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RELIGIOSITY AND COPING SELF-EFFICACY AS PREDICTORS OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS DIVORCE AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN IBADAN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Divorce has a pervasive effect on married people's lives as it affects them physically, psychologically and spiritually. Studies have shown that divorce rates remain intractable in our modern society. This study, therefore, investigated how religiosity and coping self-efficacy affect attitudes towards divorce among married couples in Ibadan, Nigeria. An ex-post facto research design using a cross-sectional survey was adopted. A purposive sampling technique was used to select six communities in Ibadan North Local Government in Oyo State. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire comprising demographic variables, religiosity ($\alpha=0.96$), coping self-efficacy ($\alpha=0.98$) and attitude towards divorce ($\alpha=0.70$). Data were analyzed using a t-test for independent mean and multiple regressions at a $p<0.05$ level of significance. The results showed that coping self-efficacy significantly influenced attitude toward divorce $t(293) = -5.6, p < 0.05$. Also, religiosity and coping self-efficacy jointly predicted attitude towards divorce [$R^2 = 0.12, F(2, 293) = 20.24, p < 0.05$]. Furthermore, coping self-efficacy independently predicted attitude toward divorce ($\beta = -0.36, p < 0.05$). However, religiosity did not significantly predict attitude towards divorce ($\beta = 0.04, p > 0.05$). The study recommends that marriage counsellors and clergymen should be actively involved in developing coping self-efficacy among potential couples and dissuades them from a negative attitude toward divorce.

Key words: Religiosity, Coping self-efficacy, Attitude towards divorce, Ibadan, Nigeria.

Introduction

Marriage is a relationship between one or more men and one or more women recognized by society as having a continuing claim to the right of sexual access to one

another (Haviland et al., 2011). It is a relationship which endorses and approves sexual commitment between spouses. In various cultures, there are a lot of reasons why people marry. For example, people married for fun, some for procreation. In

contrast, many marry for economic reasons, either to take cover under the protective wings of the proposed rich spouse or to secure a job (Joe-Akunne et al., 2020). According to Imhonde et al. (2008), achieving success in a marital relationship for the individual concerned and society is an uphill task. Therefore, marriage calls for adjustment as the relationship can have either a positive or a negative influence on the psychological well-being of the husband and wife. However, each marriage has its peculiar growth as well as conflict patterns. Despite demographic and political shifts, marriage has significant value for individuals, families and society (Ajayi et al., 2021).

When looking at marriage as an institution, as opposed to a free-standing concept, marriage represents socially sanctioned behaviour. Marriage embraces traditional virtues and legal and predictable assumptions concerning what is moral and what is proper (Nock, 2005). Through marriage, an individual is transformed: they are perceived and treated differently by society and even enjoy rights and privileges unmarried individuals do not. Married couples are perceived as more mature, stable, committed and responsible. This means that regardless of an individual's opinion or value of their marriage, marriage has broader implications with societal connotations. But, sustainable and enduring marriage has been affected by divorce, defined as a legal dissolution of the marriage relation; any formal separation of a man and his wife according to established custom; or complete separation of any kind (Ukpong, 2014).

While the prevalence of divorce tends to vary greatly, the United Nations (2020) put the country with the highest divorce rate to be the Maldives, with 10.97 divorces per 1,000

marriage persons per year, followed by Belarus with 4.63 and the United States with 4.34 per 1,000 marriage persons per year. In Nigeria, the National Bureau of Statistics (2021) put the number of men who officially dissolved their marriage through a divorce at just 0.2% and women at 0.3%. Studies have indicated that the most common contributors to divorce are infidelity, lack of commitment, religiosity, lack of communication, intimacy, and physical and sexual abuse (Eyo, 2018). The aftermath in most cases is a divorce in both newly wedded and old marriages.

One factor that has been implicated in affecting a person's attitude towards divorce is the level of religiosity, which is how much a person believes in a supernatural power that controls their life. According to Sherkat et al. (2002), about 90% of individuals report a belief in God or a higher power, and 60% stated that religion is important or very important to them. Even so, determining the influence of such belief in the context of marriage and divorce is a complex endeavour. However, studies that specifically addressed the marriage-religion connections between religiosity and marital quality, stability, and satisfaction that explains these relationships are rare and often include a Christian-only sample (Aman et al., 2019; Chesney et al., 2006). Studies of how religion affects divorce are usually based on the same faith marriages. At the same time, little is known about interfaith marriages, except that same-faith marriages are much more stable than inter-faith marriages (Lakatos & Martos, 2019). Although the influence between religious communities, practices, beliefs, marital distress and divorce remains ambiguous, the recurring correlations between religiosity and divorce require fresh investigation.

