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DETERMINANT OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG YOUNG COUPLES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Correlational survey design was adopted to examine the predictive influence of psychological and social factors on marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos state. Representative sample size of 682 young couples completed measures regarding personality trait, religiosity, parental influence and marital satisfaction. The hypothesized variables have correlation coefficients ranging from $r = .123$ to $.519$ with marital satisfaction. Multivariate Regression Analyses indicated that the contribution of the independent variables to the prediction of the dependent variable was significant [$F_{(5,676)} = 14.49$; $p < .001$]. They jointly accounted for about 29.5% variation in the prediction of marital satisfaction. Religiosity had the highest contribution ($\beta = .186$, $t = 5.34$; $P < .05$) while parental influence and gender were not potent in predicting marital satisfaction. The study provides empirical evidence to suggest that psychological and social factors have relationship with marital satisfaction in varying dimensions.

Keyword: Marital Satisfaction, Psychosocial, Social, Lagos, Nigeria

Introduction

In Nigeria the institution of marriage has seen a dramatic and disturbing turnaround from the sacred 'till death do us part' into a blasé, cavalier, slapdash and off-the-cuff relationship. This is unlike in primeval Nigeria where marriage was revered and seen as a sacred institution—a union between a matured man and a woman who may have divergent views of life but deemed it fit to live and enjoy their lives together as husband and wife. This justifies why marriage is usually contracted amidst joy, happiness and merry-making for the couple, family members and friends (Esere, 2002). In more recent time, divorce rates have grown to a high number globally. Nigeria is said to be among the highest in West Africa with one in three

marriages said to fail within the first three years (Adegoke, 2010). The situation could be worse in urban areas such as Lagos state where marital relationships are broken on a daily basis. This assertion was corroborated by Animasahun and Oladeni (2012) who cited divorce cases at Grade "A" customary court, Somolu Local Government Area where five (5) of the eight (8) divorce cases i.e. 62.5% ended up in divorce. One (1) of the eight (8) cases i.e. 12.5% did not end up in divorce while two (2) of the eight (8) cases i.e. 25% were yet to be decided.

It is generally impossible to predict the type of marriages that will succeed or fail based on marital dissatisfaction. However, "examination of divorce probabilities by marital duration shows that the probability of

divorce is highest during the earliest years of marriage and declines sharply and steadily with marital duration" (Thornton & Rogers, 1987 p. 2). Marital satisfaction in this context is defined as the degree to which an individual's needs, expectations, and desires are being satisfied in their marriages. Marital satisfaction according to Hendrick and Hendrick (1997) is "a subjective experience of one's own personal happiness and contentment in the marital relationship" (p. 57). According to Garcia (1999), marital satisfaction is considered at three levels: a) the satisfaction with one's spouse, b) satisfaction with family life, c) general satisfaction with life. Tikumah (2009) opines that marital dissatisfaction can be due to the absence of the four purposes of marriage namely: childbearing, sexual satisfaction, companionship and economic satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction is associated with lower risk of cardiovascular disease and all-cause mortality (Smith, Timothy, Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, Layton & Bradley, 2010). Conversely marital dissatisfaction, separation and divorce have been associated with decreases in psychological well-being, sexual satisfaction, happiness, self acceptance; and increases in health problems, risk of mortality, social isolation, financial strain, negative life events, depression, and alcohol use (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010). Children from marriages experiencing dissatisfaction have behavioural and emotional adjustment problems. In the midst of the conflict, children become the attentive witnesses to aggressive adult behaviours. Subsequently, children might become more aggressive with peers and authorities, modeling the negative behaviours of their parents (Papp, Cumming & Goeke-Morey, 2009).

