

Full Length Research Paper

Gender and age as moderators of the relationship between environmental variables and marital adjustment among married persons'

Ebenuwa-Okoh, E.E.

Department of Guidance and Counselling, Delta state university, Abraka. Email: ebenuwaokoh@yahoo.com

Accepted 25 November, 2010

This study examines the moderating impact of gender and age at marriage on the relationship between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment. Two hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level of significance. The sample size of 2651 was used for the study. A valid 60 item questionnaire titled Marital Adjustment and Personality Types Inventory with a reliability coefficient of 0.90 was also used for this study. The results reveal that gender and age at marriage do not moderate the relationship between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment among the respondents. It was recommended that adult counselling should be emphasized and counselling centers established.

Keywords: Communication Flow, Emotional Expression, Financial Management, Work Involvement, Marital Adjustment

INTRODUCTION

The quest for happiness and joy in humans leads to marriage. Marriage is a lifelong interpersonal relationship between man and woman as husband and wife governed by legal, religious and customary principles. When spouses get along with each other to achieve harmonious working relationship in different areas of their marital life, adjustment is achieved. Marital adjustment is a universal issue. This is because conflicts, stresses and threats of divorce have been the causes of many family instability (Amao-Kehinde, 1996; Oyemerehaye, 1997; Agbe, 1998; Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2003, 2007). The concept of marital adjustment is complex and has multi-dimensional explanations. Spainer and Cole (1976) defined it as a process of movement along a continuum which can be evaluated in terms of proximity to good or poor adjustment. This suggests that marital adjustment is a process which could be longitudinally studied over a period of time. Spainer and Cole (1976), Ofeogbu (1998) and Ebenuwa-Okoh (2007) opined that the measure of marital adjustment do not generally assess a changing process. Rather, it measures a position on a continuum from well-adjusted to maladjusted. Therefore, when marital adjustment is achieved, troublesome marital differences are reduced. Inter-personal tensions and personal anxiety can then be well managed. This increases marital satisfaction, happiness and dyadic

cohesion. Consensus on matters of importance in marital functioning, family peace and stability are enhanced. (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 1999, 2003, 2007).

Studies have shown that environmental variables such as emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment correlate. Ofeogbu (1998) and Ebenuwa-Okoh and Okorodudu (2003) found them to be correlates and predictors of marital adjustment. Apart from the above psychologists, others have pinpointed gaps within marital adjustment that need to be addressed. They opined that personal characteristics such as gender and age of marriage play significant roles in an individual's reactions to circumstances surrounding marital interaction.

Gender is a natural endowment qualifying an individual as either male or female. Osborne (1988) opines that females are social and emotional beings who take initiative to cement their relationship while males (husbands) seem better equipped to do abstract thinking and lean toward being venturesome in marriage. These natural endowments affect the reactions of spouses in the expression of emotions, management of finance, communication flow and involvement in the place of work (environmental variables) which, in turn, affect their marital adjustment. This study is therefore set to examine

how being a man or woman moderates environmental variables which, in turn, affect their marital adjustment.

Studies have revealed that the age at which people marry could be crucial to marital adjustment. For example, the younger the couple (i.e age at marriage), the higher the likelihood of divorce (Shoen, 1975). This has not been so proven in our culture, hence, the need for the present study.

Statement of the Problem

The main thrust of this study is to examine critically how personal factors such as gender and age at marriage moderate the relationship between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment.

It is believed that accurate knowledge of the moderating effects of these variables on marital adjustment will provide opportunity for effective and efficient marital counselling in Delta State.

Conceptual Analysis

The conceptual model of this study is based on the paradigm of the behavioural SOR theory. It focuses on the Stimulus Organism Response (SOR) dimension. In this model, the criterion variable is marital adjustment. Marital adjustment is a product of reinforcement of cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects of the married person's behaviour. The independent variables in the model are emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, and work involvement. However, the quality of adjustment in this study is moderated by gender and age at marriage.

