

# Relationship between Gender Roles and Marital Stability among Couples in Selected Counties of Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

There is increased evidence of marital conflict, instability, separation and divorce both globally and in Kenya. There is a possibility that this could be attributed to changes in perceptions and performance of gender roles by the partners in a marriage arising from the impact of global influences on family socialization processes. This study sought to explore the relationship between gender roles (perceptions and performances) and marital stability among couples in selected counties in Kenya. The study used a correlational research design and was guided by the Family Systems approach. The target population was 6.83 million couples in Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu counties of Kenya. Multistage sampling that included stratified, convenient and purposive sampling was used to draw a sample of 402 couples for the study. Data was collected using researcher developed questionnaires measuring gender roles and marital stability. Feedback from the pilot study was used to strengthen the validity and reliability of the instruments. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse quantitative data. Spearman rank order correlation was used to determine the nature of the relationship between gender roles (perceptions and performance) and marital stability. The findings showed that there was a significant weak positive relationship between gender role perception and marital stability,  $r_s(804) = .393, p < .05$ . Further, there was a significant moderate positive relationship between gender role performance and marital stability,  $r_s(804) = .414, p < .05$ . These findings point to the need to incorporate gender role awareness into premarital and marital counselling by family counsellors and therapists as well as in the development of strategies by key stakeholders to strengthen marital stability among couples in Kenya.

**Keywords:** Family Socialization, Gender, Gender Roles, Marital Stability, Marital Trust, Marital Commitment, Marital Problem Solving

## INTRODUCTION

Family socialization processes often tend to categorize learning based on gender. Socialization incorporates those salient and critical aspects of culture, religion, social life, psychology and lifestyle that are uniquely drawn up for the man as well as the woman. Every ethnic group had its own processes on “how and what” members were to be taught and initiated into to attain membership. Members were indoctrinated on norms, attitudes, values, behaviours and social skills which were deemed gender appropriate, gave them integrity, brought out a sense of belonging and achieved a lifelong identity.

It was hoped that socialization processes would instil in every member gender appropriate core beliefs, an awareness of dysfunctional assumptions, which are those rigid and unrealistic rules that make a relationship maladaptive and that it could avoid becoming the hub of those negative automated thoughts (NAT's) that could destroy a relationship (Lian and Geok, 2012). NAT's are those negatively framed interpretations of the way we think of ourselves and has an undesirable impact on the person. Family socialization not only plays a great role in shaping the individuals' gender role ideologies but at the same time it can engrave deeply embedded cognitive frameworks within the psyche of the person (Hilpert, Randall, Sorokowski, Atkins,

Sorokowska, & Ahmadi, 2016).

There are numerous socialization agents and environments such as family cultures, traditions and present day global influences that nurture the formation of cognitions, especially those that are gender specific. Family members are the most influential in shaping gender learning (Lamm, Keller, Yovsi, & Chaudhary, 2008; Jensen, & Arnett, 2012). Gender socialization not only teaches and generates culturally appropriate perceptions about how men and women should think, speak, dress, and interact but also determines performance criteria for men and women within the context of the society. Members of the family are typically socialized into different gender-role criteria through the formation of appropriate gender role perceptions and performances (Philpot, 2000). As a result of their differing socialization experiences, members of each sex, for the most part develop distinct behavioural expectations, are granted disparate opportunities, and have differing life experiences (Eccles, Freedman-Doan, Frome, Jacobs, & Yoon, 2012). Family socialization gives men and women the ability to be single minded in their thinking and even empowers them to add colour and flavour to their perceptions especially where gender is concerned. In other words, the man and woman, because of their socialization processes could become uncompromising and fixated in the way they perceive each other's gender roles and therefore, hold fast to what they have learnt and know best. This could lead to a hard and fast stance by the man and/or the woman about their roles in the relationship, set off a gradual outpouring of dysfunctional assumptions that are backed up by negative automated thoughts (NAT's) that in turn could feed marital conflict.

Seldom do men and women consider the fact that marriage can be plagued with conflict, separation, divorce, and violence that could lead to mistrust, lack of commitment and an inability to problem solve, leading to the possibility of marital instability. Fan and Lui (2004), contend that marriage is becoming increasingly unstable especially in many developed countries where betrayal, infidelity, separation and divorce are some of the factors that define and contribute to marital instability. According to Gichinga (2003), marriage is faced with enormous challenges that range from economic, social, political, religious, psychological and emotional impacts suggesting that marriages, both globally as well as locally, are increasingly becoming unstable. For example, according to the United Nations (UN), the country with the highest divorce rate in the world is the Maldives with 10.97 divorces per 1,000 inhabitants per year. This is followed by Belarus with 4.63 and the United States with 4.34. Statistics on divorce indicate that Kenya is facing an increase in cases of separation, divorce and marital instability. In Kenya according to records at the Milimani Law Courts, there was an upsurge of the number of couples seeking to dissolve their marriages. A total of 101 cases were recorded in 2001, 115 in 2002 and 206 cases in 2003. In the subsequent years, the figures were as high as 296, 295, 357, and 369 for the years 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 respectively. In the period between 2010 and 2015, approximately 1246 cases were filed at the Milimani Law Courts. These statistics are cases filed at the Milimani law courts only (Ayiemba, 2013, Hetherington, 2001). The number would be higher if all cases throughout the country were taken into consideration raising many questions like: how did so many married men and women who loved each other, get to reach the state of divorce? Weren't they intelligent enough to know or see it coming? Is this the face of family socialization showing itself in men and women who have become "hard faced" with "no compromise?" How much has the man and woman's socialising processes contributed to their core beliefs, dysfunctional assumptions and negative automatic thoughts? How much has family socialization processes contributed towards the divorce? This is a gap in literature and knowledge that needs a study on family socialization processes, its contribution to personalized core beliefs, dysfunctional assumptions and negative automated thoughts and its influence on the marital relationship.

