

SPOUSAL SUPPORT, EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND, AND COUPLES' TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD SATISFACTION IN BENIN CITY, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examined how spousal support relates to new parents' adjustment to parenthood, and whether this relationship is influenced by the couples' educational background in Benin City, Nigeria. Using a correlational survey design, the authors sampled 241 newly married couples who recently had their first child. Participants completed the Spousal Support Scale (SSS) and the Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI), and demographic information including education level was collected. Pearson's correlation analysis and one-way ANOVA statistics were used to test the formulated hypotheses. The findings showed a strong positive correlation between spousal support and satisfaction in the transition to parenthood ($r \approx .75$, $p < .001$). By contrast, there was no significant difference in parenthood satisfaction between couples of different educational backgrounds ($p > .05$). The study concludes that spousal support is a crucial factor in achieving a satisfying transition to parenthood, whereas a couple's level of education does not significantly impact this outcome. The authors suggest that interventions to foster mutual support between spouses may improve new parents' experiences, and that parenting should be approached as a shared responsibility of both partners.

Keywords: Spousal support, Education background, Couples transition, Satisfactory parenthood, Edo State.

Introduction

It is generally observed that the couples' stage (euphoric stage) in dyadic relationship, when babies have not started coming, is always characterised with climax of emotional attachment and blissfulness. There seems to be carryover of the courtship stage as the love is still intense and very hot, they do many things together. They tend to attend social functions together and very fond of each other. The love is usually unidirectional. As it is expected, this stage if successfully pulled through may lead to the stage of parenthood, that is, the arrival of babies. The arrival of the first baby and the beginning of parenthood comes with happiness and challenges. In the Nigerian setting, almost every marriage is geared towards procreation and so when the baby arrives, especially when it is of the desired sex; it is welcomed with much love and happiness. Both the husband and the wife have unlimited outpouring of love on the baby.

Phillip, Kenny, Esterman & Smith (2014), in their nursing theory and model, discussed what the concept of transition is. According to them, transition is the change in health status, in role relations, in expectations or abilities or as a passage from one life phase, condition or status to another. They further explained that transition to parenthood is motivated by a status of new parents' meanings, expectations, levels of skill and knowledge, the ambience around the parents, as well as emotional and physical well-being. To be a parent is a transition on many levels in order to experience health and wellbeing. However, parenthood comes with

numerous changes; some of these changes are positive, while others are negative to a couple's life together. Newman (2000) who emphasised the cognitive and emotional skills, which can be developed in parenthood, described the positive effects of becoming parents on the individuals. These cognitive skills include the ability to organise life, conveniently able to do series of chores at a time, preparedness for the future, acknowledgement of individual differences and the achievement of a more balanced view of your own and your partner's weaknesses, strengths and resources. The emotional development includes contact with new emotional levels and ways to express feelings. The increased empathy implies a capacity to help the child express and understand feelings, which could motivate acceptance and the expression of one's own feelings. Observing the baby appreciatively as he or she falls asleep, watching a partner gently cuddle the baby both created together, walking together as a threesome could be an awesomely beautiful experiences.

However, in the present day Nigeria society, becoming parents can be quite challenging. Both men and women may feel that a child could threaten their life vocation or frustrate their marital intimacy as a couple. Adegboyega (2021) asserted that, in our modern society where individualistic and hedonistic values seem to be the order of the day, the arrival of a child might be viewed as somebody interfering with the marital relationship. He also observed that, the time and energy available as being insufficient for both roles at work and parenthood. New parents' leisure activities became significantly less frequent, satisfaction declines, especially for wives, according to a review by (Amato 2010). However, Sadeh (2000) found that 'the increased sense of meaningfulness, when people become parents, overrides the loss of satisfaction and individual wellbeing'. According to Bozoglan (2013), marital role conflicts may occur more frequently and this could influence married life in a negative way. They asserted that, if the couples are well ready for this, they could handle the situation more easily. In a British study, Perronne and Worthington (2010) discovered that both men and women reported growing dissatisfaction with their spouse's role performance within the first three months after the birth of the first child. Khan and Aftah (2013) found that the wish to have a child increased the happiness; however, when the baby was born, the happiness decreased again, especially among the fathers. Mickelson, Claffey and Williams (2006) found the same tendency among fathers one year after the birth of the first child among 60 Swedish parents, where the fathers experienced deterioration in their economic situation, as well as less time for leisure activities and hanging out with friends than before. This made the fathers experience less satisfaction in the relationship in more areas than their spouses. Both mothers and fathers experienced less marital satisfaction and impairment when it came to closeness and sexuality Mickelson, Claffey and Williams (2006). Moreover, Gottman and Notarius (2000) contended that transition to parenthood coexists with a decrease in marital satisfaction, and in positive interchanges between marital partners and an increase in conflict between the parties. At the same time, struggling to wake in the middle of the night to yet more frequent crying, arguments with the partner motivated by exhaustion, and wondering if spouses will ever again have time for intimacy as a couple, can result to stress for both partners, erode the quality of their attachment and their enjoyment of life (Petch et al 2008). Many parents are surprised by the reality of caring for a new-born that requires constant, 24-hour care, and is totally dependent upon them for food, shelter, clothing, and love (Vanzetti et al 2004). Although most new-born

