

AGE AND RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION: THE DETERMINANT FACTORS OF CHOICE OF SPOUSE AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

By
Oguegbe, Tochukwu M.
&
Onuecheta, Ikemsinachi C.

Abstract

The study investigated the roles of Age and Religious affiliation on Choice of Spouse among students. The study made use of 278 participants (122 males and 156 females). The participants were of the mean age of 22.0, standard deviation of 2.95 and age range of 16-37. The study adopted a 2(young and old)x2(high and low) factorial design with 2 Way ANOVA as the corresponding statistics used for data analysis. Findings from the first hypothesis indicated no significant difference between age on choice of spouse at $F(1,274) = 1.915, P > .05$ level of significance. Findings from the second hypothesis indicated a significant difference between students with high religious affiliation and students low on religious affiliation on their choice of spouse at $F(1,274) = 7.148, P < .05$ level of significance. It implies that students who have high religious affiliation were influenced more on their choice of spouse than those who are low on religious affiliation. The third hypothesis indicated no significant interaction between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse. Hence, findings were discussed and recommendations were made.

Introduction

Entry upon the role of husband and wife in an institution like marriage depends on being chosen as a life partner. Omari(1989) saw marriage as the coming together of a man and a woman as husband and wife. In African society, Marriage is considered to be essential because it protects the morals of the people and discourages adultery and fornication. It makes couple live in responsibly, promote peace and harmony among members of a society. However, despite the usefulness of marriage, Nwoye(1991) found that a good number of marriages are threatened by rampant cases of divorce, an indication of wrong choice of spouse. According to Stagner (1974), relationship with peers, his cultural backgrounds and his religious affiliations play an important role in the choice of a marriage partner.

Two out of three first marriages go the distance, but one out of three does not. According to Prat and Kane (2012) a higher proportion of marriages fail, so it is most important to make the right choice. The consequences of a wrong choice in spouse selection can be very fatal.

In the Nigeria society, cases abound where couples who are not yet married for at least 3 years apply for divorce suit. There are cases of wife or husband battering by either of the couples and worst of some cases being the maiming of one's partner, as evidenced in Daily Sun news of Wednesday October 17, 2012 pg8, where a man threw his wife in a pit in Ogun State over a misunderstanding and Daily Sun news of Tuesday, February 19, 2013 where a lover man killed his spouse, his spouse's sisters and a pregnant lady just because he was not allowed to effect marriage rites on his spouse.

The effects of a wrong marital choice are innumerable, no wonder Prat and Kane (2012) viewed that it is important to think twice before walking into marriage because most often wise choices are blurred by the heady feelings of romance, or by the desire for sex.

Marriage however, can be seen as an intimate relationship between a man and a woman. Marriage is institutionalized by payment of bride price, religious, culture or legal injunctions or ceremonies. Omari (1989) described marriage as the coming together of a man and a woman as husband and wife in order to satisfy their needs (e.g., Sexual, Security, and Psychological needs).

In African society, Marriage is seen as a source of precaution and a means of satisfying sexual desires. Marriage protects the morals of the people and discourages adultery and fornication. It makes couples live responsibly and promotes unity and harmony among the members of the society. (Yahaya, 2009). In Nigeria, it is generally believed that the success of a family largely depends on the relationship between the man and the woman (marital relationship) which is highly dependent on choosing the right spouse. (Yahaya, 2008).

Choice of Spouse

Selecting a spouse however, is one of the most important decisions people make during their lifetime. Choice of spouse can be defined as the mental process of selecting amidst other individuals a likeable partner in marriage or legal union (Wikipedia, 2013). Spouse or mate selection is a process through a series of steps. Bee (1994) suggests that when an individual meets someone new, the individual applies three filters, in the order listed:-

- a. External characteristics; does this person match you in quality of appearance, apparent social class or manners?
- b. Attitudes and beliefs: is there a match with your ideas in basic area, such as sex, religious, or politics?
- c. Role fit: Does this person's idea about relationship match your own? Do you have similar ideas about appropriate sex roles? Are you compatible sexually? For example, if one partner is eager for a high level of personal self-disclosure and the other reserved or uncommunicative about revealing his / her feelings, a poor match would exist on this filter.