There is a possibility that family socialization processes have not only made men and women aware of their own gender role perceptions but it could have also enabled and influenced them to perceive and evaluate their partners' roles perceptions as different and non-conforming, leading to unnecessary speculation and doubt about the other. This could lead to a hard and fast stance by the man and/or the woman about the way the other perceives their roles in the relationship, set off a gradual outpouring of dysfunctional assumptions

that are backed up by negative automated thoughts (NAT's) and in turn could feed the perceptions on marital conflict leading to the dissolution of their marriage. This study sought to bridge this gap by finding out whether socialization processes contribute and lead men and women to perceive realities inaccurately causing cognitive distortions and dysfunction resulting in possible conflict situations and a possible end to the marriage itself?

Gender roles are understood as those behavioural or psychological traits typically associated with one's sex, as male or female and are also considered culturally appropriate (Moore, & Mathews, 2001; Matsumoto, 2001). In this study gender role perceptions are husbands' and wives' mental interpretation and /or categorization of each other's roles and behaviour as appropriate or inappropriate to the marriage relationship. There is a growing possibility that men and women's personalized experiences, perspectives, preferences (perceptions) and demands for equitable and quality performances from each other is gradually becoming one of the reasons for conflict situations that could further escalate into a lack of trust, commitment and a lethargy to problem solve. Wilmoth and Blaney (2016) suggest that reasons for marital instability are varied, complex, unique and specific to the couple's marital relationship. Such may include the individual's personalized experiences of upbringing, experiences of family socialization, personal and/or subjective perspectives of roles and performances about their own marriage, subjective understanding of marital conflicts and the way such conflicts should be managed and solved (Wilmoth & Blaney, 2016). When such personal perspectives are coupled with demands for equitable and quality performance by the partners from each other, and when such demands become concrete and non-negotiable, then there is a possibility of marital instability that could gradually lead to marital dissolution.

When a man and a woman enter into a marital relationship, each one brings into the marriage their own set of personal opinions, preferences, habits, and quirks (Lott, 2010; Arnett, 2002). They also bring into the marriage their unique perceptions and behaviour patterns based on their unique family socialization processes. When husbands and wives encounter gender role differences due to the uniqueness of their family socialization processes and when such differences are subjectively perceived and gets embedded in the cognitive structures of the man and woman, there is a tendency for the differences to grow and significantly impact the marital relationship. Marital conflict can be defined as differences in opinion encountered by husbands and wives, whether positive or negative, minor or major, tactical and/or emotional leading to stress and strain on the relationship and could arouse hostile interactions meted out on each other. According to Lian and Geok, (2012) marital conflict is the existence of high levels of disagreements, hostile interactions and stressful and disrespectful verbal abuse between couples usually caused by minor and major interpersonal interactions as well as temperaments that lead to difference in opinions. They further argue that these interpersonal interactions and temperaments that lead to differences in perceptions and opinions could also be the reasons that make the couple drift apart, feel threatened, intimidated and even contemplate separation and divorce (Lian & Geok, 2012; McGraw, 2007; Amato, Booth, Johnson, & Rogers, 2009).

It is possible, therefore, that couples facing marital conflict may gradually begin to perceive their marriage as breaking down, lack the ability to perceive the other as unique, and different and that they will never be able to be together. Davis and Greenstein, (2004) illustrating this tension, stated that when one spouse perceived the relationship to be inequitable or unbalanced, psychological tension resulted, leading to conflict and possible marital instability. For example, it may happen that one of the two in marriage could perceive inequity in the distribution of household tasks and hence more free time was awarded to the other partner (Ganguly-Scrase, 2003). This often resulted in marital conflict and gradually to marital instability. For many, resentment grew when they were forced to give up deeply ingrained ideas/perceptions about themselves. This could mean that the man could feel that he is unmanly even if he agrees to do "woman's work." Likewise, a woman may resent the fact that her husband is not taking care of her in a protective role and that she must take on tasks that are not hers (Adegoke, 2010). Therefore, the focus of this study was to evaluate whether such perceptions about inequitable distribution of roles could trigger a reluctance, disparity

and trigger dissolution.

### **Statement of the problem**

The institution of marriage is facing challenges that are a threat to its integrity. Marital conflict, increased cases of domestic violence, infidelity, and a desire to control the other has increased the reason among couples for the dissolution of marriages. There is a growing intolerance and demand for conformity on the part of couples about the roles they play as husbands and wives. There is a waning of marital trust, commitment and problem solving among couples and an increase of vulnerability and intolerance within marriage. There is a growing tendency for spouses to draw up mutual agreements that enable them to leave, whenever they perceive they have been aggrieved or let down by the other partner. The situation gets complicated when the partner(s) may decide to leave without prior warning or just request the other to leave with no compromise.