Due to the role marital satisfaction has to play in the stability of marriage and indeed the society, this field has attracted the

attention of researchers, sociologist, educators, behavioural scientists just to mention a few. For instance, *Omage (2013) investigated* marital failure in Benin City, Nigeria. Unlike *Omage (2013)* who was interested in reasons for marital failures, *Ubangha, Makinde, Ajani and Raji (2013)* examined stability among couples in Lagos state. Further, *Ofovwe, Ofili, Ojetu and Okosun (2013)* researched into marital satisfaction and job satisfaction as correlates of psychological health of secondary school teachers in Nigeria. In these studies the roles of variables which account for the differing degrees of marital satisfaction and the fluctuations in the marital quality still remains uncertain. *Animasahun and Oladeni (2013)* instituted assertiveness training and marital communication therapies to enhance marital satisfaction among couples in Lagos state. While these efforts are commendable and desirable, for effective remediation of marital dissatisfaction, there is need to understand the individual characteristics of married couple which will provide insight into appropriate treatment package to be adopted. It therefore, becomes imperative for the present study to examine the extent to which marital satisfaction could be predicted by psychological and social factors.

Literature Reviews

Personality traits are enduring characteristics of individuals which has a long history in the study of marital relationship. This is because marital compatibility could be affected by the personality characteristics that the two people bring to their marriage (Zoby, 2005). It is well documented that personality characteristics of satisfied couples are different from those found among dissatisfied couples. For example, *Craig and Olson (1995)* as cited by *Mahdi, Salarian, Kaleje, Vahidi, Javadpour, Alizadeh, Amini and Ghaderi (2013)* were of the opinion that

behaviours associated with specific personality characteristics can contribute to tranquility or conflict in the marriage. Personality traits that have received much attention is Costa and McCrae (1992) five-factor model which consists of five aspects of personality called the Big Five namely: neuroticism, extroversion, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and agreeableness. Kelly and Conley (1987) aver that the three aspects of personality that most strongly relates to marital satisfaction is the neuroticism of the husband, the neuroticism of the wife, and the impulse control of the husband. They affirm that the three major aspects of personality accounted for more than half of the predictable variance in marital satisfaction. The remaining variance was accounted for by attitudinal, social-environment, and sexual history variables. On the contrary, Yode (2011) report that couples with personality match scored low in marital satisfaction.

Literature has pointed to relationships with parents as having a strong influence on marital satisfaction. Relationships with parents may influence marital quality in several ways. Parents may foster psychological well-being in the adult making children feel loved and cared for, (Umberson, 1992); that sense of well-being may spill over, fostering marital closeness for adult children. Adults may rely on parents as sources of support during times of stress (e.g., work, child care), lessening the burden on spouses to provide continuous support, thus enhancing marital quality. In contrast, strained parental ties may be a considerable source of stress for adult children (Umberson, 1992). Several studies have shown that external stressors undermine marital quality (Bryant & Conger, 1999; Neff & Karney, 2004; Umberson, Williams, Powers, Chen & Campbel, 2005). In a later study, Bryant, Conger and Meehan (2001)

found that discord with in-laws was detrimental to their children's marital satisfaction.

For decades, religion plays an important role in the lives of Nigerians and marriage has traditionally been associated with religious ceremony and affirmation. It is therefore, not surprising that researchers are interested in the relation of marital satisfaction to religion and religiosity. Hill, Pargament, Swyers, Gorsuch and McCullough (1998) as cited by Haseley (2006) define religion as the feelings, thoughts, experiences and behaviours that arise from a search for the sacred. Pittman, Price-Bonham and McKenry (1983) aver that religiosity is the extent to which an individual feels that religious beliefs influence his or her life. Kohn (2001) opined that religiosity consist of numerous interrelated but distinct components, such as, homogamy or congruence of religious faith between partner's church attendance (Vaughan, 2001), denominational affiliation (Call & Heaton, 1997) importance of religion (Sussman & Alexander, 1999), religious commitment (Worthington, Wade, Hight, Ripley, McCoullough & Berry, 2003), religious style or orientation (Johnson, 1997) and prayer (Tloczynski & Fritzsche, 2002). Generally, findings have indicated that the greater the couples religion is congruent, the more the marital satisfaction and fewer the family stressors (Chinitz, 2001; Kohn 2001). Moreover, the more congruent couples are in religious beliefs, the greater their marital satisfaction and religious commitment (Chintiz, 2001).

