population Size	Sample Population Size
Church Elders	100	80
Church Ministers	20	20
Advocates of Marriage	8	8
Marriage Counsellors	15	15
Total	143	123

The research adopted random sampling method. Sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula. Questionnaire and check list were used to collect data. Quantitative data collected was analyzed descriptively while secondary data collected was analyzed into the emerging themes through concept mapping. The analyzed data were then used to design and construct the instrument used for assessing marital stability.

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

The research question of this study stated was: ‘What are the protective factors of marriage stability?’ To answer this question, the respondents were asked to rank the given factors in a scale of 1-5 on the extent of contribution of the factor to marriage stability. The items with positive direction were scored thus: Very essential = (5); Essential = (4); Sometimes = (3); Rarely = (2); No effect = (1).

The highest possible score for any respondent in the instrument is 75; (5x15). And the lowest possible score for any respondent using the instrument is 15; (1x15). The range score is 60; (75-15), thus the mid-point is 30; making the cut-off point to be 75 and 60; that’s maximum score minus the mid-point of the range 75-30 = 45. This means that respondents who scored 60 to 75 were considered to have highest perception of factors influencing marital stability and hence had stable marriages, while those with a score of below 34 have the lowest perception and hence such marriage is destined to break up.

Table 4.1 presents the perceived common protective factors of marriage stability. Each respondent is expected to honestly fill it by ranking the factors in relation to their marriage and then work out their score. The respondent rank the factor based on his/her perception of the partner.

Table 4.1 Instrument for determination of marital stability status

Serial No.	Marital protective factor	1	2	3	4	5
1	Fidelity/Faithfulness					
2	Sexual satisfaction for each marriage partner					
3	Respect, honour & care (Absence of violence / drug abuse)					
4	Presence of biological children and desired sex of children					
5	Narrow difference in educational level, type of occupation					
6	Financial ability of couple, economic ability of each partner					

7	Ease of communication between marriage partners					
8	Similarity in cultural attitudes, attitudes of close friends					
9	Dialogue conflict resolution approach between the couple					
10	Commitment spirituality or common religious beliefs of couple					
11	Health status, level of grooming, strive to be smart & beautiful					
12	Creation & planning of time for each other, living together					
13	Intimate couple / Level of love between the couple					
14	Narrow age gap between couple and influence of close friends					
15	Legalizing marriage, commitment to the marriage institution					
	Total Score					

Key

- 15 – 24 Marriage break up
- 25 – 34 unstable marriage
- 35 – 44 averagely stable marriage
- 45 – 54 Stable marriage
- 55 – 75 Very stable marriage

The usefulness of the instrument is more when each of the marriage partners fills the instrument honestly and independently, then their scores are averaged probably in the presence of a trusted marriage counselor. If the couple are concerned and are willing to save their marriage, then they can further be counseled on areas to be worked on.

Where only one member of the couple is concerned, then he/she can fill the instrument twice and at different time intervals. In the first instance, fill the instrument from his or her perspective on how he/she perceive each of the factors on the marriage stability. In the second instance (after one week) fills it on how he/she perceive each of the factors on how the marriage partner views the marriage. The two scores are averaged and that becomes the marital stability score. With proper counseling, the partner can start working on the amendment programme or at least prepare psychologically for the expected destiny of that marriage.

The respondents were asked to give their views on how they perceive the effectiveness of the instrument in predicting the marriage stability status of any marriage. The answers are analyzed in table 4.2.

Table 4.2 Perceptions on the predictability of the marital status assessment tool

Stratum	Total No.	Number in agreement	% Efficiency
Church Elders			
Church Ministers	80	59	73.75
Advocates of Marriage	20	15	75
Marriage	8	5	62.5
Marriage	15	12	80
Counselors	123	91	72.81
Total			

Marriage counselors had the highest perception (80%) that if the marriage assessment instrument is correctly used will predict correctly the marital status of any marriage. All the respondents however, perceive that the instrument can correctly be used to diagnose the unique problems of any marriage. With proper diagnosis of any marriage problem, the marriage partners can be counseled in order to amend areas of weakness so that the marriage can be rejuvenated to progress towards threshold stability status.

Most respondents as well as documented marriage research findings perceive that marriage can easily break where infidelity exist, particularly when the wife is found to be the victim. This is strongly supported by the United State conference for Catholic Bishops (2017), which noted that adultery is gravely sinful because it violates God's call to a loving covenant of fidelity between a married man and woman. The act of adultery is an injustice to the wounded spouse. It weakens the institution of marriage and the stability of the family. In a marriage squabble where this is their weak point of reference, emphasis should be carefully focused on fixing this anomaly.

