

# Sociocultural Correlates of Marital Harmony among Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State

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## Abstract

Married members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, like other married couples, are susceptible to prevailing trends in marital conflicts and disharmony. A new wave of socio-cultural exuberance is sweeping through the globe resulting in changing attitudes towards traditional gender roles, religious commitment, and attitudes towards marital fidelity. The current study aimed at determining the relationship between selected socio-cultural variables, specifically, gender roles, religiosity, and marital fidelity on marital harmony among married members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State Conference. Data was collected from a purposively selected sample of 621 married couples in the Akwa Ibom State Conference of the church (less 10, due to attrition). Research instrument used was the Marital Variables and Marital Harmony Questionnaire developed by the researchers. The questionnaire was validated and had a reliability index of .92 Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. To answer the three research questions and test the null hypotheses for the study, Pearson Product Moment Correlational analyses was conducted on the field data. The results showed that gender role orientation, religiosity and fidelity in marriage all had significant correlations with marital harmony. Based on this, it was recommended, inter alia, that couples be assisted through counselling, public education and other attitudinal reorientation programmes to eschew prevailing negative socio-cultural trends and adhere to the divine mandate of their marriage in faithfulness.

**Keywords:** Marital Harmony; Religiosity; Gender Role Orientation; Marital Fidelity; Marriage Counselling; Seventh-day Adventist

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## 1. Introduction

Marriage is a foundational institution that predates any other institution, be it nation, church, government, school, or organisation. It is a universal phenomenon that is fundamental to the survival and maintenance of the human race and critical in fostering and sustaining a healthy family and in turn, the society and the nation. Sadly, marriage in this contemporary world is faced with an unprecedented challenge for survival. Available statistics shows that not all weddings go the way of happy endings. In the US, for example, 42-45% of first marriages end in divorce, with 780,000 divorces conducted in the US in 2018 alone; at the start of the last decade, 54.9% of new marriages ended in divorce in Sweden; across Europe the divorce rate more than doubled, increasing from 0.8 per 1,000 persons to 1.9 in less than half a century; in 2016, Portugal and Luxembourg were ranked 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> in Europe with the highest divorce rates registered at 69 and 66 for every 100 marriages, respectively (Ortiz-Ospina and Roser, 2020).

The local situation is not any better. A reportage by Godson (2021) on the rising cases of divorce in Nigeria drew public attention to a claim by an Abuja based lawyer that she received over 4000 divorce applications. Godson (2021) also cited a report by Yakubu in 2019, claiming that Kano state alone had over one million registered divorcees. These reports are alarming, albeit paucity of verifiable data mars a comprehensive analysis of the outlook of marriages in Nigeria.

Generally, however, it is apparent that the global burden of marital problems would overwhelm available marriage counselling services; even if these were both accessible and affordable to all married couples. It therefore becomes imperative that religious institutions become interested in the welfare of marriages amongst their members, identifying any existing challenges and providing assistance to foster marital harmony. The current research is an effort in this direction.

Married members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are not immune to the global challenges marriages face. Granted, the Seventh-day Adventist Church holds in high esteem the institution of marriage as ordained and instituted by God and teaches that God hates divorce. The Church also recognizes that the destruction of

marriage is a problem to the nation because marital disharmony threatens the heart of the family and the wellbeing of children thereby putting an enormous burden on the church, the government and the society. This is why most Churches, especially the Seventh-day Adventist Church have made it mandatory for intending couples to undergo a period of pre-marital counselling to better prepare them for marriage. The Church also has a family life unit that organizes programs to enrich both the singles and married members.

Marital harmony has many advantages in various spheres of life. McNaughton, a song writer (Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal, 2002 p. 652), simply puts the benefits of marital harmony thus:

*Verse 1. There is beauty all around, when there's love (harmony) at home;  
There is joy in every sound, when there's love at home;*

*Peace and plenty here abide, smiling fair on every side;  
Time doth softly, sweetly glide, when there's love at home.*

*Verse 2. Kindly heaven smiles above, when there's love at home*

*All the earth is fill'd with love, when there's love at home  
Sweeter sings the brooklet by, brighter beams the azure sky;*