Family and global socialization processes plays a great role in influencing and changing husbands and wives gender roles perceptions and performances. This has given them the ability to choose between traditional and/or globalised gender roles, use such roles to benefit their own agenda in conflicts, engage in competition over each other, manipulate the other to conformity and develop a sense of control over the other. Married life has becomes a place where gender roles are used and abused in favour of the self, more than the marriage itself. Given all the factors that contribute towards marital dissolution, little is known about the couples' own socialization processes and its possible contributions towards marital stability. This raises many questions like, how did so many married men and women who were in love with each other get to reach the state of divorce? Didn't they know or see it coming? Is this the face of family socialization showing itself in men and women who have become "stone faced" with "no compromise?" How much has the man and woman's socialising processes contributed to their core beliefs, dysfunctional assumptions and negative automatic thoughts? Is it possible that the influence of family socialization processes and its contributed towards the break up?

These questions illustrate the need for a study on the relationship of family socialization processes and its contribution to personalized core beliefs, dysfunctional assumptions and negative automated thoughts and its response to its influence on marital relationship. Family socialization processes have not only made men and women aware of their own gender roles perceptions and performances, but has also influenced them to perceive and evaluate the roles and performances of the other. This study sought to bridge this gap by finding out whether socialization processes contribute and lead men and women to perceive gender roles inaccurately causing cognitive distortions and dysfunction which have influenced gender roles and marital stability? In other words, the problem was to find out whether couple's gender role perceptions which are those mental interpretation and/or categorization of each other's behaviour as appropriate or inappropriate within their marriage, and gender role performances which represents the conduct of behaviour in ways that are deemed appropriate or inappropriate within marriage, contribute towards their own marital stability?

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **Couples' gender role perceptions**

Marriage is recognized across governments, cultures and religions as the basic unit of the society. Delworth-Anderson, Burton, and Klein, (2005) in developing a strategy aimed at the contemporary and emerging theories in studying family, views marriage as a puzzle building and a puzzle solving unit. The puzzle builds as the couple grow to be a family and get clarity as they live and solve the puzzle as a couple and a family.

Married couples are viewed as persons who benefit the society, ensure safety of children, bring economic well-being, and encourage freedom to live and love and all these are pointing to the assurance of moral

values being passed over to the subsequent generation (Delworth-Anderson, et al., 2005).

One aspect of the puzzle is gender role perceptions and how such roles are perceived within marriage. Moore, et al., (2001) describes gender roles as those behavioural or psychological traits typically associated with being a man or a woman. Barker and Ricardo (2005) visualises gender roles as a set of mental expectations that help decide how men or women should think, act or feel. Gender role expectations become realities and behaviour through gender role perceptions and performances. Barker and Ricardo (2005) affirms that gender role perceptions are an individual's views about men and women's behaviours arising from personal judgments or internalized belief systems. Couple gender role perceptions can be defined as those acceptable (positive or negative) behaviour orientations or personal judgments or internalized beliefs which are demanded from oneself and the other within or outside of marriage (Moore et al., 2001). Similarly, Wilmoth and Blaney, (2014) point out that gender roles perceptions and performances are clearly evident, best experienced and has significant influence within the marital context. Amato, Booth, Johnson and Rogers, (2010), in their study on the Continuity and Change in Marital Quality between 1980 and 2000, contend that gender role perceptions were one of those frequently used cognitive process, which is inevitable in human beings and which is often used to divide people into groups based on identifying factors such as race, age, religion, language and gender and that such processes inevitably had an impact on marital quality.

In a later study on how Marriage in America was changing, Amato, Booth, Johnson and Rogers, (2010) contended that marriage is facing transformation, change in quality, and stability. There is rise in individualistic thinking, a power struggle on who earns more and who should benefit more and a changing gender relations in marriage. *Guilbert, Vacc and Pasley, (2000) affirm that positive relationships do not just happen but it needs a person to person relationship. They argue that when one partner desires an egalitarian marriage and the other favours traditionalism, opportunities for conflict are greatly increased. Differing gender role beliefs and differing perceptions of role equity significantly affects marital stability. Not only do most women want men who will share in household responsibilities (Guilbert, Vacc & Pasley, 2000), satisfaction with division of labour is a significant predictor of marital satisfaction. Often inflexibility about gender roles forces couples to make the decision to opt out of marriage. Even though such studies visualize the reality of marriage globally, it also is a recommendation that a similar reality could exist in other parts of the world where such studies have not been done. Besides, these studies do not specifically focus on husbands and wives gender role perceptions and how it impacts marital stability. A study into the comprehension and internalization of couples' gender role perceptions and its possible impact on marital stability is wanting.*

Studies in Africa focus on traditionally socialized roles of men and women. Zungu, Salawu and Ogunbanjo (2010) studied domestic violence and found out that the perception men had about their women was motivated from the traditionally socialized gender roles. Women were perceived to be the weaker gender and hence were viewed as victims and men as perpetrators, although there are some which include both sexes as either victims or perpetrators. The disparity between the genders is affirmed by Morrell, Jewkes and Lindegger, (2012) who state that African cultural beliefs and traditions promote men's hierarchical role in sexual relationships and especially marriage. They argue that that sexual, and male violent practices are rooted in and flow from cultural ideals of gender identities. The latter enables us to understand why men and women behave as they do, and the emotional and material context within which sexual behaviours are enacted (Jewkes & Morrell, 2010). Economic and political transformation has actually left many men without a clear position provoking tension in the relationship between men and women. Boonzaier (2005) argues that woman abuse and other forms of gender-based violence are key obstacles to gender equity across the globe. The study rightfully claimed that researchers have examined the problem of woman abuse from a multitude of perspectives. However, little research has focused specifically on both partners' constructions of their relationships. The study was based upon another study that examined how women and