Spouse selection sets the tone for the early adult life style. It determines one's daily routine, including the time one wakes up, ones daily activities expenditures of physical mental energy; and conditions for both immediate and long term rewards (Maliki, 2012). Mate or spouse selection confers social status and provides varying opportunities for advancement. It also represents a direct or indirect expression of one's value system (Newman and Newman, 1995).

The process of spouse selection encompasses not just the act of choosing a mate but also what really motivates or pushes youngsters into the desire of selecting a spouse. Welten and Lloyd (2000) examined some factors that makes this possible, “foremost among them is the desire to participate in a socially sanctioned, mutually rewarding, intimate relationship. Another key factor is the social pressure exerted on people to marry. Parents of youths, relatives and friends expect them to marry and they often make this expectation abundantly clear with their comments and inquiries. The popular view in our culture is that people marry because they have fallen in love. (Welten & Lloyd 2000)

Moreover, over the years, so many researchers in their effort to understand the antecedents of choice of spouse have focused mainly on environmental factors such as culture, social economic status etc. the little that captured the internal and psychological factors, to the best of the researchers knowledge were conducted outside Nigeria. It is quite understandably the prevailing notion that Nigeria is a victim of Religious bigotry and that every aspect of the lives of an average Nigerian Citizen is being influenced by his/her religious afflation, bearing in mind that the family is the nucleus of the society and every citizen is a product of a family. And this has brought disagreement in families as a result of parents not supporting the togetherness or marriage of their children who fall for different religious belief. Hence the need for the study to investigate Religious affiliation and age as likely factors affecting choice of spouse

Religious Affiliation

According to Australian Institute of health and welfare (2012) Religious affiliation is defined in the person context and also in the property context. In the person context, it is defined as the religious group to which a person belongs or adheres to and in the property context; it is defined as an association or connection with a particular theology or spiritual belief.

In Nigeria, Religious affiliation and the process of spouse selection is no look-over. People are mostly expected to marry a member who shares the same faith with them. Yahaya (2009) submitted in his view that religion is an essential part of a believer's life. In fact, religion influences the adherent's behavior. For example, what an individual does, says, wears, eats and drinks, may be determined by his /her faith. Therefore in his view, in order to promote marital harmony and stability, it is better for the husband and wife to share a common faith. Hussani (2013) in his Muslim matrimonial and marriage book was of the view that marriage is recommended for partners who share the same faith and a common way of life. They should also share the common goal of building a well integrated Muslim community and be able to work harmoniously towards it. A popular Muslim dogma called the “Bukhari and Muslim” in which prophet Muhammad(s) recommend Muslims to select those partners who are best in religion and character: in these words “A woman may marry for four reasons: for her property, for her rank, for her beauty, and for her religion (and character). So marry the one who is best in religion and character and you shall prosper”.

In similar situations, especially within the Christendom, there are cases where parents have compelled their children to choose their spouse according to who has their religious belief int# the terms of church and so on. Moreover, researches show that people with strong religious beliefs are less prone to acts of infidelity. This is in line with the position of Muhammad (2013) “marry the one who is of your religion and character and you shall prosper”.

Age

Another likely antecedent of choice of spouse is Age. Age has been viewed in the African traditional and modern contemporary society as exerting much influence on who is chosen as a marriage partner. (Yahaya, 2009). It is simply defined as the length of time during which a being or thing has existed. Marriage as an institution which lasts a long time requires couples who will decide for themselves in their own best interest, given their understanding of their peculiarities and differences that they can make a home together. Hence choosing a partner you feel that will bring out your best to help sustain the marriage. Age which is the time a person or thing has existed since birth or

beginning has the tendency to influence our actions including one's choice of spouse. Men are expected to be older than the women. Yahaya (2009) is of the view that the age of a future spouse should be taken into consideration, although males may be older than their female spouse's, it should not be to a greater degree as a 72year old man may find it difficult to sexually gratify the desires of his 35years old wife. Generally, most people believe it's better to marry someone whom you can grow old with (slightly at the same pace).

