

Beyond Marital Harmony: Marital Dissatisfaction among Married Women in Selected Churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Background: Marital dissatisfaction is a significant family and public health concern because it affects relationship quality, family functioning, and individual wellbeing. Despite growing evidence on marital relationships, little is known about the levels of marital dissatisfaction among married women attending churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kenya. **Aim:** This study assessed the levels of marital dissatisfaction among married women in selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County. **Methods:** A descriptive cross-sectional quantitative design was employed. A total of 247 married women aged 25–60 years were selected through simple random sampling from four churches. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire adapted from the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale and analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way analysis of variance, and Pearson's correlation. **Results:** The overall level of marital dissatisfaction was moderate ($M = 2.63$, $SD = 0.86$). Poor communication ($M = 2.96$, $SD = 1.05$) and emotional neglect ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 1.30$) were the leading contributors to dissatisfaction. Significant differences in marital dissatisfaction were observed by education level ($F = 26.965$, $p < .001$), duration of marriage ($F = 3.088$, $p = .017$), and employment status ($F = 7.379$, $p < .001$). Age was weakly and negatively associated with marital dissatisfaction ($r = -0.125$, $p = .049$). **Conclusion:** Married women attending the selected churches experienced moderate marital dissatisfaction, with relational and emotional factors contributing more than financial concerns. Interventions that strengthen communication, emotional support, and conflict resolution may help improve marital relationships among married women.

Keywords: marital dissatisfaction, married women, communication, churches, Kajiado County, Kenya.

INTRODUCTION

Marital dissatisfaction is a multidimensional construct that describes feelings of unhappiness or discontent within marriage arising from poor communication, unresolved conflict, emotional neglect, reduced intimacy, unmet emotional needs, and low relationship satisfaction. Rather than representing a single event, marital dissatisfaction develops through ongoing relational experiences and reflects the overall quality of the marital relationship. Because marriage remains one of the most influential social institutions, the quality of marital relationships has important implications for family functioning, individual wellbeing, and community stability. For women, persistent dissatisfaction within marriage may compromise emotional security, interpersonal relationships, parenting, and participation in social and religious life. Consequently, marital dissatisfaction has increasingly been recognized as an important family and public health concern requiring empirical attention.

Globally, marital dissatisfaction has emerged as a common experience among married couples despite cultural and socioeconomic differences. Evidence indicates that dissatisfaction often develops gradually through unresolved disagreements, ineffective communication, emotional neglect, and unmet relational expectations, resulting in declining relationship quality over time (Lambert et al., 2020). Longitudinal evidence further suggests that marital dissatisfaction is dynamic rather than static, varying across different stages of marriage as couples respond to changing life circumstances, stressors, and communication patterns (Johnson & Bradbury, 2019). These findings demonstrate that marital dissatisfaction is shaped by both interpersonal processes and contextual influences, making it an important area of family research.

Within Africa, marital dissatisfaction is embedded in diverse cultural, economic, and social realities. Cultural expectations surrounding marriage, traditional gender roles, financial pressures, and socioeconomic inequalities frequently influence how women experience and respond to marital challenges. Studies conducted in African settings have shown that marital dissatisfaction is often intensified by financial strain, unequal household responsibilities, and conflicts between traditional marital expectations and changing social roles (Ade-Oshifogun et al., 2025). Similarly, socioeconomic hardships such as poverty and unemployment contribute to marital instability and relationship strain, highlighting the interaction between family relationships and broader structural conditions (Jennings et al., 2022).

The Kenyan context reflects many of these regional patterns while presenting additional contextual challenges. Women experiencing marital dissatisfaction often encounter persistent communication difficulties, unequal relationship power, and limited access to formal counselling and support services, particularly in rural and semi-urban communities (Omondi et al., 2021; Kilonzo & Ndeti, 2022). Consequently, many women rely on family members, religious leaders, and church communities for guidance and emotional support during marital difficulties. Although these informal support systems provide valuable resources, they may also reinforce cultural and religious expectations that encourage women to remain in dissatisfying marriages despite persistent relational challenges.