babies sleep 16–20 hour a day, their sleep pattern is haphazard and when awakened they typically require feeding or parental soothing (Sadeh, 2000). Parental fatigue and exhaustion are typically high among parents of infants (Newman, 2000), and extreme for the 13–35% of parents of infants and toddlers with sleep disturbances (Kuhn et al 2000). Infant feeding is another challenge. While more than 85% of women can successfully breastfeed, the demands of breastfeeding for the mother are quite high (Fairbank, O'Meara, Renfrew, Woolridge, Sowden, & Lister-Sharp, 2000) and only 60–70% of women breastfeed at birth and about 30% breastfeed until 6 months (Blyth, Creedy, Dennis, Moyle, Pratt, & De Vries, 2002). According to Manikam et al 2000, transient feeding problems are common and chronic feeding problems affect 25–35% of infants. Besides infant care demands, there are at least five other major changes that new parenthood brings, which seem to contribute to deteriorating couple relationship satisfaction. First, sex roles become more traditional (Cowan et al 2000). Care of an infant adds approximately 35 hour of work per week to the average couple household (Craig et al 2005).

Irrespective of occupational status education background, women perform two to three times more of this work than men (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). While fathers' participation is modest in infant related chores, they often tend to increase their hours of paid work after the birth of a child in order to meet up with the new demands (Bianchi et al., 2000). Secondly, there is less time for couple-focused communication free from distraction, less self-disclosure, less praise, and increased negativity and conflict (Gottman &Notarius., 2000). Thirdly, most couples report a decline in disposable income, often associated with increased costs, and sometimes decreased income as the woman changes to working part-time or not at all (Thomas et al., 2005). Particularly for couples on modest incomes, the financial squeeze can substantially erode their opportunities for individual and shared leisure activities (Thomas et al 2005). Fourthly, there is reduced frequency and quality of couple time (Petch &Halford 2008). Finally, almost all new mothers report some discomfort or pain in their initial experiences of intercourse after childbirth, and combined with the tiredness associated with infant care, most couples report a decline in their sexual relationship. Up to 50% of women and 20% of men report reduced sexual responsiveness for 6–12 months postpartum, and one third of couples report continuing sexual problems 3–4 years after birth (von Sydow, 1999). Feeney et al. (2001) asserted that, almost all couples experience some role strain from the competing demands of work, being a spouse and parenting, and women tend to be significantly affected compared to men. The impact of parenthood is higher among wives in a marital relationship at least partly because pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding place major physical demands on women's bodies (Cowan et al., 2000). In addition, women are more likely than men to be the primary care-giver of their infant, and often feel that the task of protecting the foetus, infant, and growing child are primarily their responsibility (Pancer et al., 2000). The build-up of hormonal, physical, and psychological changes experienced by women across the transition to parenthood perhaps influences the mild depression, commonly referred to as the “baby blues”, experienced by 80% of mothers in the 2 weeks after delivery (Halbreich, 2005). While

experiencing these changes, there is the possibility that women can be emotionally disillusioned and consequently, become disharmonious to their husbands.

