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LEVEL OF EDUCATION AND MARITAL DISTRESS IN GHANAIAN MARRIED COUPLES

Anim, Michael T.

Department of Psychological Medicine and Mental Health, School of
Medical Sciences, University of Cape Coast, Ghana

E-mail address: m.t.anim@uccsms.edu.gh; **Mobile:** +233277705172

Abstract

This study set out to examine how much distress men and women experience in their marital relationships, and whether or not education level is associated with marital distress. This was done by using the Marital Happiness Scale, and a questionnaire that measured demographic characteristics, as measuring instruments. Four research questions were formulated and four hypotheses were tested. They covered the differences that exist in the marital distress experiences among husbands and wives, and differences in education and their impact on marital distress. A total of eighty (80) married men and women comprising 40 husbands and 40 wives were conveniently and purposively selected to take part in the study. Descriptive statistics and t- Tests were used to analyse the data to bring out differences and to determine associations among variables. The findings showed that many persons who said they experienced distress in their marital relationships also tested distressed on a scale of marital distress; that among this population, wives tested more distressed than husbands in marriages. There were no significant differences between husbands and wives of low education and those of high education in their distress. Those with high education were not less distressed than those with low education. Marital distress is not a respecter of level of education. Suggestions were

made for future research to consider other factors that account for distress in Ghanaian marriages other than education status.

Key words: education, level of education, marital distress, married couple

Introduction

According to Fadem (2004), “close to half of all marriages in the United States end in divorce” (pg 42), approximating 50% of all first marriages that end in divorce, one of life's most stressful events according to the Holmes and Rahe Social Readjustment Rating Scale. Even for those marriages that do not end in divorce in Ghana, many are characterized by unhappiness (Alhassan, 1997). For example, it has been estimated that approximately 20% of all married couples experience marital distress, or discontent with their marriage, at any given time. Despite the risk associated with marriage, almost 90% of the population chooses to marry at least once, and nearly 75% of divorced individuals choose to remarry. Therefore, understanding marital distress, its dynamics and its consequences, and developing effective marital therapy or treatment programs, have been major foci of individuals in the field of mental health.

It is indicated in relationship research that many marriages go through turbulent times that cause great distress among couples. These put couples at risk for developing higher levels of depression and anxiety (Bradbury, Fincham & Beach, 2000). According to Snyder, Heyman and Haynes (2005), because there is a strong relationship between distress and personal emotional disturbance, it is important to research causes for relationship distress. Then implement effective intervention strategies to either avoid the dissolution of a marriage or entering into one that might end in divorce.

Happiness in marriage seems to elude some couples. Distressed marriages are common in many countries including Ghana. According to

Sabini (1992), not all unhappy marriages end in divorce. Some stay together for the sake of the children, or for religious or other reasons. Alhassan (1997) had the conviction that many marriages in Ghana could best be described as distressed, unhappy, and in discord, but these had not yet ended in divorce. Amuzu (1997) observed that women sustain injuries as a result of marital violence which includes cuts, broken bones, concussions, miscarriages, as well as permanent injuries such as damage to joints, partial loss of hearing or vision, scars from burns, knife wounds and even death. In Ghana, although the incidence of physical abuse of women is thought to be commonplace and pervasive, only few women report or even admit being victims of domestic violence. In several instances, it is only reported when grievous harm has been caused. In addition, many victims face pressure from society to keep the family together at all costs and many women who are severely battered by their husbands love them and continue to cling to the relationship hoping that something would eventually happen that would change the bad situation. In Safo's (1997) opinion, women also commit violence against men almost as often as men do against women.

Despite much effort being made by relatives, pastors, chiefs and clan elders, the law courts and family tribunals, amateur and trained counsellors, and clinical psychologists, marital problems and conflicts are still on the ascendancy. The distress is so prevalent that one finds it difficult to assign a particular reason or factor to the phenomenon. Some authors blame it on factors including differences in the sexes, differences in personality or temperaments, differences in upbringing, communication difficulties, Western education and emancipation of women, intrusion of third parties and failure to adjust (Adei, 1991). Mcvey (1990) highlighted financial problems, immaturity before marriage, in-laws, accommodation problems and sexual incompatibilities as resulting in marital distress. Holtsworth-Munroe and Jacobson (1985) also identified expectations and negative

attributions as important.