Kajiado County presents a unique social and cultural environment in which marital experiences are shaped by strong religious traditions, cultural norms, and gender expectations. Churches occupy an important position by offering counselling, spiritual guidance, and social support to married couples. At the same time, religious teachings emphasizing marital permanence may discourage women from openly expressing marital dissatisfaction or seeking alternative solutions to persistent marital challenges. Despite these contextual characteristics, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the levels of marital dissatisfaction among women attending churches in Kajiado North Sub-County. The absence of localized evidence limits the development of culturally responsive counselling, pastoral care, and family support interventions. Therefore, this study sought to assess the levels of marital dissatisfaction among women in selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County.

Conceptualization of Marital Dissatisfaction

Marital dissatisfaction is commonly defined as a state of unhappiness or discontent arising from negative experiences within marriage. It is reflected through multiple relational dimensions, including poor communication, emotional distance, unresolved conflict, reduced intimacy, lack of trust, inadequate emotional support, and unmet expectations between spouses. Rather than representing isolated disagreements, marital dissatisfaction reflects an overall evaluation of the quality and functioning of the marital relationship. Existing literature conceptualizes marital dissatisfaction as a multidimensional and dynamic construct influenced by interpersonal, individual, and contextual factors. Johnson and Bradbury (2019) observed that levels of dissatisfaction change over time as couples encounter varying life demands, communication patterns, and stressors. This perspective suggests that marital dissatisfaction should be understood as an evolving relational process rather than a fixed marital outcome. In addition to relationship processes, individual characteristics also contribute to marital experiences. Munini et al. (2024) found that personality compatibility enhances relationship stability and satisfaction, whereas incompatible personality traits increase the likelihood of dissatisfaction. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that marital dissatisfaction emerges from the interaction between relationship dynamics and individual characteristics.

Empirical studies consistently indicate that marital dissatisfaction is prevalent across diverse cultural settings. Globally, Lambert et al. (2020) reported that many married women experience varying levels of dissatisfaction associated with unresolved conflict, emotional neglect, and unmet expectations within marriage. Similarly, Lin and Wang (2024) found that excessive relational expectations and perfectionistic standards increase the likelihood of dissatisfaction by creating persistent pressure within marital relationships. African studies similarly demonstrate that marital dissatisfaction is shaped by broader cultural and socioeconomic environments. Komal and Haroon (2025) reported that cultural norms, gender roles, and reliance on informal support systems significantly influence women's experiences of marital dissatisfaction. In many African communities, extended

families and religious institutions play central roles in marital conflict resolution, although these structures may simultaneously discourage open discussion of marital problems.

Evidence from Kenya also indicates that marital dissatisfaction remains an important concern among married women. Omondi et al. (2021) found that dissatisfaction was frequently associated with poor communication, unequal relationship power, and limited access to professional counselling services. Women living in rural settings reported greater marital dissatisfaction than their urban counterparts because they relied more heavily on informal family and religious support systems. Furthermore, Munini et al. (2024) demonstrated that personality compatibility contributes significantly to stable and satisfying marital relationships, while incompatibility increases relational strain. Religious communities were also found to provide emotional and social support, although they may reinforce expectations that discourage women from expressing dissatisfaction or leaving distressed marriages (Lin & Wang, 2024).

Despite the growing body of international, African, and Kenyan literature, little empirical evidence specifically documents the levels of marital dissatisfaction among women in church settings within Kajiado North Sub-County. Given the distinctive cultural and religious context of the area, localized evidence is needed to understand the extent of marital dissatisfaction among women attending churches and to inform culturally appropriate counselling, pastoral care, and family support programmes. This study therefore addressed this gap by assessing the levels of marital dissatisfaction among women in selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County.