Research Questions:

1. What is the nature of relationship between the variables of gender, age at marriage, emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment?
2. Does gender moderate the relationship between married persons' emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment?
3. Does age at marriage moderate the relationship between married persons' emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant moderating impact of gender effect on the relationship between married persons' emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment.
2. There is no significant moderating impact of age at marriage effect on the relationship between married persons' emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment.

METHODOLOGY

This study is a survey. It adopts expo-facto and it is correlational in nature.

Population

The population of this study consisted of all married persons in Delta State. There is no reliable record of the actual number of married persons in the state. This is because most individuals marry through traditional method and do not register their marriage thereafter.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

Multi-stage purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of two thousand, five hundred and sixty one (2561) married persons from nine local government areas of the three (3) senatorial districts of Delta State.

The sample comprises of 1,316 (51.4%) males and 1,245 (48.6%) females. In the sample, married individuals whose marital duration was less than 10 years were 52.9% while those whose marriage was above 10 years were 47.1%. Non-graduates were 48.5% while graduates were 51.5% of the sample. The individuals that got married before age 30 were 1,700 or 66.4% of the sample. Those who got married after 30 years formed 861 or 33.6% of the sample.

Measures

The instrument used to elicit information for the study was titled Marital Adjustment and Personality Types Inventory (MAPTI). The instrument was divided into two parts. Part one seeks relevant demographic information

Table 1. Correlation Matrix of Independent and Dependent Variables

	X	SD	Financial Management	Communication Flow	Emotional Expression	Work Involvement	Age at Marriage	Gender	Marital Adjustment
Financial Management	24.45	4.24							
Communication Flow	25.11	3.21	.397*						
Emotional Expression	27.35	4.21	.304*	.399*					
Work Involvement	21.08	4.35	.155*	.010	-.010				
Age at Marriage	1.39	.57	-.045*	-.049*	-.603*	-.028	.030*		
Gender	1.49	.52	-.023	.020	.030	.005	.05*		
Marital Adjustment	50.09	6.76	.4109*	.378*	.521*	.098*	-.04	.024	

* 0.05 level of significant.

on gender, educational qualifications, duration of marriage, type of profession, age at marriage etc. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 60 items. The instrument was designed such that the participants could respond to the items on a 4 point scale format of Always, Sometimes, Seldom and Never, and Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD).

It measures six (6) sub-parts of marital adjustment: financial management, 8 items; communication flow, 8 items; emotional expression, 8 items; work involvement, 8 item; general marital behaviour, 16 items; and personality types, 12 items; totaling 60 items. The instrument has face and content validity. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha. The following coefficient alpha (0.05 level) were obtained. Financial management: $r = .90$ ($p < 0.05$), communication flow: $r = .74$ ($p < 0.05$), emotional expression: $r = 0.89$ ($p < 0.05$), work involvement: $r = 0.80$ ($P < 0.05$) and general marital behaviour: $r = 0.88$ ($P < 0.05$). This reveals that the internal consistency of the instrument is reliable. The whole instrument has $r = 0.90$.

PRESENTATION OF RESULT

Research Question 1

1. What is the nature of the correlation among married person's gender, age at marriage, emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment?

The results in Table 1 show that there is a significant positive relationship between financial management and marital adjustment ($r=.41$), communication flow and marital adjustment ($r=.378$), emotional expression and marital adjustment ($r=.521$), work involvement and marital adjustment ($r=.098$), work involvement and financial management ($r=.155$), emotional expression and financial

management ($r=.304$), communication flow and financial management ($r=.304$). Non-significant correlation was noted between gender and marital adjustment ($r=.024$). Non-significant and negative correlation was also noted between age at marriage and marital adjustment ($r=-.04$).

The answer to research question 1, therefore, is that there are positive and negative inter-correlation among the variables. This provides the basis for further analysis.

Question 2 and Hypothesis 1

Research question 2 asked whether gender of the married persons moderated the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment.

The data presented in Table 2 and Figure 1 was used to answer research question 2 and test hypothesis 1 at 0.05 level of significance.