Recently, self-esteem and assertiveness were researched and found to also significantly affect marital distress in Ghanaians (Anim 2011). With self-esteem and assertiveness not properly developed in people, they enter in marital relationships only to find out that they are not really mature enough to handle physical, social, emotional, mental and spiritual conflicts that erupt in marital relationships.

Western education and its consequent 'emancipation' of women may have also affected marital distress in a society where male dominance is taken for granted. An educated wife may seek to exert 'equal-status' authority in the marriage, and may challenge her husband's final decisions pertaining to the home. Some highly educated couples find it difficult agreeing on who controls affairs in the marriage: the husband, wife, or both? Many educated women answer that it is both, for in marriage both should share the same authority or exercise equal-status rights and power. These ideas may make some wives behave in traditionally or culturally unacceptable ways in their relationships and this may spark a lot of friction, communication problems, marital dissatisfaction and distress.

Rather than face marital problems when they arise, many married couples get around it, seeking the route of least resistance. McDowell (1985) pointed out such ineffective substitutes for dealing with conflicts as failing to acknowledge the problem, withdrawal (the silent treat), trying to ignore the conflict's significance, spiritualising the problem with religious jargon, keeping scores, attacking the person instead of the problem, blaming someone else, desiring to win no matter the cost, giving up just to avoid conflict, and buying a special gift for the other person.

All these ineffective solutions have one thing in common: they try to avoid dealing with the problem. In the end, the accumulation of unresolved conflicts take their toll with painful physical, psychological, emotional,

mental, and spiritual consequences, which can be termed distress in marriage. There is a need for further study to determine other psychosocial factors that are responsible for marital distress in Ghana, apart from those above that have been researched empirically in Ghana.

In this study, therefore, some potential associates of marital distress were explored in order to understand the dynamics of a distressed marriage. One way to understand the dynamics of marital distress is to identify factors that most likely contribute to marital distress. In this study, education level was explored.

Education level was chosen because there is a correlation between education level and marital distress. Bayer (1969, 1972) found in his research that women are more likely to stop their education after marriage. Cherlin (1979) also found that women with more education have less stable marriages. So did Janssen et al., (1998), and Kalmijn (1999). On the contrary, Heaton (2002) found that higher education level could predict marital satisfaction. In a more recent research by Adler (2010) in the USA, she concluded that “although the correlation between education level and marital satisfaction was not statistically significant, more research is needed in this area because of the conflicting and outdated existing research.” Therefore the aim of this study was to empirically determine how education level of spouses in Ghana was associated or correlated with marital distress.

Objectives:

One objective of this study was to find out the intensity of marital distress among couples.

Second, to find out whether men were more distressed than women on the measuring instrument.

Third, to find out if educational status had to do with marital distress.

Research questions

1. Would husbands and wives who experience marital distress obtain high distress score on the marital happiness scale?
2. Would wives report higher distress than husbands?
3. Would highly educated husbands be found to be more distressed than those with low education?
4. Would highly educated wives be found to be more distressed than those with low education?

Hypotheses:

1. $H_{0=}$ There will be no difference in score of husbands and wives who experience marital distress using the marital happiness scale.
 $H_{1=}$ There will be difference in score of husbands and wives who experience marital distress using the marital happiness scale.
2. $H_{0=}$ There will be no significant difference in the level of distress of wives and husbands.
 $H_{1=}$ There will be significant difference in the level of distress of wives and husbands.
3. $H_{0=}$ There will be no significant difference in marital distress of husbands with high and low education.
 $H_{1=}$ There will be a significant difference in marital distress score of husbands with high and low education.
4. $H_{0=}$ There will be no significant difference in marital distress of wives with high and low education.
 $H_{1=}$ There will be a significant difference in marital distress score of wives with high and low education.