METHODS

Study Design

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional quantitative research design to assess the levels of marital dissatisfaction among married women attending selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County. A descriptive cross-sectional design was considered appropriate because it facilitated the collection of quantitative data from the target population at a single point in time, thereby providing a snapshot of the prevailing levels of marital dissatisfaction among the participants. Unlike experimental or longitudinal designs, this approach did not involve manipulation of variables or follow-up observations, but rather focused on describing the characteristics of the study population as they existed during the period of data collection. The design was therefore suitable for generating baseline information on marital dissatisfaction and for describing patterns within the study population using standardized quantitative measures.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, Kenya, an area characterized by a blend of rural and urban communities where cultural traditions, religious beliefs, and family values continue to shape marital relationships. Churches constitute important social institutions within the sub-county by providing spiritual guidance, marital counselling, and emotional support to married couples. Consequently, they offered an appropriate setting for examining marital dissatisfaction among women. The study was carried out in four Christian denominations, namely Christ Is the Answer Ministries (CITAM), Africa Gospel Church (AGC), Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA), and the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. These churches were selected because they represented diverse Christian traditions within the area and served congregations with varied demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby enhancing the diversity of the study participants.

Participants and Sampling

The target population comprised 1,108 married women aged between 25 and 60 years attending the four selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County. Women within this age category were considered appropriate because they were likely to have experienced established marital relationships and could therefore provide reliable information regarding their marital experiences. The target population consisted of 530 women from CITAM, 88 from AGC, 250 from PCEA, and 240 from SDA. The sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for finite populations. An initial sample size of 384 participants was calculated and subsequently adjusted to

account for the finite population, resulting in a final sample of 277 participants. Participants were selected using simple random sampling, which ensured that every eligible married woman had an equal opportunity to participate in the study while minimizing selection bias. To ensure that each church was fairly represented, the sample was proportionately allocated according to the population size of each congregation, resulting in 133 participants from CITAM, 22 from AGC, 62 from PCEA, and 60 from SDA.

Instrument for Measuring Marital Dissatisfaction

Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire prepared in both English and Kiswahili to accommodate participants with different language preferences. The questionnaire underwent translation and back-translation procedures to ensure conceptual equivalence between the two versions. Section A collected participants' sociodemographic information, while Section B assessed marital dissatisfaction using items adapted from the ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Scale developed by Olson et al. (1985). The adapted instrument assessed important dimensions of marital relationships, including communication, emotional connection, conflict resolution, shared responsibilities, and overall relationship satisfaction. Participants indicated their responses using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, allowing the researcher to determine the extent of marital dissatisfaction across the different domains.

Before the main survey, the questionnaire was pilot-tested among 28 married women drawn from churches with characteristics similar to those of the study population but who did not participate in the final study. The pilot study evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questionnaire items and informed minor revisions that improved the instrument before the main data collection. The internal consistency of the marital dissatisfaction scale was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, while content validity was established through expert review by specialists in psychology, counselling, and research methodology to ensure that the questionnaire adequately measured the intended construct.

Data Analysis

Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness, coded, and entered into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis. Descriptive statistical techniques were used because the study sought to describe the levels of marital dissatisfaction rather than examine relationships between variables. Frequencies and percentages were computed to summarize participants' demographic characteristics, while means and standard deviations were used to describe responses to the marital dissatisfaction items and the overall levels of marital dissatisfaction. The findings were organized and presented using tables to enhance clarity and facilitate interpretation of the results.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Catholic University of Eastern Africa Ethics and Research Committee, while a research permit was granted by the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) before the commencement of data collection. Additional permission to conduct the study was obtained from the leadership of the participating churches. Before participation, respondents received adequate information regarding the purpose, procedures, potential benefits, and voluntary nature of the study, after which written informed consent was obtained. Participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process by ensuring that no identifying information was included in the questionnaires and that all collected data were securely handled. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki (2013) to safeguard the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants.