Gender differences have also been reported in the marital satisfaction literature, but the findings of this relationship are mixed. Some studies have indicated that husbands tend to be more satisfied in their marriages than wives (Rogers & Amato, 2000), while other studies have suggested

that wives are more satisfied (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Sternberg & Hojjat, 1997). Rhoades (1994) found that the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction for men were their relationships to their children, followed by approval of parents and friends regarding the marriage, couple communication, and lastly emotional health. Conversely, the strongest predictors of marital satisfaction for women were couple communication, followed by approval of parents and friends, emotional health, impulsivity, and lastly the parent-child relationship. Koehne (2000) found intimacy, defined as voluntary closeness to one's spouse while maintaining distinct boundaries to the self, was the most significant predictor of marital satisfaction for men. On the other hand, commitment, defined as the bond with a spouse characterized by marital stability with little need to monitor and test alternatives, was found to be the most significant predictor of marital satisfaction for women.

Recent research comparing interethnic/ tribal unions with same-ethnic unions found that marriage quality and marriage satisfaction were reportedly lower among men and women who were married to or living with someone of a different ethnicity or tribe. Marriage conflict was reportedly higher among interethnic couples than same-ethnic couples, and the perceived chance of relationship dissolution was also significantly higher. More complex relationship histories (divorce, remarriage and serial cohabitations), greater differences in couple demographics (age, education or religion), fewer shared values, and less social support largely account for these differences. On the contrary, researchers such as Mustafa, and Aripin (2012) and Sussman (1997) show that the extent to which couples held similar or differing levels of ethnic identity and other-group orientation did not impact

significantly marital satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The broad objective of this study is to examine the predictive influence of the independent variables (personality traits, Parental influence, Religiosity, tribe and gender) on marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos state. Specifically, the study proffered answers to the following research questions;

Research Question

1. Is there a significant correlation between the independent variables (personality types, parental influence, religiosity, tribe and gender) on marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos state?
2. To what extent will the independent variables jointly predict marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos state?
3. What is the relative contribution of each of the variables (parental influence, religiosity, tribe, personality traits, and gender) to the prediction of marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos state?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

The independent variables (personality types, parental influence, Religiosity, tribe, and gender) will not have a significant relationship with the respondents' marital satisfaction.

The independent variables will not have a significant joint contribution to the prediction of the respondents' marital satisfaction.

The independent variables will not have significant individual contribution to the prediction of the respondent marital

satisfaction

Methods and Materials

Design

In order to establish if the variables interact with each other, correlational research design was adopted for the study. The design was considered most appropriate because it has the potential to provide insight into the numerical representation of the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 682 respondents whose marriage was equal or less than five years was randomly sampled from Lagos state, Nigeria. The couples were approached in different locations in both rural and urban locations (churches, markets, mosques, e.t.c) in Lagos state. Three research assistants who translated the questionnaire to three major Nigerian languages, namely; Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo assisted in the distribution of the questionnaire. The use of this approach in the administration of questionnaires enabled the inclusion of participants from diverse demographic background such as age, gender, tribe, religion, educational qualification, profession and location. The collection of data spanned a period of six months and two weeks. Out of the one thousand two hundred and thirty questionnaires distributed, seven hundred and ten were returned out of which 682 were correctly filled. The questionnaire return rate was 55.4% which was considered satisfactory for the study.

Measures

Two standardized instruments and one researcher made questionnaires were used for data collection. Section A of the questionnaire obtained information regarding the respondents' age, gender, years

of marriage, religion, residence etc. Section B contained items on the variables of study as shown below:

Marital Satisfaction

Marital Adjustment Scale (MAT) by Locke and Wallace (1959) was used to assess the respondents' marital satisfaction. It is a 15-item scale that was initially used to differentiate well-adjusted couples from distressed (unsatisfied) couples. The 15 items asked respondents to answer questions related to their marriage. Sample items include: *If you had your life to live over, do you think you would marry your spouse? Do you confide in your mate? Do you ever wish you had not married? Do you and your mate engage in outside interests together?* The items are positively worded. The scores for all 15 items were added up together, higher scores indicated greater satisfaction. The authors reported that internal construct was estimated using the Spearman-Brown formula and it has correlation of .90. For the purpose of this study, test-retest reliability index of $r=0.77$ was recorded using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