Methodology

Design: This was a comparative study, comparing two groups (husbands and wives), and two levels of educational status (high and low), as well as two levels of distress (high and low).

Study site: Madina in Accra, and Somanya, Odumase Krobo, and Akuse, a cluster of towns in the eastern region of Ghana, were the areas of the study. In order to collect significantly useful data fairly rapidly within the confines

of financial and time limitations, as well as by reason of proximity to the researcher, it was preferable to limit the study to these specific localities. Distressed couples who had been married two years or more with a minimum of Middle/Junior Secondary school education were used. The reason was to recruit participants who could read and understand English to respond to the questionnaire. The participants were from some churches, Department of Social welfare, a district grade two court, some schools, and civil service institutions. In all, 80 married men and women who reported marital distress on the measuring instrument were selected. Subjects, whose marital distress was associated with known psychiatric conditions, particularly substance related disorder, schizophrenia, major depressive illness, and other psychotic disorders, were not included in the study.

Sampling for equal numbers of husbands and wives was done in order to include presumably typical groups in the sample. The researcher contacted married men and women in the said areas and purposefully recruited forty (40) distressed husbands whose ages ranged from 28 years to 64 years. The mean age for the group was 40.4 (SD= 7.3796). The wives were also 40 and aged from 25 to 56 years.

The mean age for the wives was 38.6 years (SD= 7.7849). Twenty five of the husbands (62.5 %) had high education and fifteen (37.5%) had low education. Twelve (12) wives had high education (30%) while twenty eight (28) wives (70%) had low education as shown in Table 1 (NB: Up to GCE O-level was considered as low education, and from A-level was considered as high education). Husbands in the sample had been married an average of 8.05 years with a range of 3- 28 years (mean = 8.05; SD= 6.63). Also wives in the sample had been married an average of 13.9 years with a range of 2- 29 years (mean= 13.9; SD= 7.9). Refer to Table 1.

Instruments used were a questionnaire and a screening interview. The screening interview had structured questions of the closed-ended type

to which subjects responded either 'yes' or 'no'. The questions covered alcoholism, substance-related disorders, schizophrenia, psychosis, and depression. They were meant to eliminate subjects who suffered from these conditions. The main data collection instrument was a comprehensive questionnaire made up of socio-demographic data such as age, sex, religion, occupation, number of children, etc. Then a 33- item 4- point Marital Happiness scale (being the combination of the marital happiness and the Dyadic Adjustment Scales, which were modified by the researcher for Ghanaian respondents).

Procedure:

Verbal consent was obtained before the interview, and then the questionnaire was given out. The researcher supervised the completion of the questionnaire which took about thirty minutes on the average for almost all respondents whose level of education was low. In all, 90 questionnaires were given out. Four were not returned. Three were discarded because of incompleteness, and three were not used in the final analyses because the respondents were not distressed. They exaggerated their responses. The completed questionnaires were collected same day.

Method of Scoring Marital Happiness Scale:

This questionnaire was scored to differentiate high scorers and low scorers.

The highest score obtainable	= 132
The lowest score obtainable	= 33
Range: 132 – 33	= 99
Midpoint:	= 49
Therefore, from 33 – 82	= low distress
From 83 – 132	= high distress.

Method of data analyses

Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), were used to deal with hypothesis one and the other research findings. t-Test was used to test

hypotheses 2, and a One-way ANOVA was used to test hypothesis 3. Post hoc comparison of ratio of means of husbands and wives with high and low education and the effect on marital distress was also conducted. All analysis in this study was done using SPSS 1998 (8.0)

Demographic characteristics of sample are presented in Table 1 above. About 38% of husbands had low education as compared to 70% of wives of low education, whilst 63% of husbands had high education compared to 30% of wives who also had high education. A high percentage (97.5) of husbands were monogamous and only 2.5% of them were polygamous. Compared to husbands, 80% of wives were also monogamous and only 20% were polygamous. 32.5% of husbands were civil/public servants and 12.5% of wives were of similar job status. 40% of husbands were in the teaching field and about the same percentage of wives were also in the teaching field (35%). For farming, 20% of husbands and 7.5% of wives engaged in it. Finally, a small percentage of husbands (7.5%) were traders and a large percentage of wives traded (45%).