FINDINGS

A total of 249 questionnaires were distributed to married women attending the selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County. Of these, 247 questionnaires were completed and returned, yielding a response rate of 99.2%, while only two questionnaires (0.8%) were excluded because they contained incomplete responses. The high response

rate indicates a high level of participant engagement and provides confidence that the data adequately represent the study population. Such a high completion rate minimizes the likelihood of non-response bias and enhances the credibility and reliability of the descriptive findings reported in this study. Consequently, the 247 completed questionnaires formed the basis for all subsequent analyses aimed at assessing the levels of marital dissatisfaction among married women in the selected churches.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The demographic characteristics of the respondents were examined to provide an understanding of the composition of the study population and to establish the context within which marital dissatisfaction was assessed. Information on age, educational attainment, employment status, and church affiliation was considered important because these characteristics influence women's marital experiences, access to social and economic resources, and exposure to different family and religious environments. Describing the respondents therefore provides a basis for interpreting the findings on marital dissatisfaction and assessing the extent to which the sample reflects the target population.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents (N = 247).

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Age (years)	25–35	64	25.9
	36–45	71	28.7
	46–60	112	45.3
Education Level	Secondary	40	16.2
	College	97	39.3
	University	110	44.5
Employment Status	Formal employment	121	49.0
	Self-employed	41	16.6
	Unemployed	49	19.8
	Homemaker	36	14.6
Church Affiliation	CITAM	111	44.9
	AGC	21	8.5
	PCEA	59	23.9
	SDA	56	22.7

As shown in Table 1, nearly half of the respondents (45.3%) were aged between 46 and 60 years, followed by those aged 36–45 years (28.7%) and 25–35 years (25.9%). The predominance of women in the older age categories suggests that most participants had experienced relatively longer marital relationships, enabling them to provide informed perspectives on marital dissatisfaction. With respect to educational attainment, the majority of respondents had attained either university education (44.5%) or college education (39.3%), while only 16.2% had secondary education. This relatively high level of education suggests that participants were likely able to understand and accurately respond to the questionnaire items. Regarding employment status, 49.0% were in formal employment and 16.6% were self-employed, indicating that approximately two-thirds of the respondents were economically active. Economic participation is an important contextual characteristic because financial independence and employment may shape marital experiences and perceptions of relationship quality. Finally, respondents were drawn from four church denominations, with CITAM contributing the largest proportion (44.9%), followed by PCEA (23.9%), SDA (22.7%), and AGC (8.5%). The inclusion of participants from different denominations enhanced the diversity of the sample and ensured that the assessment of marital dissatisfaction reflected women from varied church settings within Kajiado North Sub-County.

Levels of Marital Dissatisfaction among Married Women

Marital dissatisfaction was assessed using six indicators that reflected key dimensions of marital relationships: poor communication, emotional neglect, mistrust, conflict and tension, financial conflict, and lack of intimacy. These indicators captured respondents' experiences of dissatisfaction within their marriages and provided a comprehensive assessment of the different aspects contributing to marital dissatisfaction. Mean scores and

standard deviations were computed for each indicator to determine the relative levels of dissatisfaction experienced by the respondents.

Table 2 Mean scores and standard deviations of marital dissatisfaction indicators (N = 247).

Indicator	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Poor communication	2.96	1.05	Moderate
Emotional neglect	2.71	1.30	Moderate
Mistrust	2.65	1.17	Moderate
Conflict and tension	2.59	1.01	Moderate
Financial conflict	2.45	1.13	Low to Moderate
Lack of intimacy	2.39	1.12	Low to Moderate