Both the marriage partners must get their sexual satisfaction from each other if the marriage is to be stable. Sexual satisfaction in marriage depends on a number of factors which include: past sexual experience of each couple, low performance in sex, varying bed room lifestyle and wide age gaps between the married couple. Gun-Mette, Kari, Espen and Kristian, (2013) note that except for younger female age, relationship dissatisfaction in women and lower education in men, have been found to be the strongest predictors of relationship dissolution. Older men married to very young women normally lead to sexual dissatisfaction. Common reason for this is that they are rich and too busy but lacks the energy for sexual satisfaction of their generally younger wives. Medium aged men though have the energy to sexually satisfy their younger wives are averagely rich and too busy to rise to the occasion. This was perceived to make some idle and dissatisfied wives to seek for solution elsewhere. Young men are too broke, not busy but have the energy for sexual satisfaction. They therefore act as ready solution to mature sexually dissatisfied women. For marriage to be stable, the couple should openly discuss their sexual life and history with the aim of understanding each other and helping each other to reach their satisfaction level.

For marriage to be stable there should be respect and honor for each other. Influence of drugs has resulted in violence in marriage which can easily lead to the weaker sex running away or being tormented in the marriage institution. Eastman (2016), note that marriages often breakdown largely as a result of problems associated with alcohol, drugs and gambling. These lead to economic drain as well as domestic violence. Marriage couples that are normally caught up in this situation should be helped to re-focus on respect and honor for each other. Those that are drug addicts should be introduced into agreeable rehabilitation programs.

Success of any marriage in the African context is dependent on the presence of biological children. The presence of a male child in the marriage helps to fix the marriage and hence make it more stable. Barren women are normally frustrated in the marriage and hence normally run away or sent away from their marital homes. Eastman (2016) note that the birth of a disable child can easily make some men to walk out of the marriage. Marriage couples caught up in this web of problems should be advised to seek genetic counseling. In the modern society and with advanced technology such inabilities can be overcome.

Difference in educational level of the marriage partners affects marriage stability. Men tend to feel insecure if their wives advance in education than them and this can easily lead to marriage break up. At the same time many women who tend to advance their education when their husbands are not making any attempt, tend to despise their husbands and often elope with other more educated men. Eastman (2016) also notes that work practices which are family unfriendly can reduce the ability of couples to resolve differences. Some employers refuse to recognize that workers have family responsibilities. Men should where possible advance their education when they notice their wives are anticipating doing so. This will make them feel secure and hence stabilize the marriage.

Many marriages become stable with good financial ability. The man should not only be financially stable but more stable than the wife. Killewald (2016) note that men's economic circumstances remain crucial for marriage formation and stability. Females cannot easily accept divorce unless they are certain of their economic status after divorce. Certain occupations encourage marriage break ups, especially occupations that tend to make partners stay far from each other or that dictate working in odd hours. Many women despise men who cannot financially fix their marriage obligation (Eastman, 2016). Financial strains are a major factor in marriage breakdown. In cases where the woman is more financially stable than the husband, she can find ways of empowering the husband in order to bridge the economic gap and hence make the marriage stable.

Ease of communication between married partners is key to marriage stability. Smooth communication with understanding, coupled with respect for one another enhances stability in marriage. Kabali (2006) opined that marriage partners should always express their emotions appropriately to each other and should also adopt open mutual negotiation dialogues about finances, sexuality and set clear boundaries with in-laws. Signs of a soon ending marriage are when there is no communication or using silence treatment for each other. Stable marriages require constant appreciation for each other.

Each marriage partner brings into the marriage institution an attitude which is largely influenced by cultural background. The individual attitude is often influenced by the attitudes of close friends. Some marriages have been destroyed by the

influence of close friends. Some marriage partners talk too much without giving room to listen to the other opinion, this is dangerous. Eastman (2016) note that proponents of radical feminism have been hostile to the institutions of marriage and family. Feminists see divorce as liberation from an oppressive marriage institution and not as a break up of a sacred trust. The researcher further note that redefinition of gender roles has had a major impact on marriage stability. In the wake of women's movement, women now have a radically new view of their role and status in society and many men are still uncertain how to respond to this, hence the common misunderstanding leading to a new trend of marriage breakdown. Killewald (2016) note that the male-bread winner norm has been more durable than the female homemaker norm. For the modern marriages to be stable, an increased and liberal understanding of these emerging trends should be accommodated by both the concerned husband and wife.

There is no marriage where there are no conflicts, the approach adopted in conflict resolution often influence marriage stability. There has to be a compromise in certain situations as sticking to extremes of divergent opinions will only lead to fueling marriage break up (Kabali, 2006). Dialogue enhances understanding than perpetual criticisms in a marriage set up. Open listening is better than filtering listening if there is to be harmony and understanding for conflict resolution. This should be addressed for marital stability.