Interestingly, in a recent research by Schaefer (2012), the number of marriages that involve much older women at least 10 years older was found to be rapidly growing. On the other hand, Age is synonymous with human development and human development comes with experience according to Sigmund Freud psychoanalytic theory. Research has shown that couples who get married after the age of 25 are far more likely to stay married than those who get married sooner, (Charles& Elizabeth, 2011). Springer (2013) is of the view that people should not get married within their early twenties, because both intending couples are still figuring out whom they are, they are starting to establish themselves in the working world, they are still maturing emotionally. Moreover, if the two love each other and are committed, waiting a few more years to get married will avail them the opportunity to understand themselves better plus the fact that they can then afford a better wedding and honeymoon.

Moreover, in our African context, men look forward to marrying a younger Lady because women are believed to be fertile and more beautiful in their early youthful days while women look forward to matured, older, hardworking and independent men as future spouse. Based on these obvious impacts of spouse selection as highlighted above, this study therefore attempts to investigate the influence age difference and religious affiliation exerts on the choice of marriage partners among undergraduate students.

The study will answer the following questions:

1. Will there be a difference between young students and old students on their choice of marriage partners?
 2. Will there be a difference between students with high religious affiliation and students with low religious affiliation on their choice of marriage partners?
- In answering the above questions, the study will achieve the following aims.
- To determine the influence of age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse.

Relevance of the Study

This study has both theoretical and practical relevance.

Theoretically, the work will add to the existing body of literature on the determinants of

choice of spouse in Nigeria especially in the areas of age and religious affiliation, to the best of the researchers knowledge, there is limited study on the choice of spouse with respect to Africa and Nigeria.

Moreover, practically, this study tends to analyze and critically examine the process of mate selection among youths and the role age and religious affiliation plays in it.

To provide parents, counselors, guardians and therapist with the requisite knowledge of the roles age and religious affiliation plays on choice of spouse. This will help them know how best to relate with the young ones in spouse selection which will in turn help to reduce the rate of unfaithfulness and divorce in our contemporary age.

Research Hypotheses

- I. There will be a significant difference between younger and older students on their choice of spouse.
- II. There will be a significant difference between students who are high on religious affiliation and students who are low on religious affiliation on their choice of spouse.
- III. There will be a significant interaction between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse of students.

METHOD

Participants

Two hundred and seventy eight participants (males = 122, females = 156) who are students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State, Nigeria were used for this study. The ages of the participants ranged from 16-34 years with the mean age of 22.00 and standard deviation (SD) of 2.95.

The participants were final year regular students of faculty of social sciences drawn through a simple random sampling technique.

Instruments

Two standardized instruments were adopted for use in this study.

The first being the Religious Affiliation scale (RAS), designed by P.F Omoluabi (1995) to measure religious devotion. The 21 item inventory was designed to assess the extent to which individual clients engage in religious activities, hold strong religious views and believe in prescribed religious practiced. It has a Forced-choice response of True or False in which the total number of items shaded "True" are multiplied by 3.

The second questionnaire adopted for use in this study was the choice of spouse scale (CSS) designed by the researchers for the measurement of factors considered in the process of marital mate selection. The 22-item was designed to assess to which extent several factors influence the choice of an individual's marriage partner.. The Nigeria norms and means are the basis for the Interpretation of scores.

Validity and Reliability

Religious affiliation scale was validated by the author using construct validity. Erinoso (1996) further correlated Religious Affiliation Scale with life satisfaction index-2 and obtained a divergent validity coefficient of 26.

Religious Affiliation scale (RAS) has a test retest reliability coefficient of .97 in an interval of three weeks.

Choice of spouse scale (CSS): the original CSS consists of 38 questions about choice of spouse in the social setting. The validation of the CSS using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was done by the researcher with 16 items being deleted due to the fact that the factor loading was more than .40 in the Varimax Rotation Matrix and Eigen value of 1 and above. So, 22 items loaded significantly and were subsequently adopted as the scale for measuring choice of spouse of the participants for the present study.

However, for suitability with the present study the reliability of the test instrument was re-established through a pilot study with cronbach alpha coefficient of .50.