Table 2 shows that poor communication recorded the highest mean score (M = 2.96, SD = 1.05), indicating a moderate level of dissatisfaction in communication between spouses. This was followed by emotional neglect (M = 2.71, SD = 1.30), mistrust (M = 2.65, SD = 1.17), and conflict and tension (M = 2.59, SD = 1.01), all of which were interpreted as moderate levels of marital dissatisfaction. In contrast, financial conflict (M = 2.45, SD = 1.13) and lack of intimacy (M = 2.39, SD = 1.12) recorded comparatively lower mean scores and were interpreted as reflecting low to moderate levels of dissatisfaction. Overall, the findings suggest that communication-related and emotional aspects of marriage contributed more prominently to marital dissatisfaction than financial or intimacy-related concerns among the respondents. To provide an overall assessment of marital dissatisfaction, a composite score was computed by combining responses across all six indicators. The composite mean represents the general level of marital dissatisfaction experienced by the respondents.

Table 3 Overall level of marital dissatisfaction among married women (N = 247).

Variable	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
Overall marital dissatisfaction	2.63	0.86	Moderate

The overall mean score for marital dissatisfaction was 2.63 (SD = 0.86), indicating a moderate level of marital dissatisfaction among married women attending the selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County. The relatively moderate standard deviation suggests some variation in respondents' experiences; however, the findings generally indicate that marital dissatisfaction was present at a moderate level within the study population. This finding demonstrates that while many women experienced challenges in different aspects of their marital relationships, the overall level of dissatisfaction was neither markedly low nor severe but reflected a moderate degree of marital strain.

Demographic Differences in Marital Dissatisfaction

The study further examined whether the levels of marital dissatisfaction differed across selected demographic characteristics. Specifically, differences were assessed according to respondents' level of education, duration of marriage, employment status, and age. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare mean marital dissatisfaction scores across categorical variables, while Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to determine the relationship between age and marital dissatisfaction. These analyses provided insight into whether marital dissatisfaction varied across different demographic groups within the study population.

Table 4 Differences in marital dissatisfaction by education level, duration of marriage, and employment status (N = 247).

Variable	Category	n	Mean	SD	Test Statistic	p-value
Education level	Secondary	40	1.94	0.85	F = 26.965	< .001
	College	97	2.99	0.71		
	University	110	2.55	0.80		
Duration of marriage	<5 years	38	2.88	0.70	F = 3.088	.017

	5–10 years	27	2.38	0.92		
	11–20 years	60	2.83	0.96		
	>20 years	119	2.49	0.80		
Employment status	Employed	121	2.47	0.81	F = 7.379	< .001
	Self-employed	41	2.71	0.90		
	Unemployed	49	2.53	0.91		
	Homemaker	36	3.19	0.65		

Table 4 shows statistically significant differences in marital dissatisfaction across respondents' education level ($F = 26.965$, $p < .001$), duration of marriage ($F = 3.088$, $p = .017$), and employment status ($F = 7.379$, $p < .001$). Respondents with college education recorded the highest mean marital dissatisfaction score ($M = 2.99$, $SD = 0.71$), whereas those with secondary education reported the lowest ($M = 1.94$, $SD = 0.85$). With respect to marital duration, respondents married for less than five years reported the highest dissatisfaction ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 0.70$), while those married for 5–10 years recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 0.92$). Differences were also observed across employment categories, with homemakers reporting the highest level of marital dissatisfaction ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 0.65$), whereas women in formal employment reported the lowest mean score ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.81$). These findings indicate that marital dissatisfaction differed significantly across educational attainment, marital duration, and employment status.

Table 5 Relationship between age and marital dissatisfaction ($N = 247$).

Variables	r	p-value
Age and marital dissatisfaction	−0.125	.049

Table 5 presents the relationship between respondents' age and marital dissatisfaction. The analysis revealed a weak negative correlation between age and marital dissatisfaction ($r = -0.125$, $p = .049$). Although the magnitude of the relationship was small, the association was statistically significant at the 5% level, indicating that marital dissatisfaction tended to decrease slightly with increasing age. This finding suggests that age contributed modestly to variations in marital dissatisfaction among the respondents.