*O, there's one who smiles on high, when there's love at home.*

In as much as marital harmony is very desirable, the prevailing socio-cultural narratives around religiosity, gender roles, and fidelity, especially in Akwa Ibom State raises curiosity over the nature of the relationship that may exist between these variables and marital harmony. For example, popular culture tends to tolerate and even approve of male infidelity while condemning and promoting stigmatization in the case of female infidelity. Moreover, widespread and deeply ingrained religious commitment among the people of Akwa Ibom State fails to diminish rising social ills including marital problems in the study area. Current trends in gender roles and related attitudes which drifts significantly from traditional patterns tends to exacerbate prevailing interpersonal challenges in marriage. The lack of distinct empirical studies on these issues as it concerns the population in focus necessitates an empirical inquest to ascertain the relationship between these variables socio-cultural variables and marital harmony among Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State Conference. Noteworthy, however, is the fact that concerted efforts have been made to explain observed disharmony in modern marriages by various researchers around the globe.

Traditional institutions, like the church, which hitherto supported couples to remain loyal to their marriage vows and mates seem to have lost their influence on the life of modern couples. George (2021) observed that a new wave of awareness is sweeping across the globe with consequential adjustment to the ancient landmarks regarding sexual attitudes in a degrading attempt to make room for youthful exuberance and life in a modern world. This trend has negatively impacted on modern marriages leading to widespread disharmony and dissolution of marital unions.

Latifa, Salsabila and Yulianto (2021) attempted to provide an understanding of the relationship between religiosity and marital commitment to marital stability by investigating a population of Indonesian journalists, using a sample of 200 female journalists residing in Jakarta. This research used a quantitative approach with multiple regression analysis methods. The sample were taken using non-probability sampling techniques, specifically purposive sampling. The measurements used in this study were adaptations of the (1) Marital Stability Scale; (2) Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-15); and (3) Inventory of Marital Commitments. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to test the validity of each scale. The results of the F-test showed a p-value = 0.000 (significant), and a total variance explained (R<sup>2</sup> value) of 0.224. This finding indicated that religiosity and marital commitment have a significant effect on marital stability (sig <0.05). The direction of the coefficient regression of the religiosity variable and marital commitment is positive, indicating that the higher the religiosity and marital commitment, the higher the marital stability.

Sorokowski, Kowal and Sorokowska (2019) examined commonalities in religious affiliation and marital satisfaction among Christians, Muslims, and Atheists. The authors' premise was that religion may add to happiness among couples considering that available studies tended to suggest that Christians have greater marital satisfaction whereas others presented evidence to suggest that Muslims are more satisfied; and additionally, less-religious people show the least marital satisfaction. Their study thus examined marital satisfaction among both sexes, and among Muslims, Christians, and atheists, using a large, cross-cultural sample from the dataset in Sorokowski et al. (2017). The results showed that men have higher marital satisfaction ratings than women, and that levels of satisfaction do not differ notably among Muslims, Christians, and atheists.

Dasgupta and Basu (2011) explored the relation of marital quality with gender role stereotype. A cohort of 350 couples aged 30–50 years were assessed for marital quality, gender role identity and gender role attitude. Results revealed a preference for traditional pattern, as masculinity for men and femininity for women were associated with better marital quality. Modern gender role attitude was significantly associated with marital quality in case of non-working women, but not with other categories.

Fan and Qian (2022) examined constellations of gender ideology, earnings arrangements, and marital satisfaction across four East Asian societies. Using data from 3,541 married respondents in the 2006 East Asian

Social Survey (China, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), the authors identified four constellations—egalitarian, moderate, traditional, and pro-work traditional—that differ in gender ideologies regarding the private and public spheres. They found little societal difference in the relationship between constellations of gender ideology and marital satisfaction among men. Among women, traditional Japanese women have particularly high, whereas egalitarian Taiwanese women have particularly low, marital satisfaction. Additionally, gender ideology intersects with couples' earnings arrangements to shape marital satisfaction in Korea. Overall, their findings advance the understanding of how political and policy environments shape gender roles in work and family.