Consequent of the fact mentioned above, a great proportion of married couples struggle to adapt to parenthood, feel stress in caring for their infant, and experience a significant decline in their couple relationship adjustment (Egbochuku & Ifelunni 2019). According to Rostami, Taheri, Abdi, and Kermani (2014), the early stage of parenthood experience marital agitation and continues by widespread states of negative affection and attachment damages, lack of concern toward needs and internal wishes, negative interactional prototypes, and unsuitable emotional experience. The health and prosperity of the family depends on the healthy parenthood. If the foundation of the parenthood is not firm enough, the negative consequences would be varieties of physical and mental problems. In satisfying parenthood, couples do things together, are proud of the home and love their children. More so the couples are intensely bound and psychologically together in important life matters (Imhonde, Aluede & Ifunanyachukwu, 2010). Satisfaction in parenthood is beneficial to the couples in many ways. Among these advantages are: an increase in couples' and their children's physical and mental health, and also an increase in their flexibility when faced with problems in the dyadic relationship (Egbochuku & Ifelunni 2019). According to Petch and Halford (2008), parenting satisfaction can be explained as an enhanced couple relationship functioning or parenting, after the birth of a first child. Parents in satisfying, low conflict relationships report higher parenting competence and sensitivity, and lower maternal stress and worry (Florsheim et al., 2013). In order to maintain satisfactory parenting of infants as well as sustain a mutually satisfying dyadic relationship, researchers have investigated the impact of spousal support among married couples.

Spousal support, like social support, is the help, advice, understanding, and the emotional support that spouses provide for one another to protect each other from the effects of stress in marriage (Akinade 2020). Two forms of spousal support, the emotional and instrumental, have been conceptualized and empirically tested (Von 1999). Emotional support includes emphatic understanding, listening, and affirmation of affection, advice, and genuine concern for the welfare of the other spouse. Instrumental support is the tangible help from the partner in terms of household chores and childcare (Biaggi 2016). Spousal support is shown to be associated with higher levels of psychological well-being (Kim & Park 2014), better marital adjustment and increased intimacy levels (Khan & Aftah 2013). The perceived adequacy of spousal support may have effect on psychological well-being. Dehle, Landers and Larsen (2001) found that spouses who reported receiving less support endorse more depressive symptoms and have difficulty controlling the aspects of their lives that induce stress. It is a common opinion that spousal support could affect the marital relationship. Many adults perceive marriage as a source of privileged support and emotional intimacy (Egbochuku & Ifelunni 2019). Moreover, supportive actions are considered important for preventing the start of a set of cognitive and emotional events that would strain or cause disruptions and conflicts in relationships. Lack of support is the basis for many problematic marriages, whereas supportive behaviour prevents the increase of marital conflicts (Lawrence et al., 2008). Yedirir and Hamarta (2015) stated that, perceived spousal support in stressful situations prevents emotional withdrawals, which

cause harm to marriages, and that it increases people's belief that they are not alone and that they can easily overcome the situation in question.

Because of the importance of spouses' perception of support in stressful situations, some studies have been conducted on patient support provided by his/her spouse, and on the patient's perception of the support he/she received, namely, how and to what extent it affected the patient. Research conducted regarding breast cancer patients in Korea found that there is a positive relationship between perceived spousal support and stress management, health responsibility, interpersonal relations, spiritual growth, and nutrition (Kim & Park, 2014). Boeding et al.'s (2014) research revealed that higher levels of perceived partner support for women with breast cancer resulted in higher levels of marital satisfaction for their husbands. Low levels of stress management in couples are considered to be an important predictor of divorce (Bodenmann, 2005; Bodenmann & Cina, 2006). Spouses basically rely on each other in stressful situations and they regard their partner as supporter in all kinds of situations, initially as emotional support transferring empathy and interest because the support that married individuals obtain from their social network does not equal the support they obtain from their spouses (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015).