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of Sample

Variables	Husbands (No.)	%	Wives (No.)	%
Educational Level				
Low (Up to O-level)		37.5	28	70
High (A-Level upwards)		62.5	12	30
Marriage Type:				
Monogamy		97.5	32	80
Polygamy		2.5	8	20
Occupation Type:				
Civil/Public Service		32.5	5	12.5
Teaching		40	14	32
Farming		20	3	7.5
Trading		7.5	18	45
Religious Type:				
Catholic		10	3	7.5
Protestant		70	24	60
Pentecostal/Spiritual		17.5	9	22.5
Islam		2.5	0	0
Religion not indicated				
Age:		Maxim	Mean	St. Dev.
Husbands		64	40.5	7.38
Wives		56	38.6	7.38
Years of Marriage:				
Husbands		28	8.0	6.62
Wives		29	13.9	7.9
Number of Children:				
Husbands		6	2.6	1.7
Wives		6	2.5	1.6

Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: This hypothesis predicted that there would be no difference in scores of husbands and wives who experience marital distress using the marital happiness scale. That is, husbands and wives who report marital distress would not score higher on the marital happiness scale.

Table 2 shows data on the levels of marital distress from both husbands and wives.

Table 2: Marital Distress Levels for Husbands and Wives.

		Husbands		Wives			
		Score	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	total Percentage
Distress	33-82		20	50	11	27.5	31 38.75
	83-132		20	50	29	72.5	49 61.25
Level	Total		40	100	40	100	80 100

Table 2 shows that out of a sample of 40 distressed husbands, 20 (50%) fell in the low distress level, and 20 (50%) fell in the high distress level. Unlike the husbands, 11 wives (27.5%) had low distress while 29 (72.5%) had high distress. In aggregate however, 49 (61.5%) husbands had high distress and 31 wives (38.75%) had low distress levels. The hypothesis was not supported in the case of the wives but supported in the case of the husbands.

Hypothesis Two: It was hypothesized that there would be no significant difference in the level of distress of wives and husbands; i.e. wives would not report high marital distress than husbands. This hypothesis was tested using an independent t-Test. Results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary Table of t-Test showing mean comparison of husbands and wives on Marital Distress

Marital Distress		
Variable	Husbands (n = 40)	Wives (n = 40)
Mean	82.6	92.6
SD	19.2	19.6
Mean Difference	-9.8	
Df	78	
t	2.28	
One-tail significance	P = 0.013 < 0.05	Significant

Table 3 shows that husbands and wives differed significantly on marital distress ($P = 0.013 < 0.05$). That wives were more distressed ($m = 92.4$; $sd = 19.4$) than husbands ($m = 82.6$; $sd = 19.2$). This way, the hypothesis that wives would not experience greater distress than husbands was refuted. The alternative hypothesis was rather supported, that wives would experience greater distress than husbands.

Hypothesis three: This predicted that there will be no significant difference in marital distress of husbands with high and low education. The hypothesis was tested using an independent t-test. The result is shown in Table 4 as follows:

Table 4: Summary Table of t-test Showing Mean Comparison of High and Low Education of Husbands on Marital Distress

Variable	N	Mean	SD	f	t-Value	Table value	Sig
High Educ	23	75.2	17.4				
				38	-3.11	2.02	Not. sig.
Low Educ	17	95.5	17.3				

95% CI; P < 0.05

The result of the t-test in Table 4 indicates a t value of -3.11 with a degree of freedom of 38. The P value is 0.86. The calculated value of t (-3.11) is lower than the table value of 2.02. Since $P(0.86) > 0.05$, there is no statistically significant difference in the marital distress scores of husbands of high and low education. On the basis of this, the null hypothesis is upheld. Level of education has no significant influence on the experience of marital distress.