The table above shows the relative predictive impact of gender on the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment. The beta weights .12 for communication flow, .23 for financial management, .40 for emotional expression, work involvement .05 and .01 for gender are indicators of the degree of correlation between each variable of communication flow, emotional expression, work involvement, financial management, gender with marital adjustment. In order to determine the moderating impact of gender on the relationship between a set of independent variables (emotional expression, work involvement, communication flow) and a dependent variable (marital adjustment), three comparisons are made. First, there must be significant relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Second, there must be significant relationship between all the independent variables and the moderating variable. Third, there must be significant

Table 2. Moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, work involvement, financial management and marital adjustment

Model	B	SeB	Beta	T	Sig. T.
Communication Flow (COF)	.25	.038	.12	6.50	"
Financial Management (FIM)	.37	.28	.23	13.13*	"
Emotional Expression (EME)	.65	.28	.40	22.82*	"
Work Involvement (WOI)	.08	.025	.05	3.36	"
Gender (SEX)	.14	.215	.01	.66	.5065 Not Sig.
Constant	15.0	1.10			

a. Predictors: (Constant) EME, COF, FIM, WOI, SEX

b. Dependent variable: Marital adjustment, Significant (P<0.05)

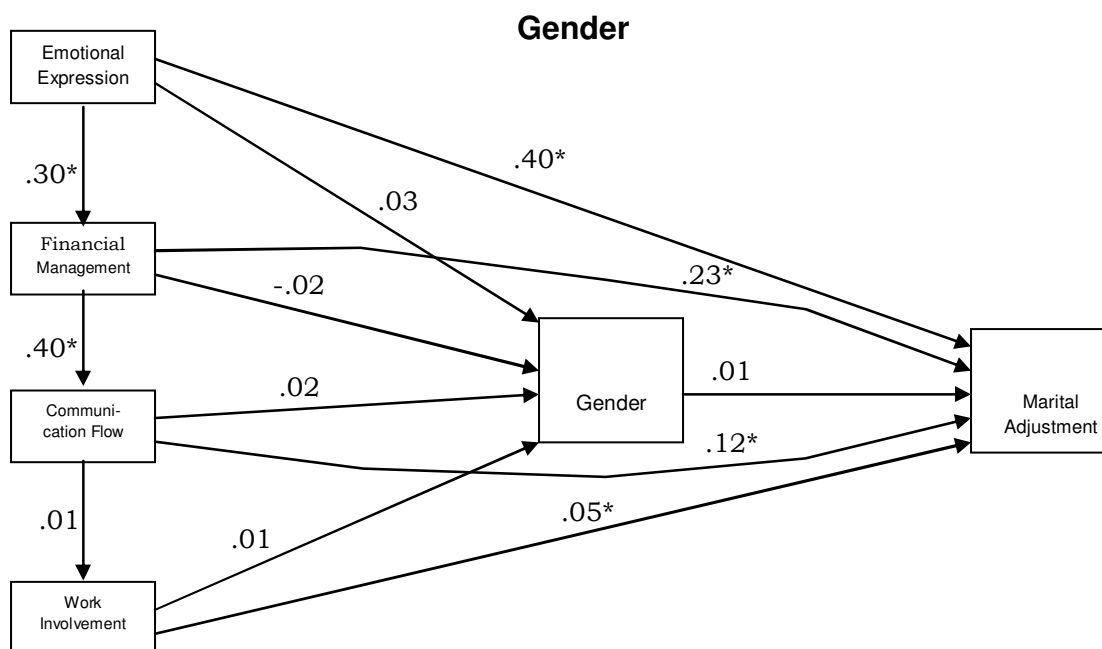


Figure 1. Path model showing the moderating impact of gender on the relationship between Emotional Expression, Communication Flow, Financial Management, Work Involvement and Marital Adjustment

relationship between the moderating variable and the dependent variable (University of Exeter, 2004 and Elliot et al., 1999).

In assessing the moderator impact, the researcher utilized the beta weights and correlation matrix of the variables concerned. The beta weights were obtained by first entering the independent variables into the regression equation before entering the moderating variable as the second independent variable. These variables entered the equation as predictors. The beta weight obtained was used in the first comparison, which is comparing the beta weights of the variables (It gives a standardized picture of the actual relationship between these variables). Also, the second and third comparisons were done through the utilization of the correlation matrix

(Ossai, 2004; University of Exeter, 2003 and Elliot et al., 1999). The moderating impact of the variable is presented as shown in the path model below.