men in intimate heterosexual relationships attribute meaning to the man's perpetration of violence against a female partner. Narrative interviews were conducted with women and men who constituted 15 heterosexual couples. In this study, participants' narratives of self, other, relationship and violence included ambiguous constructions of victims and perpetrators; constructions of violent relationships as cyclical in nature; constructions of woman abuse as a problem of the self; narrations of violence as a mutual endeavour and all-encompassing narratives of power and control. This study provided insight into the subjective, relational and gendered dynamics of abusive relationships, illustrated the significance of the context in shaping the ways in which experiences are narrated, and showed the value and need of theorizing towards feminist psychology. These studies have examined the problem of woman abuse from a multitude of perspectives. However, little research has focused specifically on partner's family socialization processes, constructions of gender role perceptions and how it impacts on marital stability.

Research is increasingly focussing on understanding how socialized gender role perceptions contribute to individuals' well-being and the quality of their relationships (Hunter & Forden, 2002; Kirchmeyer, 2002). Women, on average, still have more responsibility for home, family life, and child care than men. Differences exist in women's perceptions of how spouses manage family finances, support the women's careers, contribute to household management, and provide interpersonal support. Specific roles and the resulting support are related to life satisfaction, job satisfaction, and work-life balance of some women (Gordon & Whelan?Berry, 2004).

In addition, it has been frequently recommended that clinicians incorporate gender role discussions and analyses into psychological work with clients based, in part, on the demonstrated connection between gender roles and well-being (Good, 2001). Recent studies suggest that gender equality at the family level is also linked to reproductive behaviour, and stronger gender equality appears to be associated with higher fertility (Neyer, Lappegård & Vignoli, 2013; Oláh & Bernhardt, 2008; Duvander & Andersson, 2006). Other studies done locally have focused on social dimensions where traditional values and cultural practices and their impact on marital conflicts were the main focus (Odhiambo, 2012) In another study, Okello (2015) carried out a research on factors influencing marital conflict among Church-wedded couples in Pentecostal Churches in Masinga Division, Machakos District, Kenya. These studies observed that spouses generally disregarded resolving conflicts in their marriage, therefore raising the need for the possibility of preventing marital discord through interventions focused on building skills in diverse conflict resolution styles (Greeff & De Bruyne, 2000). These studies have their specific focus yet there is need for a study that focuses precisely on the dynamics and changes arising from couple's gender role perceptions and its impact on marital stability.

The role and impact of gender role perceptions in family dynamics has been of interest to researchers (Halim, Walsh, Tamis-LeMonda, Zosuls & Ruble, 2018). Marks, Bun and McHale, (2009) illustrate that studies done on gender role attitudes of family members—mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers—are typically studied in adults and children separately, or within single (marital or parent-child) dyads. Scott et al. (2006) studied the changing attitudes of men and women, from the view point that the family has lost its original understanding of being a "normal family." The concern of her study was to find out whether or not family values are becoming increasingly relativized to adapt to the "modern" situations. Exploring core attitudes, values and morality of family behaviours concerning marriage and motherhood, the study sought to understand whether or not attitudes were converging over time and to what extent there were generational differences regarding such family and marital values. It further explored the possibility that there may have been pronounced value shifts about some aspects of family life, while other values show greater continuity. It also studied the changing gender roles in marriage and why gender roles in general and, more specifically, gender inequalities in domestic labour are quite hard to change. However, the present study argues that there is a possibility that values and gender roles within marriage can be influenced and experience change. Though the study alludes to global influences as a possible cause for change in family values, it does not

address the impact global influences could possibly have upon couples' gender role perceptions, gender role performances and marital stability. Furthermore, this study argues that there is a possibility that spouses themselves could contribute towards the changes experienced.

Even though literature focuses on varied aspects of human interaction, the undeniable fact is that it also indirectly deals with the thinking or cognitive perspectives of the couples involved. This implies that couples, who are the two most important persons towards beginning of a family, can display healthy or unhealthy relationships depending on their gender role perceptions about each other's roles. This makes the couple responsible in the "make" or "break" of their own marriage. This begs the question whether it is the interaction of the couple's gender roles or their personal ways of thinking and perceiving their gender roles that lead to positive or negative interaction and their marital stability? This study hoped to bridge this gap and throw light on couple's gender role perceptions and its impact on marital stability.

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

The study used correlational research design and mixed methods approach. The mixed method approach was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. The correlational research design enabled the research to assess the correlations (relationship) between the independent and dependent variables.

### **Study Variables**

The independent variable was gender roles, which, for this study, were operationalized as couples' gender role perceptions and gender role performances arising from family and global socialization. The dependent variable was marital stability which was operationalized in terms of three components: mutual trust, commitment and problem solving.

### **Site of Study**

The study was done in the counties of Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa. These Counties were chosen because they exhibited three essential characteristics essential to this study: first, a history of a growing interaction with a variety of peoples, traditions and cultures; second, an interaction and growth arising from the socialization structures of peoples and third, that they have encountered positive and/or negative change and growth especially to gender role perspectives and performances.