DISCUSSION

Levels of Marital Dissatisfaction among Married Women

The study established that married women attending the selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County experienced a moderate level of marital dissatisfaction, suggesting that although many participants encountered challenges within their marital relationships, these challenges had not escalated to severe dissatisfaction. This finding implies that the respondents generally maintained functional marriages but continued to experience recurring relational difficulties that affected the quality of their marital experiences. The moderate level of dissatisfaction also suggests opportunities for timely interventions aimed at strengthening marital relationships before dissatisfaction progresses to more serious marital distress. The finding is consistent with Johnson and Bradbury (2019), who observed that marital dissatisfaction is rarely an abrupt occurrence but rather develops gradually through the accumulation of unresolved relational challenges, changing life circumstances, and ineffective communication patterns. Similarly, Karney and Bradbury (2020) argued that marital quality exists along a continuum, with many couples occupying an intermediate position where marriages remain intact despite persistent relational strains. Comparable observations were reported by Kanter and Proulx (2021), who found that many couples experience moderate fluctuations in marital functioning over time without necessarily progressing to relationship dissolution.

The analysis of the individual indicators demonstrated that poor communication was the most prominent contributor to marital dissatisfaction, followed by emotional neglect, mistrust, and conflict and tension, while financial conflict and lack of intimacy contributed comparatively less. These findings suggest that interpersonal and emotional processes within marriage were more influential than structural or material factors in shaping women's experiences of dissatisfaction. Communication serves as the foundation upon which couples negotiate expectations, resolve disagreements, and express emotional needs. Consequently, when communication

deteriorates, misunderstandings accumulate, emotional needs remain unmet, and relational satisfaction declines. This interpretation supports the findings of Johnson and Bradbury (2019), who reported that ineffective communication patterns are among the strongest predictors of declining marital quality because they limit constructive conflict resolution and increase emotional distress. Likewise, Karney and Bradbury (2020) emphasized that the quality of interactions between spouses often exerts a greater influence on marital satisfaction than external stressors alone.

The prominence of emotional neglect further highlights the importance of emotional responsiveness in sustaining satisfying marital relationships. Women who perceive inadequate emotional support from their spouses may experience loneliness, frustration, and reduced relationship fulfilment despite remaining within the marriage. This finding is consistent with Lin and Wang (2024), who found that unmet emotional expectations and persistent relational pressures contributed significantly to marital dissatisfaction and emotional exhaustion among married women. Similarly, Gabriel (2024) reported that emotionally supportive marital relationships promote psychological wellbeing and marital stability, whereas diminished emotional connection weakens relationship quality. These findings collectively suggest that emotional availability remains a central component of marital satisfaction regardless of cultural context.

The moderate levels of mistrust and conflict and tension observed in the present study further indicate that many respondents experienced challenges related to confidence in their spouses and the management of interpersonal disagreements. According to Bowlby (1969), secure attachment relationships are characterized by trust, emotional availability, and confidence in significant others, whereas insecurity may foster suspicion, emotional withdrawal, and relational instability. The attachment perspective was subsequently expanded by Baldwin et al. (1996), Griffin and Bartholomew (1994), and Fraley (2002), who argued that individuals develop internal working models that shape expectations of support, trust, and responsiveness within close relationships. From this perspective, recurrent mistrust and unresolved conflict may reflect disruptions in these relational expectations, thereby contributing to dissatisfaction within marriage. The findings therefore lend support to Attachment Theory by illustrating the importance of secure emotional bonds in promoting healthy marital relationships.