The above table shows the beta coefficients of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable. Their relationship with the moderating variable was also presented. Thus communication flow and marital adjustment = .12, financial management and marital adjustment = .23, emotional expression and marital adjustment = .40, work involvement and marital adjustment = .05, gender and marital adjustment = .01. The correlation coefficients of gender with each of the independent variables were derived from correlation matrix on Table 1

(communication flow and gender .02, financial management and gender-.02, age at marriage and marital adjustment .04, work involvement and gender .01). The above coefficients show clearly that gender could not meet the criteria for establishing moderating impact. The relationship between all the independent variables and marital adjustment were significant at 0.05 level. Whereas, the relationship between the moderating variable, gender and some of the independent variables were not significant. Also, the relationship between gender and the dependent variable was not significant. These two last results confirmed beyond doubt that gender does not moderate relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, work involvement, financial management and marital adjustment.

All three conditions for establishing moderating impact (Elliot et al., 1999; Ossai, 2004) were carried out. The answer to research question two, therefore, is that gender does not moderate the relationship between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment. Furthermore, hypothesis 1 is upheld. There is no significant moderating impact of gender on the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment.

Question 3 and Hypothesis 2

Research question 3 asked if the relationship between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment is moderated by age at marriage while hypothesis 2 stated that there is no significant moderating impact of age at marriage on the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment.

The data presented in Table 3 and the path analytic model in Figure 2 is used to answer research question 3 and test hypothesis 2 at 0.05 level of significance. Table 3 shows the beta weights of emotional expression.

The procedure used in assessing the moderating role of age at marriage on the relationship between communication flow, emotional expression, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment is the same as the one used in research question 2 and hypothesis 1. It involves the computation of the beta weight of emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement, age at marriage which are contained in Table 3 (.40, .12, .23, .05, .01) respectively. The *r* values were extracted from the correlation matrix. The path model further illustrates and explains;

Figure 2 shows that age at marriage did not significantly moderate the correlation between emotional

expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment. The conditions for establishing moderator impact were not satisfied. The relationship between age at marriage and the set of independent variables (emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement) are not significant. The relationship between age at marriage and marital adjustment is also not significant. This shows an insignificant role of age at marriage. From the above analysis therefore, the answer to research question 3 is that age at marriage does not moderate the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment. Hypothesis 2 is also upheld. There is no significant moderating impact of age at marriage on relationship between married person's emotional expression, communication flow, financial management, work involvement and marital adjustment.

DISCUSSION

Generally, the findings of the study reveal that the variables of gender and age at marriage do not moderate the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, work involvement, financial management and marital adjustment among spouses in Delta State of Nigeria.

This result is not surprising because everyone who goes into marriage relationship expects to be happy in it, irrespective of gender and the age at marriage. It is therefore the personal determination of the spouses to make their marriage a success that makes the difference.

The moderating role of gender on the relationship between psychological constructs has generated keen interest among scholars in psychology, counselling and education. The results of the present study show that gender does not significantly moderate the relationship between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment. This finding is consistent with the findings of Ossai (2003) and Okorodudu and Ossai (2004) who did not find gender as a significant factor in their studies.