### **Sampling Techniques and Sample Size**

The study employed a multi-staged sampling technique. The technique was employed in two stages. Stratified sampling for stage one and convenience sampling for stage two. In stage one Stratified sampling was employed to breakdown the population into manageable clusters. The manageable clusters were Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu as counties. In the second stage, convenience sampling was used to obtain the sample for quantitative data

### **Sample**

According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), table, determining sample sizes for research activities (Appendix 5) three hundred and eighty four couples were considered to be representative of the views of the study population. The minimum sample size desired was 384. However to take care of potential non response, oversampling was done hence a sample size of 402 was used. The sample population was distributed among the three Counties in the following proportions: Nairobi County having the largest population of 3.5m was

apportioned a total sample of 240 couples, Mombasa was apportioned 55 couples and Kisumu was apportioned 110 couples.

### **Research Instruments**

The instruments used for the study were researcher developed questionnaires and focus group discussion guides. The questionnaires consisted of two parts. The first part was to gather relevant demographic information about the participants. The second part was to collect data for the study objectives which were: i) couple's gender role perceptions; (ii) couple's gender role performances; (iii) Marital stability based on three components – mutual trust, commitment and problem solving; (iv) relationship between gender role perceptions and marital stability; (v) relationship between gender role performances and marital stability.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected primarily by the researcher, who took the principal role in the distribution and collection of questionnaires. When groups were involved, the researcher personally administered questionnaires and collected the responses as well. Since the sample population was vast and spread over the three counties, the researcher employed six field research assistants (two per county) to assist with data collection.

### **Data Analysis and Presentation**

The data collected from the selected counties was analysed and grouped into the following categories, themes and sub-themes: (a) Couples gender role perceptions; (b) Couples gender role performances; (c) Levels of marital stability based on the three components of trust, commitment and problem solving; (d) relationship between gender role perceptions and marital stability-trust, commitment, and problem solving; and (e) relationship between gender role performances and marital stability-trust, commitment, and problem solving.

### **Data Management and Ethical Considerations**

Before beginning the study, the researcher sought letters of introduction, authorization and ethical clearance from Kenyatta University. The necessary permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation, Kenya (NACOSTI) to conduct the research was also obtained. To uphold the dignity of the participant, data management and ethical considerations were adhered to by the researcher. Data collection and analysis revealed no identifying factors about participants' identities. Coding was used in place of names so as to ensure confidentiality of data and of personal identities. All participants signed the informed consent form before any data was collected. Participants were made aware that they could terminate their participation in the study at any time with no consequences to them. Participants were assured that all data collected would be confidential and at no time would it be released. There was no foreseen reason for deceit. At the end of every data collection session, the researcher conducted a debriefing session in order to prevent any harm as a result of their participating in the study.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Gender role perceptions**

The first research objective was to find out the gender role perceptions among couples in selected counties of Kenya. Data was collected using a gender role perception questionnaire with fifteen items measuring gender role perceptions based on either traditional or global gender roles. For each item the respondents were required to indicate their level of agreement using a score of 1 to 5 where 1=strongly agree, 2= agree, 3= undecided, 4= disagree and 5= strongly disagree. A higher score indicated perceptions that tended to be



highly traditional (minimally global), while a lower score indicated perceptions that were minimally traditional (highly global). Since there were a total of fifteen (15) items, the highest possible score for each individual was seventy five [(75 (15X5)]. The lowest possible score, on the other hand, was fifteen [(15 (15X1)]. To obtain a couples score, an average was obtained between the scores of the husband and wife. The scores were then categorized as follows: thirty seven (37) and below indicated perceptions that were minimally traditional; thirty eight to fifty three (38-53) indicated perceptions that were moderately traditional and a score of fifty four (54) and above represented scores that were highly traditional.

### Gender Role Perceptions of couples

Data was analysed to gauge gender role perceptions of couples in general. The findings are presented in table 1:

**Table 1 Couples Gender Role perceptions**

Frequencies on Couples Gender Role Perceptions		
Level of Perception	Couple	
	Frequency	Percent
Highly Traditional	450	56
Moderately Traditional	345	42.3
Minimally Traditional	9	1.1
	804	100

Findings on couples' gender role perceptions in general shows that 56% of couples were highly traditional while 42.3% were moderately traditional in their gender role perceptions.

The findings on gender role perceptions for couples in general were consistent with family socialization processes. Family socialization processes initiated men and women into appropriate traditional gender roles. Husbands were identified as “bread winners”, “providers” and “heads” of the family. Wives were identified as “life givers”, “nurturers” and “care takers” of the family. Philpot (2000), argued that traditional gender role traits are deeply embedded within the psyche of men and women. Males and females were typically socialized from an early age into different gender-role behaviour's within the family. This confirms the findings of this study that couples in general were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions. Malatras, Luft, Sokolowski and Israel (2012), pointed out that as a result of their differing socialization experiences, members of each sex for most part develop distinct behavioural expectations, are granted disparate opportunities, and have differing life experiences even though they are a couple. Such distinct and differing socialization experiences, that make the partners in the couple unique, could also be the reason why couples showed that they were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions.