Although financial conflict and lack of intimacy recorded comparatively lower mean scores, they nevertheless reflected low to moderate levels of dissatisfaction, indicating that they remained relevant aspects of the marital experience. Their comparatively lower contribution suggests that, within this study population, respondents perceived emotional and relational processes as more immediate sources of dissatisfaction than financial concerns or physical intimacy. This observation aligns with Lyman et al. (2024), who argued that emotional support, relational resilience, and effective coping resources often buffer couples against the adverse effects of external stressors. Similarly, the Stress and Coping Theory proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and further developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1980) posits that individuals' appraisal of stressful situations and their available coping resources determine the extent to which life challenges affect wellbeing and relationships. Applied to the present findings, this perspective suggests that while financial pressures may exist, couples who maintain supportive communication and adaptive coping strategies may be better able to manage such stressors without allowing them to become the primary source of marital dissatisfaction.

Demographic Differences in Marital Dissatisfaction

The study further demonstrated that marital dissatisfaction varied significantly according to respondents' level of education, duration of marriage, and employment status, while age exhibited a weak but statistically significant negative relationship with marital dissatisfaction. These findings suggest that women's marital experiences are influenced not only by interpersonal dynamics within marriage but also by individual and socioeconomic characteristics that shape expectations, coping capacities, and relationship interactions.

The significant differences observed across educational levels indicate that educational attainment influenced how respondents experienced and evaluated their marital relationships. Women with college education reported the highest levels of marital dissatisfaction, whereas those with secondary education reported the lowest. One possible explanation is that education may shape expectations regarding communication, emotional support, shared decision-making, and equality within marriage. Individuals with higher educational attainment may

therefore be more sensitive to unmet relational expectations and more likely to evaluate the quality of their marriages critically. This interpretation is consistent with Gabriel (2024), who reported that relationship quality is influenced by individuals' psychological expectations and perceptions of marital functioning. Similarly, Karney and Bradbury (2020) argued that marital satisfaction is influenced by the interaction between partners' expectations and their day-to-day relationship experiences, suggesting that dissatisfaction may emerge when marital realities fail to meet anticipated standards. Although education often provides resources that strengthen family functioning, the present findings indicate that it may also heighten awareness of relational shortcomings.

Marital dissatisfaction also differed significantly according to the duration of marriage, with women who had been married for less than five years reporting the highest levels of dissatisfaction. This finding suggests that the early years of marriage may present considerable adjustment challenges as couples negotiate roles, establish communication patterns, and adapt to shared responsibilities. Over time, couples may gradually develop effective coping strategies, mutual understanding, and more stable patterns of interaction, thereby reducing dissatisfaction. This interpretation agrees with Johnson and Bradbury (2019), who observed that marital satisfaction changes across the life course as couples respond to developmental transitions and accumulated relationship experiences. Likewise, Kanter and Proulx (2021) reported that marital functioning evolves over time and that couples who successfully adapt to relational challenges are more likely to maintain stable and satisfying marriages. The findings therefore suggest that marital dissatisfaction is not a fixed characteristic but a dynamic process that changes as relationships mature.

Employment status was also significantly associated with marital dissatisfaction, with homemakers reporting the highest levels of dissatisfaction and women in formal employment reporting the lowest. Economic participation may provide opportunities for social interaction, financial independence, and increased autonomy, all of which can influence perceptions of relationship quality. Conversely, homemakers may experience greater dependence on their spouses for financial resources and social engagement, potentially increasing vulnerability to dissatisfaction when emotional or relational needs are not adequately met. This finding may be understood through Social Exchange Theory, which proposes that individuals evaluate relationships by comparing perceived rewards with associated costs (Blau, 1964). Where rewards such as emotional support, recognition, shared responsibilities, and autonomy are perceived to be limited, dissatisfaction is likely to increase. Similarly, Clark and Mills (1979) argued that although close relationships are ideally characterized by communal concern rather than calculated exchanges, perceptions of inequity and unmet expectations can nevertheless undermine relationship satisfaction. The present findings therefore suggest that economic and social circumstances may influence how women evaluate the quality of their marriages.