Hypothesis 4: This predicted that there will be no significant difference in marital distress of wives with high and low education. The hypothesis was tested using an independent t-test. The result is shown in Table 5 as follows:

Table 5: Summary Table of t-test Showing Mean Comparison of High and Low Education of Wives on Marital Distress

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	t- Value	Table value	P	Sig
High Educ	12	85.3	19.6	38	-1.53	2.02	0.9	Not sig
Low Educ	28	95.4	18.8					

95% CI; $P < 0.05$.

From Table 5, no significant difference exists between wives of high and low education with regards to distress. At 38 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 alpha level, the calculated value of t (-1.53) is lower than the table value of t (2.02). In other words, since $P(0.93) > 0.05$, there is no statistically significant difference in the marital distress scores of wives of high and low education. On the basis of this, the null hypothesis is upheld. Level of education has no significant influence on the experience of marital distress among wives.

Discussion

This study set out to answer the following research questions: what are the levels of marital distress on the measuring instrument? Are husbands and wives of high education more distressed than those of low education? Finally, who are highly distressed: husbands or wives? This discussion considers the degree to which the results of the study answered the above questions.

Marital Distress Level of Husbands and Wives.

The first alternate hypothesis stated that husbands and wives who said they experienced marital distress would score high on the marital happiness scale. The results did not support the case for husbands. But it did for wives. Equal numbers of husbands reported low and high distress. Unlike the husbands, a few number of wives (27.5%) had low distress while the majority (72.5%) had high distress. This result suggests that wives in this population were highly distressed in their marriages. Thus, there were relatively more wives testing distressed on the marital happiness scale than husbands in the population studied. In aggregate however, relatively more married men and women (61.3%) who reported distress tested distress on the research instrument than those who tested low distress (38.8%).

Hypothesis two stated that wives would not report higher marital distress than husbands. This was not confirmed. Rather, wives were significantly more distressed than husbands. This could be accounted for by the fact that even in a distressed relationship with a husband, a wife in Ghana would strive to keep the home from disintegrating or stay for the sake of the children, or for religious reasons (Sabini, 1992), or stay because of pressures from family members or society; or still stay hoping that something would eventually happen which would change the bad situation (Safo, 1997). All or most of these and other reasons kept wives in distressed relationships. Here, they suffered more than their husbands who although

distressed too, might have other outlets for their distress. Some of these outlets, as revealed by male respondents, were having girlfriends, staying away from home for long period, sheer pretence as if they were alright. Some resorted to drinking alcoholic beverages and smoking cigarettes to alleviate their distress.

Another possible reason for this finding is that in our society, women are noted for reporting their emotions more frankly than men. And this has appeared here in reporting their distress more than the husbands. This is in consonance with Adei's (1991) statement that 'men are not expected to display emotions and vulnerability. These are feminine characteristics'.

Level of Education and Marital Distress

The study also investigated education and distress experiences of husbands and wives. To this end, the hypotheses "there will be no significant difference in marital distress of husbands with high and low education and there will be no significant difference in marital distress of wives with high and low education" were tested. Findings showed no significant differences between the two groups. The findings were that highly educated husbands and husbands with low education did not experience significant differences in marital distress. Also, wives of high education and those of low education did not show any significant difference in their experience of marital distress. It suggests that educational status did not influence the experience of distress in marriages. Even though this study revealed that husbands and wives experienced high marital distress, the distress could not be explained by reason of differences in their educational levels. Other factors would account for the experience of distress in marriages. The results mean that high education per se cannot prevent marital distress. Marital distress is not a respecter of educational status.

It was expected that couples with low education had the most satisfying marriages. But there is evidence now which seems to be that husbands and wives with low education are not the most satisfied at the moment. Neither did high education help couples to avoid marital distress. A possible reason could be that education as a means of leading or bringing people out of ignorance, poverty and disease (both physical and psychological) did not benefit these distressed couples because of their having received little or more of it.