Isma and Turnip (2019) investigated the role of marital satisfaction and personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) in predicting attitudes toward infidelity. The participants of the study were 438 married men and women ranging in age from 22 to 40 years old ( $M = 31.02$ ,  $SD = 4.3$ ). The results from the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), Evaluation and Nurturing Relationship Issues, Communication and Happiness (ENRICH) Marital Satisfaction Scale and Attitudes toward Infidelity Scale used in this study indicate that conscientiousness and neuroticism, followed by marital satisfaction and gender, are significant predictors of attitudes toward infidelity. From these results, it was concluded that attitudes toward infidelity can be predicted by demographic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal factors.

Anwar, Riaz and Ahmed (2022) examined the relationship between attitude towards infidelity, difficulty in emotion regulation, and mental health issues including psychological distress and psychological well-being. Cross-sectional survey research design was applied for data collection from married individuals ( $N = 200$ ), including an equal number of men ( $n = 100$ , 50%) and women ( $n = 100$ , 50%). Along with demographic information sheet, Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale (Gratz & Roemer, 2004), Mental Health Inventory and Attitude toward Infidelity Scale was used for the purpose of data collection from participants. Attitude towards infidelity and difficulty in emotion regulation positively predicted psychological distress whereas attitude towards infidelity negatively predicted psychological well-being of married individuals. The findings have important implications in the field of family psychology, health psychology and marital counselling from the perspective of the impact of attitude towards infidelity on the mental health issues of married individuals.

### *1.1 Purpose of the Study*

The main purpose of this study was to determine the nature of the relationship between selected socio-cultural variables and marital harmony among married members of the Seventh-day Adventist in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the was designed to determine:

1. The relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State.
2. The relationship between religiosity and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.
3. The relationship between fidelity in marriage and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.

### *1.2 Research Questions*

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What is the relationship between gender role orientation and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State?
2. What is the relationship between religiosity and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State?
3. What is the relationship between fidelity in marriage and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State?

### *1.3 Hypotheses*

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the study:

- $H_0$  1. There is no significant relationship between gender role orientation and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.
- $H_0$  2. There is no significant relationship between religiosity and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.
- $H_0$  3. There is no significant relationship between fidelity in marriage and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.

## **2. Research Methods**

### *2.1 Design of the Study*

This study adopted the correlational research design and used the survey method for data collection.

Correlational research design is a type of nonexperimental research design that is used to examine the relationship between two or more variables. The design is suitable for studies where, like in the current one, the researcher does not manipulate or control the independent variable, but instead observes the relationship between the independent and dependent variables through a quantitative analysis of data collected on those variables. Hassan (2022) posited that correlational research investigates the relationships between such measurable variables as attitudes, behaviours, or even thoughts; to determine if there is a relationship between these variables and nature or quality of such relationship. The researchers were convinced this design was most suitable for the current study.

## 2.2 Population and Sampling

The population of this study comprised 621 married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa-Ibom State Conference. The Akwa Ibom State Conference is made up of ten districts and one group namely: Uyo Township, Ikot-Ekpene, Eket, Oron, Uyo West, Mbioto, Itu Nbonuso, Ikot Ntuen, Nkwot, Ubon Akwa, and Ikot Abasi Group. Since the entire population was sizeable enough for the researchers to survey, all 621 members were co-opted into the study without any further sampling procedure.

## 2.3 Instrumentation

The Marital Variables and Marital Harmony Questionnaire (MVMHQ) was used for data collection in this study. The researchers adapted the Marital Season Indicator by Chapman (2005) for the MVMHQ. The MVMHQ had 3 sections: Sections A, B and C. Section A consists of, respondents' Bio-Data, Section B assessed the independent variables while Section C contained items adapted from the Marital Seasons Indicator by Chapman (2005). The Marital Season Indicator was originally developed by Chapman (2005) to measure the different seasons of marriage namely: winter, fall, summer and spring. For the current study, the seasons were used to determine the level of harmony enjoyed in the marriage at the time of the study. The adapted instrument was subjected to rigorous validation by professional counsellors and experts of Tests and Measurement in the Faculty of Education, University of Uyo, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument based on data generated from a sample of 20 couples of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ogun State (Babcock Branch) was .92 Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. This was considered high enough for the study.