Another factor investigated in this study considered to predict attitude toward divorce is coping self-efficacy, which has been defined as the belief about one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce given attainments (Bandura, 1997; Chesney et al., 2006). In other words, coping self-efficacy is based on the individuals' confidence in their abilities to manage certain events. Higher levels of coping self-efficacy have been found to reduce depression, while lower levels of coping self-efficacy put the individual at increased risk for depression (Kwasky & Groh, 2014). Also, coping self-efficacy may mediate some negative effects of challenging life transitions (Kwasky & Groh, 2014). Given that marriage may be accompanied by some forms of challenges and these challenges are transitional, it could cause divorce. This study will examine coping self-efficacy among married couples and how it mediates positive and negative perceptions of divorce (Zareei & Zareei, 2019). Suppose these challenges and conflicts influence married couples. Would the marriage couples possess the ability to handle or manage these challenges, which could be regarded as an advantage or disadvantage to marital stability or divorce (Joe-Akunne et al., 2020).

Divorce in our society today has given rise to the problem of various dimensions. They include the growth of indiscipline and lawlessness in our society, armed robbery, thieves, drug abuse and addiction, sex abuse, indiscriminate behaviour such as bullying in school, pick-pocketing, lying, examination malpractices, and disrespect to constituted authority (Cui et al., 2008) This study will, therefore, investigate the effects of religiosity and coping self-efficacy on attitude towards divorce. Specifically, the study aims to examine the influence of religiosity on

attitude towards divorce, examine the influence of coping self-efficacy on attitude towards divorce and establish whether religiosity and coping self-efficacy will jointly and independently predict attitude towards divorce among married persons.

The study will provide awareness of the rising threat of divorce in our society and its effects on the parties involved, their relatives, and society. It will help strengthen, improve and provide counselling and therapeutic interventions to marriage and family counsellors. Specifically, the result will give insight and guidance to the mental health professional, marriage counsellors and religious leaders, the law court and the government to better understand the unique nature of marriage and the importance of building a positive coping self-efficacy and being religiously conscious, and to know how to handle marital cases or crises. The findings will also guide the development of new interventions and modifying existing treatments to meet better the needs of this growing population that is prone to divorce against it, further spreading. Finally, this study will give a helping hand to parents or caregivers, intending couples, and adolescents to know the significance of developing a positive coping self-efficacy and religious belief, affiliation and activities. Married couples will see the relevance of securing positive coping self-efficacy and being religious, which can positively or negatively affect their future life, especially in their marriages if not well developed.

Three hypotheses were generated and tested in this study:

(i) Participants with a high level of religiosity will significantly report an unfavourable

attitude toward divorce than those with a low level of religiosity,

(ii) Participants with a high level of coping self-efficacy will significantly report an unfavourable attitude towards divorce than those with a low level of coping self-efficacy,

(iii) Coping self-efficacy and religiosity will jointly and independently predict attitudes towards divorce among married persons in the Ibadan-North Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Method

Design: The ex-post facto research design using a cross-sectional survey was used in this study because the variables in this study already exist and cannot be manipulated by the researcher. Two independent variables: religiosity and coping self-efficacy, were investigated on one dependent variable: attitude towards divorce.

Setting: The study was carried out in Ibadan North Local Government Area in Oyo State, South-west, Nigeria. It is a predominantly Yoruba-speaking population of people of different religions and works of life. There are also people from other faiths and different cultures who dwell there. Hence this research is focused on all married couples dwelling in this region who made up various religions and works of life.

Population of Study: The population of the study comprised married persons in Ibadan North Local Government Area, in Oyo State, South-west, Nigeria. The population was selected because of the local government area's heterogeneity and diverse religious make-up.

Sample and Sampling Technique: Six communities in Ibadan North Local

Government Area were purposively selected. These communities include: University of Ibadan, Abadina, Agbowo, Bodija, Sango and Ojo communities. The accidental sampling technique was used to select participants from each of the communities for the distribution of the questionnaires.

Instrument

The centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS):

This was developed by Huber and Huber (2012) and is used to measure participants' religiosity. The CRS is a 15-item scale based on five core features of religiosity, including public practice, private practice, religious experiences, ideology, and intellectual dimensions. The scale is measured on a 5-point Likert's format ranging from 1 (not all-important) to 5 (very important). The combination of these five dimensions is a valid measure of an individual's religiosity. The authors recommended cut-off values to differentiate highly religious people from moderate and low religiosity (1.0 to 2.0: not religious, 2.1 to 3.9: religious, 4.0 to 5.0: highly religious). The Cronbach alpha for the scale is $\alpha=0.96$.