It is noteworthy to observe that even though data indicated couples were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions, it is also noticeable that 42% of couples were moderately traditional in their gender role perceptions. This could imply that even though couples gender role perceptions were highly traditional, there has been some tangible impact from global influences on their gender role perceptions. These findings show consistency with the global trend and its power to socialize as reiterated by Raymo JM, (2020), who points out the important changes that have been occurring to the family structure throughout the last 40 years in Korea, such as an increase in marital age, decrease in the marriage rate, increase in divorce rate, and a decrease in total birth rate. Such phenomena are hard to capture within the traditional concept of the family. Phenomenal changes like that of transformation from the patriarchal system of family members into a hierarchical order to a nuclear family, from single income family to a co-working couple family structure, are some of the changes that are visible in today's family structure in its various forms. Such changes

definitely have an impact on couples' gender role perceptions and could probably be the reason why a good number of couples favoured the moderately traditional option in this study. This could also imply that there is a possibility that couples are slowly and gradually moving away from traditional gender roles or constantly seeking to strike a balance between traditional gender roles and global gender role perceptions.

### Couples Gender role perceptions by County

Further analysis on couple's gender role perception by county was done. The findings are presented in table 2

**Table 2 Couples Gender Role Perceptions by County**

County	Level of Perception	Frequency	Percent
Nairobi	Minimal Traditional	7	1.3
	Moderate Traditional	225	41.4
	Highly traditional	312	57.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>100</b>
Mombasa	Minimal Traditional	2	1.8
	Moderate Traditional	55	48.2
	Highly traditional	57	50
	<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100</b>
Kisumu	Moderate Traditional	65	44.5
	Highly traditional	81	55.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 7, shows that couples from the three counties were highly traditional. 57.4% of couples from Nairobi County, 50% from Mombasa County and 55.5% from Kisumu County were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions. At the same time, data indicates that 41.4% of couples from Nairobi, 48.2% of couples from Mombasa and 44.5% of couples from Kisumu were moderately traditional.

The expected outcome was that couples from the three counties would be moderately or highly globalized in their gender role perceptions showing some impact from global socializing trends. On the contrary, findings of this study showed that couples from the three counties were highly traditional which was inconsistent with the expected outcomes. It is interesting to note that even though couples from the three counties face varied global socializing environments, findings show that couples were highly traditional than global in their gender role perceptions.

Family socialization processes could be one way of making sense of such an outcome because it is through family socialization that humans learn what appropriate and/or inappropriate gender role perceptions are. Literature affirms that family and global socialization processes have power over the person and forms in them appropriate gender role perceptions. For example, Satow (2001) argued that parents probably exert the greatest influence, especially on their very young offspring with regards to gender role formation. On the other hand, Lott (2010) affirmed and expanded family socialization processes to include the construction of all socially acquired habits and knowledge that are subjectively acquired through personal cognitive constructions. This is consistent with the study findings where there was a growing number of couples who were moderately traditional. Wise (2008) explained further the understanding of the process when he contends that the construction process in turn becomes the embodiment of a tradition and a history that shapes the life of the person and a people, often called culture. In their desire to uphold their traditionally socialized roles, couples could inadvertently resist changes demanded of them with respect to their gender

role perceptions which in turn could impacts on their marital stability.

### Couples Gender role perceptions by Gender and by County

Further analysis was done based on gender and by County. Outcomes are shown in table 3

**Table 3 Gender role perceptions by Gender and by County**

County	Levels of perception	Husbands		Wives		couples	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Nairobi	Minimal Traditional	3	1.1	4	1.5	7	1.3
	Moderate Traditional	121	44.6	104	38.1	225	41.4
	Highly traditional	147	54.2	165	60.4	312	57.4
	<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Mombasa	Minimal Traditional	1	1.8	1	1.8	2	1.8
	Moderate Traditional	30	52.6	25	43.9	55	48.2
	Highly traditional	26	45.6	31	54.4	57	50.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Kisumu	Moderate Traditional	34	45.9	31	43.1	65	44.5
	Highly traditional	40	54.1	41	56.9	81	55.5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100.0</b>

From table 8, 54.2% of husbands from Nairobi County, 54.1% from Kisumu County were highly traditional, while 52.6% from Mombasa County were moderately traditional. Wives from the three counties were highly traditional. 60.4% from Nairobi County, 54.4% from Mombasa County, and 56.9% from Kisumu County were highly traditional. Couples from the three counties were highly traditional. 57.4% of couples from Nairobi County, 50% from Mombasa County and 55.5% from Kisumu County were highly traditional.

Findings show that both husbands and wives were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions. Yet it was observed that there was a growing number of husbands and wives who tended towards being moderately traditional. A possible explanation could be attributed to the socialization processes that men and women are socialized in. Socialization processes can positively and/or negatively impact human beings, contributing towards the formation of positive and/or negative impressions, thoughts, feelings and behaviours about themselves and the other. Besides, socialization processes could help men and women develop unique gendered perceptual criteria about each other's thinking, feelings and behaviours. Such perceptual criteria could not only lead men and women into struggles with power, competition and dominance over the other, but also be interpreted and perceived as a weakness in the other which could be exploited for gain. For example, women are more pressurized to traditional roles than men. Often times, depending on the environment(s) faced by the woman, she may perceive herself as adequate or inadequate (Animasahun & Femi, 2011, Ayodele, 2001, Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky, & Kim, 2014, Brown & Roberts, 2014).