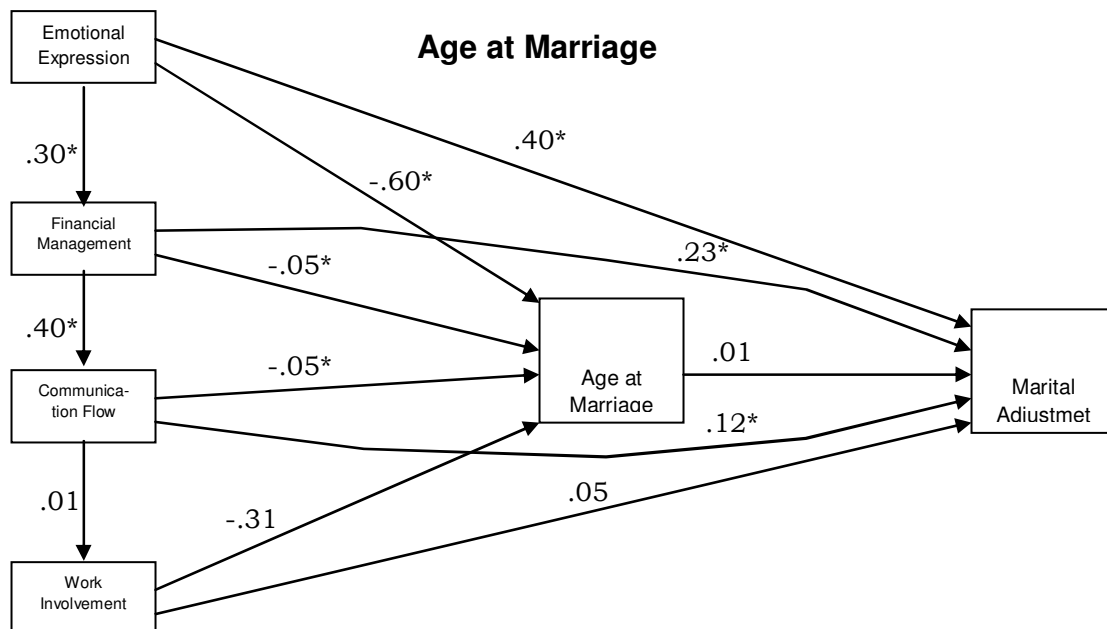
However, some other studies such as those of Nnodum (2004) and Falaye and Aremu (2004) found gender differences significant in their studies. In Nigeria, however, both male and female spouses engage in marriage in droves (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2007). It is not surprising, therefore, that gender is not a significant moderator of the correlations between emotional expression, financial management, communication flow, work involvement and marital adjustment. Reports on marital maladjustment in Nigeria have affected both males and females in large numbers (Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2007). A study by Wright (2000) says that men and women tend to behave differently because of variation in their psycho-physiological brain constituent. Even though

Table 3. Moderating impact of age at marriage on the relationship between emotional expression, communication flow, work involvement, financial management and marital adjustment

Model	B	SeB	Beta	VIF	T	Sig.
Communication Flow (COF)	.25	.04	.12	1.326	6.51	“
Work Involvement (WOI)	.09	.03	.05	1.04	3.40	“
Emotional Expression (EME)	.65	.03	.40	1.24	22.85	“
Financial Management (FIM)	.37	.03	.23	1.25	13.12	“
Age at Marriage (AAM)	.15	.23	.01	1.01	.67	.50
Constant	15.03	1.12			13.40	

a. Predictor: EME, COF, FIM, WOI, AAM.

b. Dependent Variable: Marital Adjustment, Significant (P<0.05)

**Figure 2.** Path Analytical Model showing the moderating impact of age at marriage on the relationship between EME, COF, FIM, WOI and MAA. Significant at 0.05

there may be psycho-physiological differences in brain constitution which propel men and women to behave differently under certain situations, the socio-cultural environment of the individual may also counteract or subdue such inbuilt tendencies (Okorodudu, 1999; Ossai, 2004).

The finding of the study might be connected with the fact that both spouses play complementary roles in their marriage. For instance, both husband and wife now participate in child-rearing, home-keeping, cooking and in one form of job or the other to survive the present economic down turn in Nigeria.

The understanding derived from the data analysis in this study is that age at marriage does not play a significant moderating role between the independent variables and the dependent variable among the married persons that participated in this study. In our contemporary time, there is a general enlightenment so that individuals who go into marriage, irrespective of their age, appear to be well informed about what it entails. The age differential at marriage does not matter. Rather, it is the ability of the individuals to face the challenges which marital life provides and to create a conducive home climate for peaceful co-existence. It is therefore the efforts made in

the marriage process and commitment by the couples that lead to the success of the relationship. These efforts that are made are the necessary ingredients that keep marriage vibrant throughout the period. The findings of the study are also at variance with that of Filani (1984) and Okoro (1994) whose studies reveal that age at marriage influence marital adjustment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it could be concluded that gender and age at marriage play no role in moderating the relationship between married persons' emotional expression, communication flow, work involvement, financial management and marital adjustment. Marriage is a union of two persons. Such persons possess various levels and forms of individual differences. These observable differences cause problems in the home. It should, therefore, be noted that couples ought to concentrate on these areas to enable them cope properly in their marriages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is hereby recommended that the government and professional counsellors in Delta State should develop interest in adult counselling.
2. There should be provision of counselling centres and clinics in towns and villages for handling cases of marital maladjustment and promotion of family harmony and stability.
3. The professionally trained counsellors should play major roles in the promotion of family stability.