According to Sadeh (2000), four aspects of spousal support are considered useful for increasing marital satisfaction and for the continuation of a marriage. Firstly, spousal support helps prevent emotional withdrawal and depression in stressful situations. In their research on the predictive effect of marital satisfaction on subsequent depressive symptoms, Miller, et al. (2013) concluded that low levels of perceived partner support could result to depression. Khan and Aftah (2013) equally examined the mediating role of perceived social support between marital satisfaction and depression, and they concluded that perceived social support is a vital variable, which predicts marital satisfaction and depression. Secondly, spousal support inhibits disputes from transforming into destructive behaviour and hinders increase of dyadic conflicts. Thirdly, supportive communication strengthens emotional attachment between spouses, and fourthly, it leads to a positive marital experience. Individuals who report higher level of spousal support are more likely to report significant rate of marital satisfaction (Cramer, 2014). Instrumental spousal support eases the burden of family demands and motivates partners to devote more time to work, whereas emotional spousal support enhances feelings of self-efficacy both at home and at work (Yedirir & Hamarta, 2015). Individuals that feel supported by their partners report reductions in stress and the support is significantly beneficial (Bozoglan, 2013). Spousal support is quite necessary to married persons because of its role in the marital relationship. According to Begin, Bouthillier, Chartrand, Julien, & Simard (2003), good communication, spousal support, and conflict resolution are all related to the quality of a relationship and significant to the extent to which individuals are satisfied. Dehle, Landers and Larsen (2001) found that spouses who reported receiving less support endorse more depressive symptoms and have problem managing the aspects of their lives that induce stress. When couples cooperate, utilize coping mechanisms, support each other and share their tasks equitably, they are likely to be satisfied in their relationship (Perrone & Worthington, 2010).

Social support may reduce conflict, ambiguity and time demands and may be able to decrease work-family conflict.

The study carried out by Mickelson, Claffey & Williams (2006), to examine the interaction of gender and gender role attitudes on spousal support and marital quality; emotional spousal support predicted better marital satisfaction and less conflict for traditional women and egalitarian men, whereas both instrumental and emotional spousal support predicted better marital satisfaction for egalitarian women and traditional men. The researchers believe the results suggest that within, as well as between, gender differences are important for understanding the contribution of spousal support to perceived marital quality. Further, researchers on spousal support and dyadic relationship have found that spousal support is a significant predictor of both greater marital satisfaction (Acitelli & Antonucci, 2012) and lesser marital disharmony (Miller, et al 2013), and more so for women than for men. Emotional support is perceived to be more important for women's well-being because of women's emphasis on intimacy in relationships. The expectation for intimacy and caring may make emotional support salient in a wife's evaluation of marital quality (Acitelli, et al. 2012). On the other hand, married men's marital satisfaction and intimacy may be strongly attached to both instrumental spousal support because of their socialized expectations for marriage and marital roles (Okorodudu 2010) and emotional spousal support because the wives are often the sole confidant for married men (Oladapo 2013). Zemp (2016) asserted that females are having better marital adjustment than males. He further explained that, even if working females play dual roles and burdened but still, they tried to make adjustment in family and are satisfied in other all circumstances. They participate in family matters, cooperate more and make themselves available whenever required for family matters. In a study by Gottman and Notarius (2000), during transitions to parenthood, women rated their relationships to be more satisfying when their partners expressed more fondness toward the women, and when the women were aware of the efforts that their partners were making to show love and support during transitional periods in the relationship. Individuals that feel supported by their partners report reductions in stress and the support is beneficial (Bolger, Kessler, & Zuckerman, 2010).

Education of partners could contribute immensely to marital success as because it may increase understanding and interest existing in such relationship. According to Imhonde, (2008), people with little education are mostly likely to be dissatisfied with their marriages. It is easy to see that the more educated a person is, the more satisfied his or her marriage. The educational background and qualification of married spouses have the tendency to determine the behaviour of each of the partners because education is an important tool for acquiring skills, which may ensure stability in marriage. The educational level of spouses is a variable considered as a factor that affects family stability (Amato & Previti 2003). They further argued that in most families where the husband and wife are literate, the incidence of marital problem is significantly minimal when compared with non-literate couples. This may be consequent of the fact that educated men and women appear very humble, understanding, calm, quiet and tolerant in view of the nature of training acquired while at school. Education no doubt instills discipline in individuals as well as influences their level of interaction and understanding of the personality of one another. Onwuasoanya (2005), stated among others that, educational level of couples has direct bearing on marital satisfaction and harmonious relationship.