When a woman postpones child bearing in order to enjoy a career, it is possible that she may meet women who already have borne children and who speak of their roles as mothers. This could trigger the woman to perceive herself as inadequate and hence, she could pressurize herself to become a mother. Chodorow (2012) illustrates this fact by postulating that girls continue to identify with their mothers and they also psychologically merge with them. As a consequence, the daughter's self-concept or gender role perceptions are characterized by mutuality and a sense of relatedness that orients her towards interpersonal relationships. This interpersonal orientation is the main reason why women engage in mothering and show more

connectedness to their mothers than men. In contrast to females, boys develop by increasingly separating themselves from their mothers and define themselves in terms of difference from females. They begin to denigrate femininity in an attempt to establish their own separateness and individuation (Chodorow, 2012). It is possible that women, due to their family socialization processes, experience their family interconnectedness, to a large extent than men and hence tend to be perceived as more traditional than men, which is consistent with the findings of the current study.

Findings also show that 42% of husbands and wives when put together as couples scored moderately traditional in their gender role perceptions. This could indicate that even though husbands, wives and couples from the three counties scored highly traditional on their gender role perceptions, there was an impact from global influences on their gender role perceptions. This is consistent with Ember (2012) who contends that people consider themselves to be unique individuals with their own set of personal opinions, preferences, habits, and quirks which are deep seated within the psyche of the person.

Another reason why couples were consistently highly traditional in their gender role perceptions was because both the man and the woman in marriage were constantly challenged and reminded about their traditional gender roles by members of families of origin, extended family and/or friends. This finding is consistent with what Young (2007) visualizes as vertical and/or horizontal stressors that have the greatest impact on both partners in the couple even though the greater impact is on the woman in the marriage. Often times these stressors become constant reminders to the couple especially the woman and her role of being wife and mother. The woman, can begin to perceive herself as wife and mother and become convinced that her primary gender role is to be “child bearer” in order to be perceived as a woman.

It is also possible that the role of “child bearer” can give rise to other gender roles like, “stay at home mother” and/or “care giver” of the home and the man being perceived as “provider”, and “bread winner.” This backs the outcome of this study that it is possible that the woman feel more pressurized, than the man, into traditional thinking arising from obligations to the nuclear family and the society. This is consistent with the findings of this study where wives were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions than men.

In summary, there was a consistency in the findings about couple’s gender role perceptions, where couples in general, couples by County, and couples by gender by County all exhibited highly traditional gender role perceptions. On the other hand, it must be pointed out that there has been a constant growth of couples whose gender role perceptions were moving towards being moderately traditional.

It is also interesting to note that findings indicate men from Nairobi and Kisumu counties score almost identical in their gender role perceptions. It is also noticeable that women from Nairobi County, even though they experience the greatest impact from the modern world, scored highly traditional in their gender role perceptions. Findings from Mombasa County show that men were moderately traditional while women were highly traditional. Among couples by County, findings show that although couples were highly traditional, there has been some impact from globalization as the tendency to be moderately traditional grows.

### **Levels of Marital Stability among Couples**

From the perspective of the levels of marital stability, couples in general scored moderate in their level of marital stability. Findings show that couples from the three counties were moderate in their marital stability. From the perspective of gender according to the counties, findings indicate that husbands and wives were moderate in marital stability. Couples from the three Counties were at the moderate level of marital stability.

### **Couples level of Marital Stability**

Data was analysed on couples’ levels of marital stability. The findings are presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Couples level of Marital Stability**

Frequencies on Couples Levels of Marital Stability		
Level	Couple	
	Frequency	Percent
Low Marital Stability	10	1.2
Moderate Marital Stability	509	63.3
High Marital Stability	285	35.4
	<b>804</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 4 shows that 63.3% of couples were moderate in their levels of marital stability while 35.4% of couples showed high levels of marital stability.

The expected outcome was that couples would score low on marital stability. On the contrary, scores revealed that couples scored moderate in their levels of marital stability. A possible explanation could be that couples perceive their own marriages and performances in marriage as stable in comparison to other marriages that are facing separation, divorce and instability. It is believed that social, behavioural, domestic, sexual, religious and financial factors influence marital stability (Maciver & Dimkpa, 2012; Dada, Adetutu, Bada & Sanni, 2016). Though, globally, education has improved the quality of the understanding of the need for marital stability, the impact of family socialization plays a vital role in decision-making especially in the less educated parts of the globe (Ayodele, 2001). For example, socialization and cultures contribute to the break up and impact couples. One of the factors responsible for these the break-up or separation or divorce is lack of children which couples encounter some years after inception of the union (Maciver et.al. 2012).

When couples discover that they are childless, they begin to perceive their marriage as incomplete and the need to remarry is often felt especially with pressure from members of the family of origin, friends and even the larger society (Ayodele, 2001). In spite of being educated, childless couples often face stigma and ridicule of family socialization processes that often perceive them as incomplete and shame them. The shame becomes visible as couples' performances are questioned. Marital conflict becomes the norm ultimately resulting in suspicion, unhappiness and even separation and divorce (Dada, Adetutu, Bada & Sanni, 2016). It is possible then, that the constant friction arising from husbands' and wives' differences in perception and performances, coupled with impact from their various socialization processes could lead them to the decision to separate or divorce or lead them to ignore such shame and so present a high level of marital stability.