## 2.4 Method of Data Collection

The researchers personally met with the respondents in groups at their different meeting centres to explain to them the purpose of the study and solicit their participation in the study. This was done across the 10 centres in the study area. This approach allowed the researchers ensure the data collection process was smooth and successful. Copies of the questionnaire were administered and retrieved on-site to minimise attrition. In spite of the painstaking efforts of the researchers, 611 out of the 621 copies of questionnaire administered were properly filled out, thus resulting the attrition of 10 copies of the questionnaire. Hence, 611 respondents' data were used for the study.

## 2.5 Method of Data Analysis

Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used in analyzing the data collected in the study. The PPMC coefficients obtained provided bases for answering the research questions and testing the null hypotheses. All hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Analysis of Research Questions

**Research Question 1:** What is the relationship between gender role orientation and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa-Ibom State?

Table 1: PPMC of gender role orientation and marital harmony

Variables	$\sum X/\sum Y$	$\sum X^2/\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	$r_{cal}$	Decision Rule
Gender Role Orientation	2341.8	89991.08	8442.68	0.36	Weak Relationship
Marital Harmony	2202.2	7990.84			

The PPMC coefficient of the relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is 0.36. This indicates a weak relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State.

**Research Question 2:** What is the relationship between religiosity and the marital harmony of Seventh-day

Adventists in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: PPMC of religiosity and marital harmony

Variables	$\sum X/\sum Y$	$\sum X^2/\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	$r_{cal}$	Remarks
Religious Commitment	2276.4	8509.6	8218.28	0.51	Moderate Relationship
Marital Harmony	2202.2	7990.84			

The data presented in Table 2 shows the result of the relationship between religiosity and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State. The Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of the relationship is 0.51. This shows that there is a moderate relationship between religious commitment and marital harmony among married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: PPMC of fidelity in marriage and marital harmony

Variables	$\sum X/\sum Y$	$\sum X^2/\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	$r_{cal}$	Remarks
Fidelity in marriage	2189	7980.76	7933.08	0.56	Moderate Relationship
Marital Harmony	2202.2	7990.84			

From the data presented in Table 3, the PPMC of the relationship between fidelity in marriage and marital harmony of married members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is 0.56. This indicates a moderate relationship between fidelity in marriage and marital harmony.

3.2 Test of Hypotheses

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between gender role orientation and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Significance of PPMC of gender role orientation and marital harmony

Variables	$\sum X/\sum Y$	$\sum X^2/\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	$r_{calc.}$	$r_{crit.}$
Gender Role Orientation	2341.8	89991.08	8442.68	0.36*	0.08
Marital Harmony	2202.2	7990.84			

\* Significant at  $p \leq .05$ ;  $n = 611$ ;  $df = 610$

From the data presented in Table 4, the results show that the calculated (observed) correlation index (r-calc.) for the relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is 0.36 while r-crit. is 0.08 at  $df$  of 610 and 0.05 alpha. The r-calc. of 0.36 is greater than r-crit. of 0.08. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is rejected. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony among members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between religiosity and the marital harmony of Seventh-day Adventists in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 5: Significance of PPMC of religiosity and marital harmony

Variables	$\sum X/\sum Y$	$\sum X^2/\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	$r_{calc.}$	$r_{crit.}$
Religious Commitment	2276.4	8509.6	8218.28	0.51*	0.08
Marital Harmony	2202.2	7990.84			

\* Significant at  $p \leq .05$ ;  $n = 611$ ;  $df = 610$

In Table 5, the r-calc. for the relationship between religiosity and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is 0.51 while its corresponding r-crit. value is 0.08 at  $df$  of 610 and .05 alpha. Since the r-calc. of 0.51 is greater than r-crit. of 0.08, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant relationship between religiosity and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is rejected. Hence, there is a significant positive relationship between religiosity and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State.

**Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant relationship between fidelity in marriage and marital harmony of married members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa-Ibom State.



Table 6: Significance of PPMC of fidelity in marriage and marital harmony

Variables	$\sum X/\sum Y$	$\sum X^2/\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r calc.	r crit.
Fidelity in marriage	2189	7980.76	7933.08	0.56	0.08
Marital harmony	2202.2	7990.84			

\* Significant at  $p \leq .05$ ;  $n = 611$ ;  $df = 610$

From the data presented in Table 6, the r-calculated for the relationship between fidelity in marriage and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is 0.56 while its corresponding r-critical value at  $df$  of 610 and .05 alpha is 0.08. Since the r-calc. 0.56 is greater than the r-crit. of 0.08, the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship between fidelity and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State is rejected. Hence there is a positive significant relationship between fidelity and marital harmony of married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State.