Attitude Towards Divorce Scale: This was developed by Kinnaird and Garrard (1986). It is a self-report instrument used to measure participants' attitudes toward divorce. It is rated on a 5-point Likert's scale, with seven being 'Favourable' and 1 'Unfavourable'. Scale scores ranged from 12 to 60, with higher scores representing more favourable attitudes toward divorce. Cronbach alpha for this study is 0.70.

Coping self-efficacy Scales: This was developed by Chesney et al. (2006), and it is a 26-item scale presented on a 10-point Likert's format where 0 means 'cannot do at all', five means 'moderately can do', and ten

means ‘certain can do’. A possible total score of 260; higher scores signify high coping self-efficacy while lower scores signify low coping self-efficacy. The scale has a Cronbach alpha of 0.98

Procedure Questionnaires were administered to married persons in Ibadan North Local Government Area across different religious, ethnic groups and ages by the researchers. Individuals’ informed consent was sought, and the purpose of the study was explained to them; how they should respond to the various items in the questionnaires was also explained to them. At the end of participation, each participant was thanked. Participation was voluntary.

Statistical analysis: The collected data were screened, coded, and analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software 22.0. Demographics were analyzed with descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, ranges and percentages; a t-test was used for hypotheses one and two.

Multiple regressions analysis was used to test hypothesis three at a 0.5 alpha level.

Results

A total of 295 participants were used in the study, 164 (55.6%) were males, and 131 (44.4%) were females. The participants’ age ranges from 24-80 years. In terms of ethnic groups, 231 (78.3%) of the participants were Yoruba, 61 (20.7%) were Ibo, and 3 (1.0%) were Hausa. Of the participants’ religious backgrounds, 189 (64%) were Christians, and 106 (35%) were Muslims. Thirty-six (12.2%) participants reported being divorced, while 256 (86.8%) reported that they were still married. The participants’ years in marriage range from 1-56 years.

Hypothesis one states that participants with a high level of religiosity will significantly report an unfavourable attitude towards divorce than those with a low level of religiosity. This was tested using a t-test for independent means, and the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: T-test showing means difference between religiosity and attitude towards divorce among married couples in Ibadan North LGA

Dependent	Religiosity	N	M	SD	t	df	p
Attitude towards divorce	High	147	43.0	4.78	-1.08	293	> .05
	Low	147	43.64	5.40			

Table 1 presents the influence of religiosity on attitude towards divorce among married persons in Ibadan North Local Government Area (LGA). It is revealed that there exists no significant difference between religiosity and attitude towards divorce [t (293) = -1.08, p > .]. This negates the stated hypothesis. Hence, it was rejected.

Hypothesis two states that participants with a high level of coping self-efficacy will significantly report an unfavourable attitude towards divorce than those with a low level of coping self-efficacy. This was tested using a t-test for independent samples, and the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: T-test showings mean difference between coping self-efficacy and attitude towards divorce among married couples in Ibadan North LGA.

Dependent	Coping self-efficacy	N	M	SD	t	df	P
Attitude towards divorce	High	170	41.98	4.48	5.61	293	< .05
	Low	122	45.22	5.36			

As shown in Table 2, there is a significant difference between coping self-efficacy and attitude towards divorce [$t(293) = -5.62, p < .05$]. It further revealed that those with a low level of coping self-efficacy ($M = 45.22, SD = 5.36$) reported a favourable attitude towards divorce than those with a high level of coping self-efficacy ($M = 41.98, SD = 4.48$). This connotes that those with low coping self-efficacy tend to have a more unfavourable attitude towards divorce than individuals with high coping self-efficacy. This confirms the stated hypothesis; hence, it was retained.

Hypothesis three states coping self-efficacy and religiosity will jointly and independently predict attitudes towards divorce among married persons in the Ibadan-North Local Government Area of Oyo state. This was tested using multiple regressions analysis, and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Multiple regressions analysis showing independent and joint religiosity and coping self-efficacy as predictors of attitude towards divorce among married persons in Ibadan North LGA

DV	IV	β	t	R	R ²	F	p
Attitude towards divorce	Religiosity	0.4	.78	35	12	20.24	<.05
	Coping	-.36	-6.34				

DV = dependent Variable, IV = Independent Variable

As shown in Table 3, religiosity and coping self-efficacy had significant joint influence on attitude towards divorce [$R^2 = .12, F(2,293) = 20.24, p < .05$]. Religion and coping self-efficacy collectively contributed about 12% of the variance in attitude towards divorce. However, only coping self-efficacy independently predicted attitude towards divorce ($\beta = -.36, p < .05$). This confirms the hypothesis and was accepted.