Procedure

The researchers obtained permission from lecturers in the relevant departments involved in the study so that he could administer the questionnaire during their lecture time. The permission was granted to him to come into lecture halls to administer the questionnaire. The researchers through the assistance of the course representatives distributed 300 copies of the questionnaire to students out of which 278 were correctly filled and returned to the researchers. Hence, were used for the present study.

Design / Statistics

The study adopted a 2 x 2 factorial design and subsequently 2 way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used as the corresponding statistic

RESULTS

Table 1: Summary table of mean and standard deviation for age and religious affiliation.

| | Mean (M) | Standard deviation (SD) | N |
|-----------------------|----------|-------------------------|-----|
| AGE | 22.0 | 2.95 | 278 |
| Religious Affiliation | 80.76 | 7.4 | 278 |

Table 2: Summary Table of 2-way Analysis of variance (ANOVA) for age and religious Affiliation on choice of spouse.

| Source | Sum of squares | Df | Mean square | F | Sig |
|------------------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|-------|------|
| AGE | 102.251 | 1 | 102.251 | 1.915 | .168 |
| Religious Affiliation | 381.677 | 1 | 381.677 | 7.148 | .008 |
| AGE*Religious Affiliation | 138.250 | 1 | 138.250 | 2.589 | .109 |
| ERROR | 14630.303 | 274 | 53.395 | | |
| TOTAL | 1828456.000 | 278 | | | |

The result of the ANOVA that tested differences in age indicated that there is no significant difference between younger and older undergraduate students in their choice of spouse at $F(1,274) = 1.915$, $P > .05$ level of significance. Therefore hypothesis 1 that states that there will be a significant difference between younger students and older students on their choice of spouse was rejected.

Findings also indicated that the second hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant difference between students with higher religious affiliation rate and students with lower religious affiliation rate on their choice of spouse was accepted at $F(1,274) = 7.148$, $P < .05$ level of significance.

Conclusively, the ANOVA test result also indicated that there was no significant interaction effect between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse at $F(1,274) = 2.589$, $P > .05$ level of significance; hence, rejecting the third hypothesis which stated that there will be a significant interaction between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse.

Discussion and conclusion

Evidence from this study indicated that the mean scores of younger and older students on choice of spouse did not differ significantly. The findings did not confirm hypothesis 1 of this study which proposed that there would be a significant difference between younger and older students on their choice of spouse. This findings is not in support of previous research that has shown that men prefer a partner who is 2.3 years younger and women prefer a partner who is 3.4 years older than they are.(Schwarz and hassebrauk, 2012). It also contradicted the findings of Witt,Murray and Kim (1992) which showed a significant difference in age preferences between Americans and Koreans on their choice of spouse. It is also not in line with the findings of Kunene(1982) which showed a significant difference between black males and females over age preferences of their future spouse with females opting for an older, matured and hardworking male while males on the other hand opted for a younger, submissive and child bearing female. However the findings of this study corresponds with the proposition of Springer (2012) which states that there is no specific age for marriage, it all depends on the maturity of those involved.

The second hypothesis in this study which stated that there will be a significant difference between students with high religious affiliation and students with low religious affiliation on their choice of spouse was confirmed. This findings is in line with the submissions of Maliki (2002) who found that religious affiliation of prospective spouses is very important as individuals who desire to marry should have the same religious belief since differences in religious belief or affiliation can be a disruptive force in their marriage life. This fact is supported by Levi-strauss(2006) that found that people are so particular about the demographic characteristics of their prospective spouses. College students surveyed indicated that they will not marry from another religious affiliation other than their own.

The findings is also in consonance with the results of Kunene(1982) which showed a significant difference over religious affiliation of future spouses with respondents agreeing that they will not marry from another religious affiliation other than their own. This was supported by the findings of Suhaimi, Yep and Rahman(2011) which showed that both African and Malaysian males prefer to date and marry someone who has the same religion and race with them.

However the findings of this study is in contradiction with the findings of Witt, Murray and Kim(1992) which showed no significant difference in religious affiliation of future spouses of college age young adults in the united states.

The third hypothesis which states that there would be a significant interaction between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse was also not confirmed as results showed no significant difference between them. However there are no empirical studies done on the interaction between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse to the best of the researchers' knowledge.