Okorodudu and Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2003) reported that educational qualifications are predictors of marital success. They emphasized that they help to improve on all spheres of the individual's life, marriage and home management inclusive. Educated individuals seem to be more emotionally secure and to have higher communication skills, making them better equipped for establishing functional marital relationships (Amato & Previti 2003). One vehicle for remedying marital stress, occupational stress and for facilitating career fulfilment is through advanced formal education. Couples with higher socioeconomic status (SES), whether measured by income or educational level, are at less risk of marital disruption than couples that have lower SES (Obiekwe & Ekebosi 2020). Dyadic relationships that differ significantly in background characteristics, such as educational level, age and race, were reported to be at higher risk of marital disruption and disharmony (Omage 2013). However, the results of the study carried out by Ebenuwa-Okoh (2010) showed that, educational qualification does not have moderating impact on the dyadic relationship between emotional feelings, communication flow, work involvement, financial management and marital adjustment among married persons.

Although, literature showed that researches have been carried out on spousal support, educational level and other variables on marital satisfaction and stability, but none among the literature available to the researchers has actually looked at spousal support and educational qualifications and how they influence couples transition to satisfying parenthood in Edo State. In view of the foregoing, the current study is designed to investigate the relationship and influence of spousal support and educational background between and on couples' transition to satisfying parenthood in Edo state, Nigeria

Statement of the problem

Marital counsellors have observed that increase in couple conflict, while dyadic relationship progresses into parenthood could be associated with negative parenting practices. According to Krishnakumar & Buehler (2010), poor parenting practices, could predict a high lifetime risk of child attachment insecurity, depression, conduct disorder, poor social competence, health problems, and academic under achievement. Both parents seem to experience a decline in perceived marital intimacy over the first three years after the birth of a child, irrespective of parity, since the child will naturally seeks for attention almost all the time night and day. From the experience of the researchers who are also counsellors, some couples find it difficult to adapt to parenthood, feel stress in taking care of their infant, and experience a significant reduction in their couple relationship harmony. These changes have the tendency of stretching family relationships to a critical situation. Subsequently, love, which is the true bedrock of marriage collapses. There could be a communication breakdown. Sex life becomes not satisfactory and incessant quarrels become the order of the day. Nothing holds together, mistrust and infidelity may set in. Moreover, many of the spouses usually complain that, their partners found it difficult to adjust to the present status of parenthood. Children's psycho-social development may be compromised when marital maladjustment leads to punitive discipline, detachment by parents and negative interaction between parents and children. A marriage

where the spouses are not well adjusted, especially at the beginning of parenting will likely affect the stability of the home and fail to meet the expectations of the partners as what a good home should be. It is believed that the level of educational attainment of couples could impact their transition to parenthood satisfaction. However, many of the previous researches seemed not to have focused on this early stage of marriage when the first child arrives.

Therefore, the problem of this study is could there be a relationship between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction? and could couples' educational background influence such transition in Edo State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

- There is no significant relationship between spousal support and transition to satisfying parenthood in Edo State, Nigeria.
- There is no significant difference in transition to satisfying parenthood in Edo State based on education background of spouses.

Literature Review

Concept of Spousal Support

Spousal support refers to the perception or receipt of assistance, care, and encouragement from one's marital partner (Guidubaldi & Cleminshaw, 1995). It is commonly classified into three forms: emotional, instrumental, and informational support. Emotional support includes empathy, understanding, and reassurance; instrumental support involves tangible help such as household participation and financial assistance; and informational support covers advice or guidance on family matters (Kim et al., 2014).

According to Mickelson (2006), high spousal support predicts marital satisfaction, as it strengthens partners' sense of connectedness and trust. Similarly, Yedirir et al. (2015) observed that couples who exchange consistent emotional and instrumental support adapt better to parenting stress and role demands. Boeding et al. (2014) added that supportiveness during pregnancy and early parenting increases couples' psychological resilience, leading to a healthier marital climate.

The absence of adequate support, however, has negative effects. Gottman and Notarius (2000) found that perceived lack of understanding and assistance contributes to marital withdrawal and reduced intimacy. These findings underscore the critical role of spousal support in maintaining emotional balance and satisfaction during the transition to parenthood.

Educational Background and Family Adjustment

Education influences individuals' cognitive, emotional, and social competencies, which can shape how couples approach family responsibilities. Educated partners may have greater awareness of parenting demands, gender equity, and stress-coping strategies (Okorodudu & Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2003). Ebenuwa-Okoh (2010) observed that higher education promotes positive communication patterns that enhance marital adjustment.