Personality Traits measure

Personality traits were assessed with the NEO-PI scale by Renner (2002). The original scale was developed from International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) to assess the five-factor model of personality by Costa and McCrae (1992). The scale consists of 50 statements (10 items for each facet). This fifty-item scale was measured on a Likert-type anchoring ranging from Strongly Disagree SD (1) to Strongly Agree SA (5), and contains five dimensions corresponding to the five factors of personality: Extraversion, Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness, and Conscientiousness. Sample items for each of the dimensions are as follows: *"I make friends easily"* (for

Extraversion), "I have frequent mood swings" (for Neuroticism), "I accept people as they are" (for Agreeableness), "I enjoy hearing new ideas" (for Openness), and "I make plans and stick to them" (for Conscientiousness). The instrument was positively worded. Higher points indicate a higher value in the assessed construct. The reliabilities for each facet were as follows: Extraversion ($\alpha = .86$), Neuroticism ($\alpha = .83$), Agreeableness ($\alpha = .77$), Openness ($\alpha = .82$), and Conscientiousness ($\alpha = .81$). The reliability during pilot study was calculated using PPMC it show an index of $r = 0.75$.

Parental Influence measure

In order to assess the extent of parental influence on marital satisfaction, the researcher generated items based on literature reviews to assess parental influence. The instrument titled "*parental influence in children's marriage questionnaire*." It is a positively worded twenty-two item questionnaire with response anchored on 5-point Likert format. It has three sub sections (A, B and C). Items in section A were specifically design to assess the level of their parents' involvement in the selection of partners. In section B respondents were asked to rate in five point Likert formats the extent to which their parents are involved in their marital decisions. Finally, respondents indicated the extent to which their parents provided them with different types of supports (upkeep, chores, and financial). The reliability indices for the three subsections are: $\alpha = .85$ for section A; $\alpha = .85$ for section B and $\alpha = .81$ for Section C. Test retest within two weeks interval show that the instrument has reliability index coefficient of correlation $r = 0.71$

Results

The result of hypothesis one which was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) is presented on table 1.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix of the independent Variables and marital satisfaction

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Marital Satisfaction	1.00					
2. Parental Influence	-.123*	1.00				
3. Religiosity	.519*	.904**	1.00			
4. Tribe	.409**	.189	.159	1.00		
5. Personality Types	.342	-.117	-.394	-.121*	1.00	
6. Gender	-.186	.135*	-.116	.164	.219	1.00
Mean	55.8450	32.2350	31.5400	7.1650	71.2400	9.5350
SD	15.32630	7.61312	7.72247	1.35534	2409346	2.50003

* Sig. at .01 level; ** Sig. at .05 level

The first hypothesis which stated that there will be no significant relationship between the independent and dependent variables was rejected since the calculated value was greater than the table value. The descriptive statistics and inter-correlations among the study variables as shown on table 1 reveal that marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos is significantly correlated with parental influence ($r = -.123^*$, $p < .05$), religiosity ($r = .519^*$, $p < .05$), tribe ($r = .409^{**}$, $p < .05$), personality types ($r = .342$, $p < .01$), and gender ($r = -.186$, $p < .01$). The implication of this outcome is that the strength of the relationship as well as the direction of the relationship interacts with each other to influence marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos. It is worthwhile to note that while three variables had positive relationship with marital satisfaction, parental influence ($r = -.123^*$, $p < .05$) and gender ($r = -.186$, $p < .01$) had inverse relationship.