Conclusion

As it is with the findings of the study, the researchers conclude that one's affiliation to religious belief influences the person's choice of spouse. Specifically thus, people that are high on religious affiliation tend to be influenced on their choice of spouse than those who are low.

Secondly, and in keeping with the findings of the study, being old and young does not influence the choice of marriage partner. Similarly, the study maintained no significant interaction between age and religious affiliation on choice of spouse.

Implication of the study

As was reported in the findings of the study, people who have strong religious attachment and belief in the form of religious affiliation, have the high propensity to determine their spouse according to who shares their same belief or to determine for others under their custody and care, according to their religious affiliation.

Secondly, age has no influence on people's choice of spouse. This implies that ones choice of marriage partner is never influenced by being young or old.

Recommendations

The researchers recommends that due to the nature of the process of spouse selection, further research should be carried out involving other factors such as influence of character, education, economic status, family background, parental influences, culture and ethnicity as it affects choice of spouse. And the findings from this study should be used to develop effective interventions that are viable in improving courtship and enhancing psychological health among intending couples.

Limitations of the study

This study like any other scientific study is not without its shortcomings. At the time the research was performed, the researchers experienced some limiting factors which includes low turnout of students as the research was carried out during a period students were engrossed with so many extra-curricular activities such as departmental weeks, SUG week and Conferences and also difficulties in getting approval from some

lecturers and course representatives of some departments from which the participants were drawn.

Also during the administration of the religious affiliation scale (omolabi,1995), respondents complained about the “forced choice” response of “true or false” as some of the items did not represent their opinion. They advocated for the 5-likert response instead.

Suggestions for further Studies

Here the researchers proffer suggestions that may prove to be instrumental in future research on choice of spouse.

First and foremost, they advocate that research be carried out on this topic extensively and should include factors such as religious faith, cohabitation, sexual experience and self esteem and their influence on choice of spouse.

Also the researcher suggests that the study be replicated using a larger number of participants and involving students from several universities and even unmarried graduate and masters students of several universities to determine if age and religious affiliation exerts much influence on choice of spouse among students in general.

References

- Australian Institute Of Health And Welfare (2012). Person –Religious Affiliation, Code CASCRG 2011) N (NNN) Community Services, Standard 30/09/2012. [Www.Meteor.Ashw.Gov.Au / Content /](#)
- Charles, E. & Elizabeth, S. (2011). Fifteen predictors of marital success. [Www.Examiner.Com](#)
- Edward, P.E. & Kane, R. (2012) [Www.Prepare-Enrich](#).
- Levi- Strauss, C. (2006). Historical trends and variations in educational homogeneity. *Journal of Marriage & Family*, 333, 83 – 95.
- Maliki, A.E. (2012).Determinants of mate selection choice among University students in South-South Zone of Nigeria: Educational Foundations Department Niger Delta University.
- Mohammad, M.H. (2013). Marriage and family In Island. Muslim Marriage and matrimonial Site. [Www.Qiran.Com](#).
- Newman, B.M. & Newman P.R. (1995). The development through Life. A Psychological Approach 6th E.D New Brooks / Cole
- Nwoye,A.(1991). Marriage and Family Counselling. Jos. Jab Educational Books.
- Omari, T.P. (1989): Changing Attitudes Of Studies In West African Society Towards Marriage And Family Relation Britiah. *Journal Of Sociology*, 11, 197 – 210
- Schaefer, R.T (2012). Cougars On The Rise, New York Mcgraw – Hill Companies Inc 1221, Avenue, NY 10020
- Springer, S (2012): The Joint (Ad) Ventures Of Well Educated Couples: The Key Factors That Impact Your Odds Of Marital Success [Www.Psychologytoday.Com/Blog](#).
- Stagner, R (1974): Psychology Of Personality, New York. Mcgraw Publishers 1974.
- Weiten, Wayne And Loyd, Margret: Psychology Applied To Modern Life. 6th Ed. Wadsworth Inc.
- Yahaya, L.A (2009). *Marriage; Sex And Family Counseling*. Pg. 63 – 69 Lagos. ABIC Publishers