However, not all findings support this assumption. Imhonde (2008) found that educational level does not always translate to marital harmony, especially when socio-economic or cultural pressures are intense. In Nigeria, where extended family obligations and

traditional gender expectations remain strong, education may not necessarily buffer couples from marital stress (Amato, 2010). This inconsistency makes it important to examine whether educational background moderates the relationship between spousal support and parenthood satisfaction in local contexts.

Transition to Parenthood Satisfaction

The concept of transition to parenthood satisfaction describes the extent to which couples perceive the shift to parenthood as fulfilling and emotionally rewarding. Phillips et al. (2014) defined this transition as a psychosocial process that involves changes in identity, routines, and relationship roles. Satisfaction during this period depends largely on how well couples adapt to new responsibilities and maintain emotional connection (Petch & Halford, 2008).

Empirical studies suggest that marital satisfaction often declines following the birth of a first child, especially when partners fail to maintain communication and support (Miller et al., 2013). However, couples who engage in shared parenting and mutual emotional support report higher satisfaction levels (Perrone, Webb, & Jackson, 2010). Sadeh (2000) similarly found that supportive relationships during early parenthood reduce stress and promote well-being.

Empirical Support

Several empirical investigations have highlighted the interconnectedness of spousal support, education, and marital satisfaction during parenthood. In Turkey, Yedirir et al. (2015) reported that perceived spousal support significantly predicted marital satisfaction across education levels. Similarly, Kim et al. (2014) found that mutual support between spouses enhances the quality of marital relationships during early child-rearing.

In Nigeria, Ebenuwa-Okoh (2010) observed that although education contributed to better communication among couples, emotional support was a stronger predictor of marital satisfaction. Imhonde (2008) and Okorodudu and Ebenuwa-Okoh (2003) also reported that couples who cooperate and empathize with each other enjoy higher marital harmony regardless of educational status.

These findings collectively imply that while education provides knowledge and awareness, spousal support functions as the primary emotional foundation for a successful transition to parenthood. This study builds on these insights to explore how both factors interact to influence parenthood satisfaction among first-time parents in Benin City, Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Transition Theory developed by Schumacher and Meleis (1994) and later adapted by Phillips et al. (2014) for nursing and family contexts. The theory explains how individuals and families adapt to significant life changes such as parenthood, marriage, migration, or retirement. Transitions are defined as processes of change that involve shifts in roles, identities, and patterns of behaviour, often triggered by life events. According to the theory, successful transitions depend on three key factors:

1. personal conditions – the individual's readiness, previous experience, and coping resources;
2. community or social support – the interpersonal and institutional assistance available during change; and
3. societal context – the cultural and structural factors shaping the transition process.

Applied to this study, the transition to parenthood is conceptualized as a period of adjustment that requires new role identities and relational balance. Spousal support functions as a facilitating condition, helping partners adapt to the demands of caring for a new child while maintaining emotional stability. Emotional and instrumental assistance from a spouse can buffer the stress associated with childcare, financial pressure, and fatigue.

Educational background, on the other hand, represents a personal condition that may enhance or limit coping effectiveness. Educated couples may possess better problem-solving and communication skills, allowing them to navigate challenges more efficiently. However, in contexts where traditional gender norms remain strong, education alone may not guarantee smooth adjustment unless it is complemented by emotional support and shared responsibility.

Thus, the transition theory provides a framework for understanding how individual and interpersonal factors interact to influence adaptation during early parenthood. Within this framework, spousal support and educational background are examined as determinants of couples' satisfaction in the transition to parenthood. The theory's emphasis on interpersonal relationships and contextual factors aligns with the objectives of this study and guides its interpretation of results.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive correlational survey design, which is appropriate for exploring the relationship between variables without manipulating them. This design enabled the researchers to determine the relationship between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction and to examine differences based on educational background among first-time parents in Benin City, Nigeria.

The target population comprised couples in Benin City who had recently become parents for the first time. Respondents are grouped into those with and without tertiary education as to determine the influence of education background on parenting satisfaction. Using a convenience sampling technique, the researchers selected 241 couples (a total of 482 individuals) from two major health institutions: the University of Benin Teaching Hospital (UBTH) and the Edo State Specialist Hospital. Couples were eligible to participate if they:

1. had recently delivered their first child (within the last 12 months);
2. were both present at the postnatal clinic during data collection; and
3. willingly consented to participate in the study.