**Couples Levels of Marital Stability by County**

Data was then analysed to find out the levels of marital stability by county. The findings are shown in table 5

**Table 5: Couples Levels of Marital Stability by County**

County	Level of Marital Stability	Frequency	Percent
Nairobi	Low Marital Stability	7	1.3
	Moderate marital stability	323	59.4
	High Marital Stability	214	39.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>100.0</b>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Mombasa	Low Marital Stability	1	0.9
	Moderate marital stability	78	68.4
	High Marital Stability	35	30.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Kisumu	Low Marital Stability	2	1.4
	Moderate marital stability	108	74.0
	High Marital Stability	36	24.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 5 shows that 59.4% of couples from Nairobi County, 68.4% of couples from Mombasa and 74.0% of couples from Kisumu County indicated moderate levels of marital stability.

Findings of this study showed that couples from Nairobi, Mombasa and Kisumu indicated moderate levels of marital stability. Marriage and marital stability spells out the interaction between husband and wife and unfolds their positive and/or negative marital experiences. The interaction between husband and wife often reflect their positive or negative gender role perceptions and the resultant demands for appropriate gender role performances. The expected outcome was that couples would score low on marital stability. On the contrary, findings revealed that couples scored high on marital stability. The findings of this study are consistent with studies on marital stability. For example, Boerner, Jopp, Carr, Sosinsky and Kim (2014), studied gender differences in older adults' appraisals of positive and negative aspects of their marriages and examined how these appraisals relate to global marital satisfaction. Men and women who had positive appraisals of their marital experiences showed high levels of marital stability. Similarly, men and women who displayed negative appraisals displayed low levels of marital stability. Such findings were again consistent with Hawkins, Carrère, Sybil and Gottman's (2002) findings that married individuals who report low marital happiness are nearly 5 times more likely to divorce than those who report greater marital happiness. Fan et al. (2004) studied how the perceived changes in marital satisfaction affect marital stability using a unique data set obtained in Hong Kong. Findings showed that a change in marital satisfaction due to extramarital affairs increases the probability of divorce, but it is not the only determinant of marital instability. These results affirm and align well with the outcomes of this present study.

### Level of Marital Stability by gender and by county

Further analysis by gender and by county generated findings which are presented in table 6

**Table 6: Level of Marital Stability by gender by county**

County	Levels of Marital Stability	Husbands		Wives		couples	
		Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Nairobi	Low Marital Stability	2	0.7	5	1.8	7	1.3
	Moderate marital stability	160	59.0	163	59.7	323	59.4
	High Marital Stability	109	40.2	105	38.5	214	39.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>271</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>273</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>544</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Mombasa	Low Marital Stability	1	1.8			1	0.9
	Moderate marital stability	38	66.7	40	70.2	78	68.4
	High Marital Stability	18	31.6	17	29.8	35	30.7

	<b>Total</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>114</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Kisumu	Low Marital Stability	57	77.0	2	2.8	2	1.4
	Moderate marital stability	17	23.0	51	70.8	108	74.0
	High Marital Stability			19	26.4	36	24.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 6 shows that 59.4% of couples from Nairobi County, 68.4% of couples from Mombasa and 74.0% of couples from Kisumu County indicated moderate levels of marital stability. Noteworthy of acknowledging is that 40.2% of husbands, 38.5% of wives and 39.3% of couples from Nairobi County displayed high levels of marital stability. Similarly, 31.6% of husbands from Mombasa County displayed high levels of marital stability.

The expected outcome was that couples would score low on marital stability. On the contrary, scores revealed that couples scored high on marital stability. A possible explanation could be that couples perceive their own marriages and performances in marriage as stable in comparison to other marriages that are facing separation, divorce and instability. When data was put together from the three counties, husbands, wives and couples demonstrated moderate levels of marital stability. A possible explanation is through the concept of “sentiment override”. Navarra and Gottman (2018) define sentiment override as the tendency husbands and wives use to assess the other’s behaviour as either positive or negative on the basis of more globally held perceptions about the partner rather than the objective nature of the partner’s immediate behaviour. Sentiment override then tends to become a kind of perceptual filter husbands and wives use to view and assess the behaviour of each other. Sentiment override could be indicative that husbands and wives are conscious of the complex nature of social life lived around them, and therefore show that they are a match to the situation. Lian, and Geok (2012), illustrate the fact that irrespective of the outcomes of husbands and wives’ gender role perceptions and gender role performances, what matters to couples is to present a sound level of marital stability. The urge to present a sound level of marital stability could be the reason why husbands and wives override their own perceptions and performances about marital trust, in order to present their marriage as highly stable.

## CONCLUSIONS

With respect to the couple’s gender role perceptions, in general, it is concluded that couples were highly traditional though there was a reasonable high number being moderately traditional. Couples from Nairobi and Mombasa counties were highly traditional, while those from Kisumu County were predominantly moderately traditional.

From the perspective of gender by the counties, the conclusion is that husbands and wives were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions. As couples from the three counties it is concluded that couples were highly traditional in their gender role perceptions.

With respect to the levels of marital stability, the conclusion that can be made is that in general couples were moderate in their level of marital stability. The conclusion on couples within the three counties is that they were moderate in their level of marital stability. From the perspective of gender according to the counties, the conclusion is that husbands and wives were moderate in their level of marital stability. Finally, it is concluded that couples from the three counties were moderate in their level of marital stability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendation is made for policy makers, implementers, researchers, counsellors and therapists and other stake holders.

There is need for counsellors and religious ministers to assist couples to understand how individual differences in gender role perceptions could influence their expectations of each other within marriage, especially if one is more highly traditional than the other

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