Hypothesis Two

The second hypothesis which stated that the independent variables (parental influence, religiosity, tribe, personality type and gender) will not have any significant joint contribution to the prediction of marital satisfaction of young couples was rejected as presented on table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Regression Analysis of the combined Prediction of Independent Variables on Marital Satisfaction

$$R = .553^a$$

$$R^2 = .305$$

$$\text{Adj. } R^2 = .295$$

$$\text{Std Error of the Est.} = 15.34068$$

Model	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	P	Remark
Regression	24534.61	5	4906.92	14.49	.001 ^a	Sig
Residual	65689.35	676	338.60			
Total	90223.96	681				

Result of Multiple Regression presented on table 2 show that the independent variables (parental influence, religiosity, tribe, personality types and gender have composite contribution to the prediction of marital satisfaction among young couples. This is confirmed by the result of coefficient of multiple correlations (R); = .553; (R²) = .305, and Multiple adjusted R2 = .295. The outcome is indicative of the fact that the independent variables jointly accounted for about 29.5% variation in the prediction of marital satisfaction of young couples while other variables not examined in this study may have accounted for 70.5%. In addition, Analysis of variance produced an F- ratio value significant at .001 level alpha level [F (5,676) =14.49; p< .001). This suggests that the four hypothesized variables contribute significantly to the prediction of marital satisfaction either positively or negatively.

Hypothesis Three: The third hypothesis postulated in this study was also rejected at 0.05 level of significance. Result of the Multiple Regression Analysis show that the independent variables contributed individually and in different magnitude to the prediction of marital satisfaction of the respondents as shown on table 3

Table 3: Relative contribution of the independent variable to the dependent variable (Test of significance of the Regression coefficients).

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient Beta	T	P	Remark
	B	Std. Error				
(Constant)	58.703	7.584		7.740	.000	S
Parental influence	.111	.199	.072	.397	.110	NS
Religiosity	.311	.330	.186	5.336	.000	S
Tribe	.194	.129	.114	2.049	.011	S
Personality Types	.219	.025	.154	4.255	.000	S
Gender	-.084	.210	-.068	-.298	.320	NS

Using the standardized regression coefficient to determine the relative contributions of the independent variables to the explanation of the dependent variable (marital satisfaction) the result show that the variables contributed differentially to marital satisfaction with religiosity being the most potent ($\beta = .186, t=5.336; P <.05$), followed by personality types ($\beta = .154, t=4.255; P <.05$); tribe ($\beta = .114, t=2.049; P <.05$), while parental influence ($\beta = .072, t=.397; P >.05$) and gender ($\beta = -.068, t=.320; P >.05$) made no potent contribution in predicting marital satisfaction respectively as shown on table 3.

Discussion

This study examined the extent to which psychological and social factors could predict marital satisfaction of young couples in Lagos state. The study assumed that the predictor variables (personality traits, parental influence, gender and religiosity) would not have significant relationship with marital satisfaction, the hypothesis was however rejected.

Similarly, the hypothesis that the independent variables will not have significant composite and individual contribution to the prediction of marital satisfaction was also rejected. The results suggested that the variables have relationship with marital satisfaction but at a varying strength and direction. For example, while three of the independent variables (personality traits, religiosity and tribe) had positive relationship with marital satisfaction, parental influence and gender had inverse relationship with marital satisfaction as shown on table 1. This result corroborated several studies which show that personality traits influence marital satisfaction (Lavee & Ben-Ari, 2004; Barelds, 2005; Donnellan, Humbad, Iacono, McGue & Burt, 2010; Malouff et al., 2010). The possible explanation for this result could be due to the fact that couples who score high in conscientiousness will have self-control to constructively manage the conflicts that inevitably arise in marriage. Unlike their counterpart with low conscientiousness who may inadvertently escalate negativity by responding impulsively or rashly to their partners (Robin, 2000). Moreover, agreeable spouses may be better equipped to handle the conflicts that arise in marriages and this disposition may reduce the frequency and/or intensity of negative interactions. In addition, couples who have openness personalities, may adopt a more intellectual approach to problem solving and possibly more flexible attitude towards change, and may be more willing to analyze their marriage. These behaviours and attitudes would likely facilitate the constructive management of conflict in marriage. Research on extroversion and marital satisfaction has shown inconsistent results however. Some researchers reported that extroversion was associated with marital satisfaction (Watson, Hubbard & Wiese, 2000; Hayes & Joseph,

2003). These researchers argue that extroverted individuals are characterized by liveliness, high activity levels, sociability, dominance, energy, and cheerfulness. These personality traits have been found to lead to marital satisfaction (Gattis, Berns & Simpson, 2004; Malouff et al., 2010; Moller, 2004) However, this outcome contradicted (Wang et al., 2005, in Schmitt et al., 2007) who reported non-significant relationship between these personality variables and marital satisfaction.