Couples were excluded if either partner declined participation or if they had previous parenting experience.

Three instruments were used to collect data. They are:

1. Biodata Form: This collected demographic information such as age, gender, educational level, occupation, and length of marriage.
2. Couples Satisfaction Index (CSI): Developed by Funk and Rogge (2007), this standardized scale measures relationship satisfaction. For this study, items were adapted to reflect satisfaction during the transition to parenthood. The CSI consists of 16 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient obtained in this study was .79, indicating acceptable internal consistency.
3. Spousal Support Scale (SSS): Developed by Guidubaldi and Cleminshaw (1995), this 10-item scale measures perceived emotional, instrumental, and informational support from one's spouse. Responses are rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The Cronbach's alpha values for this study ranged between .84 and .87, confirming satisfactory reliability.

All instruments were validated by experts in Counselling Psychology and Family Studies to ensure content and face validity. The reliability of the instruments was established through a pilot test involving 20 couples who were not part of the main study sample.

Formal permission to conduct the study was obtained from the management of the two participating hospitals. The researchers, assisted by trained research assistants, administered the questionnaires to couples attending postnatal clinics. The purpose of the study was explained, and informed consent was obtained from each participant. Each couple was asked to complete the instruments independently in a quiet area of the clinic.

Out of 400 questionnaires distributed, 241 valid responses were retrieved, representing a response rate of approximately 60%. Ethical considerations were strictly observed: participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and respondents could withdraw at any point without penalty.

Data collected were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. Descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations were used to summarize the data. Two hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

For hypothesis 1, the Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to examine the relationship between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction, while for hypothesis 2, the One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine whether educational background significantly influenced transition to parenthood satisfaction. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One

To test this hypothesis, the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) was computed to determine the relationship between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction. The result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Correlation between Spousal Support and Transition to Parenthood Satisfaction (N = 241)

Variable	Mean	SD	r	p
Spousal Support	41.69	3.87	.752	<.001
Transition to Parenthood Satisfaction	30.78	3.97	—	—

The result in Table 1 shows a strong positive correlation between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction ($r = .752$, $p < .001$). This relationship is statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

This finding implies that the higher the level of perceived spousal support, the greater the satisfaction couples experience during the transition to parenthood. Spouses who provide emotional and instrumental assistance are more likely to maintain harmony and satisfaction in their relationship as they adjust to parenthood.

Hypothesis Two

To test this hypothesis, a one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: ANOVA Summary for Transition to Parenthood Satisfaction by Educational Background

Source	SS	df	MS	F	P
Between Groups	71.57	2	35.78	2.29	.103
Within Groups	3717.78	238	15.62		
Total	3789.35	240			

The results in Table 2 show that the calculated $F(2, 238) = 2.29$, $p = .103$, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is retained.

This means that there is no statistically significant difference in transition to parenthood satisfaction among couples with different educational backgrounds. In other words, educational attainment does not appear to determine how satisfied couples feel during their transition to

parenthood. Couples with lower or higher educational qualifications may experience similar levels of satisfaction, provided spousal support is strong.

Summary of Findings

- There is a significant positive relationship between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction among first-time parents.
- Educational background does not significantly influence couples' satisfaction during the transition to parenthood.

These findings suggest that emotional and instrumental support between partners, rather than educational attainment, is the most critical factor in ensuring a satisfying adjustment to parenthood.

Discussion of Findings

The study examined the relationship between spousal support, educational background, and transition to parenthood satisfaction among first-time parents in Benin City, Nigeria. The findings revealed a strong positive correlation between spousal support and transition to parenthood satisfaction. This means that couples who perceived greater emotional and instrumental support from their spouses reported higher satisfaction levels during the early stages of parenting.

This outcome supports previous research emphasizing the importance of spousal support as a determinant of marital harmony and adaptation to parenthood (Boeding et al., 2014; Kim et al., 2014; Yedirir et al., 2015). In their studies, couples who experienced higher levels of empathy, shared responsibility, and mutual appreciation reported less stress and better overall satisfaction. Similarly, Perrone, Webb, and Jackson (2010) found that partner support significantly reduces work–family conflict and enhances well-being among new parents.