The study further found a weak but statistically significant negative relationship between age and marital dissatisfaction, indicating that dissatisfaction tended to decrease slightly as women grew older. Although the strength of the relationship was modest, the finding suggests that age may contribute to greater relationship stability through accumulated marital experience, emotional maturity, and improved coping strategies. Older women may have developed more realistic expectations of marriage or acquired more effective approaches to managing conflict and maintaining emotional balance within the relationship. This finding is consistent with Karney and Bradbury (2020), who noted that marital quality often reflects long-term adaptation to changing life circumstances rather than isolated events. It is also supported by Jennings et al. (2022), who observed that socioeconomic and life-course experiences shape how individuals respond to marital challenges and relational stress. The relatively weak correlation found in the present study, however, indicates that age alone explains only a small proportion of marital dissatisfaction and that other relational and contextual factors remain more influential.

Taken together, the demographic findings demonstrate that marital dissatisfaction is influenced by a combination of personal, relational, and socioeconomic factors. Differences associated with education, marital duration, employment status, and age underscore the importance of considering the broader context in which marriages are experienced. These findings suggest that programmes designed to strengthen marital relationships should acknowledge the diverse circumstances of married women and provide support that is responsive to variations in life stage, educational background, and socioeconomic conditions rather than adopting a uniform approach to marital counselling and family support.

CONCLUSION

The study assessed the levels of marital dissatisfaction among married women attending selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, Kajiado County, and found that respondents experienced an overall moderate level of marital dissatisfaction. Poor communication, emotional neglect, mistrust, and conflict emerged as the most prominent contributors to dissatisfaction, indicating that relational and emotional challenges were more influential than financial conflict and lack of intimacy in shaping women's marital experiences. The findings further demonstrated that marital dissatisfaction differed significantly according to education level, duration of marriage, and employment status, while age exhibited a weak but significant negative relationship with marital dissatisfaction. These results underscore that marital dissatisfaction is a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by interpersonal, individual, and socioeconomic factors. The study therefore highlights the importance of strengthening communication, emotional support, and relationship skills within marriage while promoting targeted counselling and family support programmes that address the diverse needs of married women across different demographic groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, churches should strengthen marriage enrichment and counselling programmes focusing on communication, emotional support, conflict resolution, and trust. Premarital and post-marital counselling should incorporate practical relationship skills to support healthy marital adjustment and prevent persistent dissatisfaction. Counsellors, psychologists, and family therapists should provide targeted support for women who may be more vulnerable to marital dissatisfaction, particularly homemakers and women in the early years of marriage. Confidential counselling, peer-support groups, relationship education, and appropriate referral pathways should be strengthened to ensure timely support. Finally, future studies should examine marital dissatisfaction across broader populations and regions in Kenya using longitudinal and mixed-methods approaches. Future research should also include both spouses to provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital dynamics and examine how marital dissatisfaction changes over time and the factors underlying it.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the study was conducted among married women attending selected churches in Kajiado North Sub-County, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to women from other religious settings, non-church populations, or other geographical regions. Second, the study relied on self-reported data, making the findings susceptible to social desirability and recall bias, particularly because marital relationships are sensitive and personal. Some participants may have underreported or overstated their experiences of marital dissatisfaction. Third, the cross-sectional design captured respondents' experiences at a single point in time and therefore did not permit conclusions about changes in marital dissatisfaction over time or causal relationships. Thus, while the findings demonstrate associations among the variables examined, they should not be interpreted as evidence that one variable causes changes in another. The cross-sectional design also limits understanding of how marital satisfaction may evolve in response to changing relational, personal, and contextual circumstances. Future studies could employ longitudinal designs to examine changes in marital satisfaction over time and clarify the temporal direction of observed relationships. Mixed-methods approaches could also provide deeper insight into the experiences and underlying factors contributing to marital dissatisfaction. In addition, including both spouses in future research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital dynamics and allow comparison of partners' perspectives. Despite these limitations, the use of a standardized instrument, probability sampling, pilot testing, and a high questionnaire completion rate strengthened the credibility and reliability of the findings.

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