It is not surprising that parental influence has inverse relationship with marital satisfaction. This contradicts the popular theoretical position that married couples do not exist in social isolation rather that the social contexts and relationships outside the marital dyad influence marital quality (Lewis, 1973). In present day Nigeria, Marriage is no longer regarded as a social arrangement between two families. Unlike in primeval period, family ties are now de-emphasized in modern Nigeria family, rather individual needs are emphasized. The era where most parents would arrange marriage for their children for security purpose to ensure a peaceful, successful and comfortable married life is rapidly waning. This finding is consistent with works of previous scholars (Kapinus, 2005; Popenoe, Whitehead, & Miller, 2005; Segrin & Taylor 2006; Ghimire 2006) who found parental influence insignificant to marital satisfaction.

This study shows that religiosity and its various components have been associated with marital satisfaction. This is consistent with studies of (Bradbury et al., 2000; Greeff, 2000; Chinitz, 2001; Kohn, 2001) who report that couples with similar cognitive processes, religious beliefs and philosophy of life have marital satisfaction. Research on the role of religion and marital satisfaction has shown an overall positive relationship between

religiosity and marital satisfaction. Kaslow and Robinson (1996) found religious beliefs to be the fifth most important component for marital satisfaction. However, other studies showed no relationship or even a negative relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Astacio, 1999; Koehne, 2000; Vaughan, 2001). These inconsistencies in the research may be due to varied definitions and measurement differences, but may also indicate that religiosity can either improve or decrease marital satisfaction depending on other contextual factors.

This outcome is plausible given that the role of religion has generally been accepted as an important component of the marital union. Previous studies (Butler, Stout & Gardner, 2002) have shown that couples who used prayer during marital conflict decreased negativity, contempt, and hostility while increasing emotional intimacy with their partner. Religiosity may compensate for couples' vulnerabilities and help them remain relatively satisfied despite these vulnerabilities. La Hoz (2005) also provide support that religion discourages divorces.

The finding of this study with regards to the influence of tribe on marital satisfaction corroborates report of Mustafa, Mohd -Hasim and Aripin (2012); Maldonado (2000); Miller and Browning (2000) who found that tribe and ethnic group contributed significantly to marital satisfaction. This outcome is expected since there is likelihood that if couples are from same ethnic group there will have shared values and similar cultures which is capable of enhancing relationship quality and satisfaction. The cultural systems (values, beliefs and worldviews) help people in forming internalized social norms that are prime sources of marriage behaviour.

Conclusions

This study provided empirical data to suggest

that personality traits, religiosity and couples tribe significantly predict marital satisfaction in a positive direction. On the other hand, parental influence and gender have inverse relationship with marital satisfaction. The implication is that the more partners' personality, religion and tribe are similar, the more they will have satisfied marital union. On the contrary, the more parents' interfere in marriage (mate selection, decision making and finances) the less likely the couples will be satisfied in their relationship.

Recommendations

- Marriage counsellors should teach couples how to understand their own personality type and the personality type of the other person involved in the relationship. By so doing they will appreciate their individual differences which will enhance marital satisfaction.
- Moreover, though different types of marriages have different characteristics, communication is a basic area which seems to be critical in all relationships irrespective of couple's characteristics. Couples should therefore be taught how to communicate what they expect from their spouses.
- Behavioural scientists should also offer premarital counselling to intending couples. This will no doubt help them prepare for marriage. Premarital counselling ensures that partners have a strong, healthy relationship — giving a better chance for a stable and satisfying marriage. Premarital counselling can also help to identify major weaknesses due to personality differences that could become problems during marriage.
- Workshops and seminars should be organized to empowered couples

with assertiveness, value clarification and negotiation skills should be organized by counselling Psychologists. With these skills couples can resist any undue parental interference in their marital relationship.

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