About 70% of wives attained low education and only about 38% of husbands had low education. Previous findings already indicated that many wives were more distressed than husbands. This, together with the fact that most of the wives in the sample were school dropouts (researcher gathered during interview sessions), point to certain facts. Research indicated that sex of children influenced parents' decision as to who to educate. According to Rosen & Aneshensel (1978), in a situation where there are more claimants than resources, preference is given to the males to ensure their occupational advancement. Samson's (1974) research in the US indicated that girls needed the same kind of studies for both sexes but for a shorter period of time for girls. This discrepancy between boys' and girls' education is also predominant in Ghana. Twumasi (1986) commented that "when the family finances are at low ebb, the young girl is asked to stop her schooling." This implies that girls' education is of a second order importance. It can be deduced from these researches that some parents have different aspirations for children depending on their sex and that their aspirations for their daughters is lower.

Alexander et al., (1974) stipulated that the educational attainment of females tends to depend more heavily on family background and less on ability than that of males. It can be postulated, based on these findings that educational and vocational achievement are not regarded as a major task for

girls and are considered less important than it is for boys, in many societies. There is the tendency of parents to invest the limited finances and available resources in the person who is most likely to bring the highest and surest dividend. Many parents, thus, believe that boys will be more certain to remain in school to complete a course. Hence, when they are to choose between educating a boy or a girl, they normally do not overlook the risks involved in educating the latter, such as premature pregnancy and early marriage. They feel that when pregnancy occurs while the girl is in school, the money invested in her is wasted. In a recent study on attitudes towards female education by Mensah (1992), a correlation was made between level of education and attitude toward girls' education. It was found that parents with little or no education fail to appreciate the importance of schooling for female children. Parents were also more likely to remove their daughters from school because of pregnancy. As a result, girls are not encouraged to continue in education. Sabini (1995) observed that a variable that has been shown to relate to divorce is whether the partners finish whatever educational institution they have entered. To him, in general, the more educated a couple is the less likely the couple is to divorce. But this relationship breaks down for who fail to complete a level of education. So though people with one, two or three years of school education are more educated than those of no school education, they are more likely to divorce than those of no school experience. This has been interpreted as indicating that the same people who lack the persistence to finish an educational programme they have began also lack the persistence needed to stay married. Laudable though this interpretation seem, the majority of women in this study (57.5%) (though of low education), do not seek divorce or separation.

Conclusion

The primary purpose of this study was to find out the marital distress level of married men and women who report distress and what role level of education plays. This study was conceived against the background of increased marital distress in Ghana. So the research focused on marital distress and level of education. 80 married Ghanaians who reported marital distress men (40) and women (40) aged between 28-64 years (husbands) and 2-56 years (wives) responded to a questionnaire. The researcher used descriptive statistics and t-tests to analyze the data. The main results of the study might be summarized as follows:

1. In the aggregate, more married persons in the sample experienced high distress than the number that reported low distress.
2. Wives were more distressed than husbands. Thus, the study has shown that in terms of who experienced the greatest distress in marriage relationships in Ghana, it was the wives. Some studies (Adu-Gyamfi, 1986) found (as in this present one) that women were more likely to report problems in the emotional and social domains more readily, but that sex differences might lie in differences in ability to admit and to report certain kinds of marital problems.
3. There were no significant differences between husbands of high and low education and wives of high and those of low education in their experience of marital distress.

Clinical Implications of Findings and Suggestions

The findings of this research have some clinical implications. Unlike adults seeking psychological services in the US for the most common presenting problem of marital dissatisfaction (Behrens, Brett, & Sanders, 1994), most Ghanaian distressed women (and men) do not look for psychological services. It is therefore suggested that psychologists be trained in couples'/marriage/family therapy and to publicize the availability

of such services for the benefit of distressed couples who seek assistance from unqualified sources and thus worsening their distressed conditions.

It was found that educational status did not affect the experience of distress in marriages. It means that factors other than education and its levels account for marital distress in couples. Factor such as temperament types and differences and personality differences could be researched in detail to see if they are the causes of high marital distress levels in married couples in Ghana. How much informal and non-formal education couples received prior to or during their marital relationships, have also not been researched. This research assumed that level of education meant level of formal education or schooling. But education and schooling may not be the same things.

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