#### 4. Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that there is a significant relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony among married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State. The results in Tables 1 and 4 show the analysis of the research data on the relationship between gender role orientation and marital harmony. Although the observed correlation is a weak relationship, the hypothesis testing indicate that this weak correlation is significant. Dasgupta and Basu (2011) similarly found a significant correlation between gender role orientation and marital quality in their study. Also, in the study by Fan and Qian (2022), just a little difference was found between constellations of gender ideologies and marital satisfaction. These previous studies, along with the result of the current study point to the fact that couples who conform to traditional gender roles are more harmonious than couples who have divergent views and indifference towards traditional gender roles. It is thus expected that couples who are more inclined to fulfil their roles are more likely to contribute to harmony in their marriages.

The results of this study further indicate that there is a positive correlation between religiosity and marital harmony among married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State. It means that religious commitment can predict marital adjustment and findings were confirmed as significant as shown in the summary of data analyses presented in Tables 2 and 5. Findings of the present study are consistent with other researches such as the result Latifa, *et al* (2021) which showed that religiosity had a positive effect on both marital commitment and marital stability. Interestingly, marital commitment and stability are close by products of marital harmony examined in this study. In another related study, Sorokowski, *et al* (2019) showed that the pattern of influence between religiosity and marital outcomes remain fairly the same across the major religious faiths namely Christians and Muslims. These studies, along with the current results show that when both mates in a marriage are committed to their faith, this can enrich their union, making it stable and accruing desired satisfaction for the couples.

The last result obtained in this study revealed that there exists a significant, though moderate, relationship between fidelity in marriage and marital harmony among married members of Seventh-day Adventist Church in Akwa Ibom State. The summary of correlation analyses presented in Tables 3 and 6 provide the statistical evidence for this conclusion. This finding was to be expected because of observed societal views on fidelity in marriage in the modern context which deviates significantly from traditional views and tilts more liberally towards acceptance and an openness to liberal sexual behaviour for both sexes. Researchers like Anwar and colleagues (2022) had already established that attitudes towards marital fidelity correlates significantly with emotion regulation and mental wellness among couples. Isma and Turnip (2019) also showed in their study that attitudes to marital fidelity is significantly impacted by satisfaction in marriage and such personality traits as neuroticism and conscientiousness. These studies along with the current findings provide evidence to show that couples would benefit their marriage if they adopt and maintain a positive attitude towards marital fidelity. Both mates will derive satisfaction from the confidence that neither mate would engage in any acts of unfaithfulness and this will contribute to harmony in the marriage.

#### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The aim of this study was to determine the relationship between such socio-cultural variables as gender role orientation, religiosity and marital fidelity on the marital harmony of married members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Akwa Ibom State Conference. The data collected and analysed in this study provide sufficient empirical bases to conclude that these socio-cultural variables have significant relationship with marital harmony among the population of study. based on this conclusion, the following recommendations are advanced:

1. Premarital counselling programmes provided in the church should include admonition to couples to eschew prevailing societal trends that tend to promote liberal sexual dispositions and appreciate the benefits that come with adhering to the divine mandate for couples to remain faithful to each other

- while fulfilling their God assigned roles as husbands and wives which cannot be delegated or subverted.
2. Professional counsellors should assist couples who are struggling to adjust and find harmony in their marriages identify the root causes of their disharmony and work at improving the situation instead of breaking up on the false premise that they are incompatible. As this study has shown, where couples commit to practicing their faith and fulfilling their roles, marital harmony naturally accrues to them.
  3. There is need for public education, championed by all responsible socio-cultural institutions, beginning with the church, and of course various governmental and non-governmental organisations; to create awareness on the negative impact negative social narratives are having on modern families. The aim should be to reorientate the masses on the importance of marital harmony as harmonious marriages provide the foundations for functional families where functional and well-adjusted children could be raised to contribute to nation building.

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