Discussion

This study investigated the influence of religiosity and coping self-efficacy as predictors of attitude towards divorce among married persons in the Ibadan-North Local

Government Area. Three hypotheses were tested using a t-test and multiple regressions analysis. The hypothesis that participants with a high level of religiosity will significantly report an unfavourable attitude towards divorce than those with low religiosity was not supported in this study, against the findings of the study by Aman et al. (2019). The latter found that religious participation correlates with higher marriage commitment and increased family satisfaction. Additionally, a review of the religion and marriage literature by Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2010) found evidence that religious affiliation and activity have a modest positive impact on marriage and

family life. Shurts and Myers (2011) stated that individuals develop their attitudes based on various experiences, including messages from the family, the media, religious values and groups of friends. This study negates this statement.

Hypothesis two states that participants with a high level of coping self-efficacy will significantly report a lower attitude towards divorce than those with a low level of coping self-efficacy was confirmed. It was further revealed that those with a low level of coping self-efficacy reported a favourable attitude towards divorce than those with a high level of coping self-efficacy. This connotes that those with low coping self-efficacy tend to have a more favourable attitude towards divorce than individuals with high coping self-efficacy. This lent credence to the founding by Zareei and Zarei (2019) and Cui et al. (2008). They found that greater coping self-efficacy expectations are related to more positive attributions about partners' behaviours in relationships and greater satisfaction among married couples over time. Using the same self-report measure, Sahebihagh et al. (2017) found that coping self-efficacy beliefs about resolving conflict, which in turn is related to relationships in terms of feelings of satisfaction, reward, warmth, and happiness. Joe-Akunne et al. (2020) found that coping self-efficacy beliefs about resolving conflicts are related to persistence in solving relationship problems, thereby averting divorce.

Finally, hypothesis three, which states that coping self-efficacy and religiosity will jointly and independently predict attitude towards divorce among married persons in Ibadan North Local Government Area, showed that collectively, religiosity and coping self-efficacy contributed about 12%

variance in attitude towards divorce. However, only coping self-efficacy independently predicted attitude towards divorce. This study supported the findings of other scholars that linked religiosity, including strong religious beliefs, with increased marital satisfaction and duration, increased commitment and fidelity (Zareei & Zarei, 2019; Lakatos & Martos, 2019) and marital stability (Aman et al., 2019), thus avoiding divorce. Research has also repeatedly indicated correlations between religious homogamy and marital satisfaction, although the nature of the relationship is not certain (Koenig et al., 2001).

Conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, the following conclusions were drawn. First, this study concludes that there is no significant difference between high and low levels of religiosity in attitude towards divorce among married persons in the study population. In other words, this means that religiosity has no role in attitude towards divorce. Also, the level of coping self-efficacy that partners in a relationship have dictated their attitude towards a divorce to an extent. Married persons with a high level of coping self-efficacy tend to have a less favourable attitude towards divorce than those with a low level of coping self-efficacy. Recommendations and suggestions for further studies This study identified that a marital relationship provides an individual with a different experience than other forms of relationships. However, the reverse is the case as a recent study shows that most marriages have succumbed to the current tidal wave of divorce, which has been perpetrating into many homes, families and previously loving couples who vowed to love themselves till death do them apart. Based on

the findings from this study, the following recommendations are suggested. One, since coping self-efficacy is a significant predictor of attitude toward divorce among married persons; further, those with a high level of coping efficacy reported an unfavourable attitude towards divorce than those with a low level of coping, our various religious institutions should consider boosting the coping efficacy of about to marry persons such that they can develop the attitude of having the ability to cope with the marriage no matter the challenge. This can be done through psychological counselling by emphasizing more the negative effect of divorce and the need to believe in one's ability to cope with a marital crisis without divorce. Also, more studies should be carried out on psychosocial predictors of attitude

towards divorce as it is established that attitude precedes actual behaviour.

Limitations of the study Some limitations in this study need to be itemized. First, data were collected using self-report, which may be subject to response bias. Future studies should try out qualitative research on the variables of this study. Also, the sample selected for this study was limited to married persons in Ibadan North Local Government Area; hence, the results may not be adequate to generalize the findings to other LGAs in the State and even to the large population in Nigeria. Lastly, other psychosocial variables such as locus of control, social support, self-esteem, etc., should be investigated in future studies.

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