During pre-marital counselling, there should be enough evidence of understanding of what marriage implies to avoid incidence of marital maladjustment in Delta State.

REFERENCES

- Agbe NN (1998). The Efficacy of Counselling for marital adjustment, *The Counsellor*, 16(1): 147-155.
- Amao-Kehinde AO (1999). The effect of communication and conflict resolution skills strategies on marital adjustment of some selected couples. *The Counsellor*, 17(1): 138-143.
- Cattell RB (1979). *Personality and Learning Theory: A systems theory of motivation and structural learning*: New York, Springer.
- Cattell, RB (1980). *Personality*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Crow LD, Crow A (1980). *Child Psychology*. U.S.: Barnes and Nobles.
- Ebenuwa-Okoh EE (1999). Factors related to marital adjustment in Ethiopia East L.G.A. Ph.D seminar of Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City.
- Ebenuwa-Okoh EE (2007). Correlates of marital adjustment among married persons' in Delta State of Nigeria: Implication for Guidance and Counselling. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies of the University of Benin City.

- Elliot AI, McGregor HA, Gable S (1999). Achievement goals, study strategies and examination performance. A mediational analysis. *J. Educ. Psychol.* 91(3): 549-562.
- Falaye AO, Aremu AO (2004). Gender differences in the sexual behaviour of selected Adolescents in Southern Nigeria. *Niger. J. Guidance Couns.* 9(1): 240-254.
- Falaria IO (1984). An experimental study of the effectiveness of communication skill training and cognitive restructuring of the marital adjustment of some Nigerian couples. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.
- Hull CL (1952). *A Behaviour System: An introduction of behaviour theory concerning the individual organism*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.
- Nnodum BI (2004). "Incidence and causes of marital infidelity as perceived by secondary school teachers in Orlu Educational Zone of Imo State". *Niger. J. Guidance Couns.* 9(1): 270-284.
- Ofoegbu CI (1998). Differential effectiveness of communication skills, cognitive restructuring and problem solving training on marital adjustment problems of some Nigerian couples. (Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Educational Psychology, Faculty of Education, Delta State University, Abraka).
- Okorodudu RI (2000). Selected personality traits and motivational indices as correlates of work attitude of teachers in secondary schools in Delta state. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis, Department of Educational Psychology and Curriculum Studies, University of Benin, Benin City Nigeria.
- Okorodudu RI, Ebenuwa-Okoh EE (2003). Predictive factors of marital adjustment among couples in Delta state of Nigeria: Implication for counselling. *Afr. J. Stud. Educ.* 1(1): 20-85.
- Onyemarekaye A (1997). Marriage and family conflicts: Implication for counselling. *The Counsellor*. 15(1): 16-20.
- Osakwe RN, Ebenuwa Okoh EE (2001). The impact of work dynamics on marital interaction. *J. Soc. Stud.* 3(2): 28-33.
- Osborne CG. (1988). *The art of understanding your mate*; Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House.
- Shoen E (1975). California Divorce Rates by age at first marriage and duration of first marriage. *J. Marriage Fam.* 37: 555-584.
- Spainer GB, Cole CL (1976). Toward clarification and investigation of marital adjustment. *Int. J. Soc. Fam.* (Spring) 6: 126-146.
- University of Exeter (2003). Principles of path analysis retrieved August 6 2003, from the Department of Psychology, University of Exeter at <http://www.exeter.ac.uk/seg/ea/mutra-2/paratharal/html>.
- Wright NH (2000). *So you're getting married*. U.S.A: Gospel Light Publishers.