In the Nigerian context, where family and societal expectations strongly influence marital dynamics, this finding is particularly relevant. Emotional interdependence between partners is essential for navigating the cultural pressures surrounding fertility and parenting roles. As Amato (2010) and Imhonde (2008) observed, lack of emotional support often leads to tension, role conflict, and diminished marital satisfaction among young couples. The present study therefore reinforces the notion that supportive spousal relationships serve as protective factors during major family transitions.

The second finding showed that educational background did not significantly affect transition to parenthood satisfaction. This aligns with Ebenuwa-Okoh (2010), who observed that educational attainment does not necessarily translate to marital adjustment. Although education can enhance communication and conflict management, the emotional and practical support between spouses remains a more immediate determinant of satisfaction (Okorodudu & Ebenuwa-Okoh, 2003). In contrast, Imhonde (2008) found that higher educational levels fostered better marital understanding and adjustment; however, such benefits may diminish under cultural pressures that prioritize traditional gender roles over shared parenting.

The current finding suggests that emotional connection and cooperation outweigh educational differences in influencing couples' adaptation to parenthood. Within the framework of the Transition Theory (Schumacher & Meleis, 1994; Phillips et al., 2014), spousal support operates as a facilitating condition that promotes healthy adaptation, while education represents a personal condition that shapes but does not determine how couples manage the transition.

Overall, the study contributes to a growing body of evidence emphasizing relational and contextual factors over purely demographic ones in explaining marital and family outcomes. It underscores that mutual understanding, empathy, and shared involvement in parenting are the primary predictors of satisfaction in the transition to parenthood.

Implications of the Findings

The findings have both practical and theoretical implications. Practically, they highlight the importance of couple-focused interventions and counselling during pregnancy and postnatal care. Marriage counsellors, family therapists, and health practitioners should encourage couples to develop communication and support skills before and after childbirth. Theoretically, this study strengthens the application of Transition Theory in explaining family adaptation processes in African settings. It demonstrates that successful transitions depend more on interpersonal and contextual supports than on structural variables such as education.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights derived, this study had some limitations. Firstly, the use of convenience sampling restricts the generalization of the findings to all Nigerian couples. Secondly, the study relied on self-reported data, which may have been influenced by social desirability bias. Thirdly, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causal relationships between spousal support and parenthood satisfaction. Future research employing longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples would provide stronger evidence for these associations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study investigated the relationship between spousal support, educational background, and transition to parenthood satisfaction among first-time parents in Benin City, Nigeria. The findings revealed that spousal support plays a crucial role in helping couples experience a satisfying transition to parenthood. Couples who perceive emotional, instrumental, and informational support from their partners tend to report higher satisfaction and smoother adaptation to parenting responsibilities.

Conversely, the study found that educational background did not significantly influence transition to parenthood satisfaction. This indicates that while education may enhance awareness and communication, it may not independently determine how well couples adjust to the demands of early parenthood. The success of this transition depends primarily on the quality of mutual understanding, empathy, and cooperation between partners.

Conclusively, the study contributes to the growing recognition that emotional and relational

competencies are key to achieving fulfilling family life. Strengthening spousal support systems during the transition to parenthood can enhance marital satisfaction, improve family stability, and promote the overall well-being of parents and children alike.

Based on the findings and conclusion of this study, the following recommendations are made.

- Marriage counsellors, health educators, faith-based organizations and NGOs should develop programmes that train couples in effective communication, shared parenting responsibilities, and conflict management during early parenthood.
- Hospitals and community health centers should incorporate couple-based counselling sessions into routine maternal and child health programmes, helping new parents build mutual support skills.
- Couples should be encouraged to attend seminars and workshops that address challenges in early parenthood, emphasizing teamwork, appreciation, and shared goal-setting.
- Policy and Workplace Support should be provided/enhanced. Government and private institutions should introduce family-friendly policies—such as paid paternity leave and flexible work schedules- to reduce stress and encourage joint parenting during the transition phase.
- Counselling and Family Life Education should be strengthened. Counselling units in universities, community centres and NGOs should include topics on emotional intelligence, empathy, and mutual support in their family life education curricula to prepare young adults for healthy marital transitions.
- Scholars should extend this line of inquiry by exploring other psycho-social and cultural factors influencing parenthood satisfaction, including gender expectations, economic pressures, and social support networks.

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