Marriage is a spiritual institution. If the marriage partners strongly believe in the spiritual tenets of marriage, they are more likely to have stable marriage. In addition, Kabali, (2006), note that shared spiritual concerns and prayer times tend to make marriages stable. Marriages where the wives are submissive to their husbands and recognize them as the head of the family tend to be more stable. Killewald (2016) note that couples that have a common religious commitment are less likely to divorce than those with diverse or non-common religious commitment.

Health status of the marriage partners can either build or weigh down on the marriage stability. Men like healthy, thick, curvy and beautiful women, not careless busy bodied women (Kabali, 2006). Wives who groom themselves for their husbands help to cement the marriage. Dirtiness and carelessness make the marriage partners repel. Eastman (2016) note that illness creates a destabilizing stress in the marriage institution. For example, a perpetually sick and dirty wife can easily make some men to walk out of the marriage or marry another wife.

A marriage where the partners create and plan for quality time for each other are more stable than marriages where some members are perpetually absent. Eastman (2016) observed that families spending less time together are more vulnerable to marriage breakdown. Isolated and lonely marriage couples are very easily stressed that make it easier for marriage breakdown. The partners should live together to avoid

temptations that come because of loneliness. When the marriage partners rarely spend time together, then there is cause for alarm on their marriage stability.

Love between the couple can cement the marriage. Couples that have a common religious commitment are likely to enhance their bonding love which is very key for marital stability (Killewald, 2016). United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2017) re-affirms that the act of adultery is an injustice to the wounded spouse as it weakens the bonding fabrics of love in marriage. Love can lead to sacrifices from each marriage partner that often lead to stable marriages. Where no love exists between the married couple, the marriage can very easily break up. Wives need to be constantly assured of their husband's love for them to feel secure in the marriage. Wives on the other side should be good cooks and personally create time where possible to prepare favorite foods to their husbands because statistics has always shown that good food is the way to a man's heart. Submissiveness of wives to their husbands is likely to strengthen marriage stability.

Large difference between the age of the couple can influence marriage negatively. Generation gap can often bring unnecessary misunderstanding. Where there is a large age gap, then either the younger member must adjust to think and act like the older one or vice versa. If this does not happen, then the marriage will soon degrade to its brink. Killewald (2016) note that though females do not consider age difference between the married couple at the time marriage is instituted; they are the ones that commonly raise age related issues that cause marriage instability.

Though Killewald (2016) note that there is change in marriage foundations over time, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (2017) still uphold that divorce is contrary to the natural law for it breaks the promise 'to which the spouses freely consented to live with each other till death'. Therefore, for there to be commitment to the marriage institution, the marriage should be legalized. This brings implied responsibility and security which is normally necessary for marriage stability. In addition, for religious community, cohabitation does not guarantee successful married life and is detrimental to future commitments.

V. CONCLUSION

Table 4.1 shows the perceived protective factors for any marriage stability. Any married couple can use the guideline given to assess the marital stability status of their marriage. The score obtained from such an assessment can inform the client on the state of their marriage. With adequate guidance and counseling from competent marriage counselor, the flaws identified in each marriage institution can be fixed and hence make the marriage stable. A common theme of these submissions is that the causes of marriage breakdown are complex, diverse and interactive and that no single factor can be isolated as the most significant or important reason for marriage breakdown. It is also evident that the views vary

depending on the background and status of those who hold them, so that professionals in relationship development may hold theoretical understandings that differ widely from the personal experiences of individuals within the community, therefore, a mutual understanding between the client and marriage counselor is important in helping to fix each marriage problem. Generally, separation can at times be a prudent action to take before rushing into divorce.

REFERENCES

- [1] Badcock, C.R. (2015). *The imprinted brain*. Sussex publishers. Retrieved from www.psychology.today.htm
- [2] Eastman, M. (2016). Factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown. *Family Service Australia*. Submissions p. S690.
- [3] Gun-Mette, B.R., Kari, S., Espen, R., & Kristian, T. (2013). Relationship dissatisfaction and other risk factors for future relationship dissolution. *Springer Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology Journal*. Doi: 10.1007/s00127-013-0681-3
- [4] Kabali, J. (2006). *Identifying factors that influence marital stability and satisfaction for custodial parents who remarry*. Thesis. Seton Hall University.
- [5] Killewald, A. (2016). Money work and marital stability: Assessing change in the gendered determinants of divorce. *American Sociological Association*. Vol. 91(4), 696-719. DOI 10.1177/0003122416655340 <http://asr.sagepub.com>
- [6] Reza, K., Maryam, B., & Abbas, M.A. (2019). Protective factors of marital stability in long term marriage globally. A systematic review. *Epidemiology and Health Journal*. 41: e2019023. Doi:10.4178/epih.e2019023
- [7] United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (2017). What actions and behaviours are threats to marriage? *United States Catholic Catechism for Adults: Discovery Journal*. Washington, D.C.