

Original Research Article

The Levels of Marital Stability among Married Couples in Selected Parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya

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Received: 16.02.2024

Accepted: 31.03.2024

Published: 04.04.2024

Journal homepage:<https://www.easpublisher.com>**Quick Response Code**

Abstract: The level of marital stability among members of a given community is important in determining the future generations of that community. This study investigated the levels of marital stability among couples in selected parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (CAN), Kenya. The study was guided by the Emotion Focused Theory and employed concurrent convergent mixed methods research design. The study targeted a population of 19,828 Catholic faithful in the research area, who have exchanged their marital vows therein within the last 5 to 25 years. From these, sample of 784 married men and women were selected by multistage sampling thus census, proportionate quota and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using the marital Stability Questionnaire, whose resultant data was analyzed descriptively using frequency counts and percentages. Findings indicated that the marital stability of respondents in the research area was in three levels thus low, moderate and high. The study recommends that the office of the attorney general should formulate policy to ensure all newly married couples are sensitized on various aspects of marital stability before issuing them with marriage certificates.

Keywords: Marital Stability, Marital Stability Level, Married Couples, Nairobi Catholic Archdiocese.

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

A stable marriage institution has always been the prime focus of any community, religious organization, governments and other stakeholders in ensuring a harmoniously existing community and mankind in general (Ramirez, 2024). Marriage is a duty and a requirement from the society that has been perceived as the natural order of things that ensures continuity of life and lineages within the family context. Marriage is one of the most important stages in the development of personal and social lives of individuals. An unstable marriage is therefore a recipe for many societal problems ranging from non-law abiding citizen to a morally rotten community (Dimetman, 2021).

In Brazil, Dutra-Thome *et al.*, (2019) found that of those who are separated or divorced were about 63% while those legally divorced were 32%. American community Survey 3-year Estimates, 51.5% of males and 47.7% of females over the age of 15 were married. The parting rate was 1.8% for males and 0.1% for females (US Census Bureau, 2020).

In Asia the situation of marriage is wanting because since 2005, crude divorce rates have increased in most Asia/Pacific countries – and by around 25% across the region on average, while crude divorce rates in China more than doubled (OECD < 2023). In contrast, crude divorce rates fell among the OECD countries in the Asia/Pacific region – Australia, Japan, Korea and New Zealand. Across the Asia/Pacific the mean age of first marriage has increased by 3 years on average since 2005. In 2005, the mean age at first marriage across the selected Asia/Pacific economies was 24.0 years for women and 27.4 years for men. By 2019, the mean age at first marriage had increased to 27.5 years for women and to 30.1 years for men, still some 3 to 3.5 years below the OECD average for men and women. A strong tendency of postponing marriages is observed across Asia/Pacific economies, but large cross-national differences remain: since 2005, the mean age at first marriage has increased by about four years among men and women in Armenia, while change was much more limited in New Zealand and Singapore where the mean age of first marriage for men increased by less than a

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year. Only in Viet Nam, is the mean age for women in 2019 slightly lower (OECD, 2023).

In Africa, several studies show that 45% of families struggle to survive due to the rise of conflicts. Couples often undergo strained relationships (Amato, 2014). In Nigeria, there have been strong and vocal religious forces that dictate morality, thus policy, and ultimately family life education instructions (Ogunfowokan & Fajemilehin, 2012). Egypt teaches family life education that focuses on knowledge about male and female reproductive systems, sex organs, conception, and sexually transmitted infection. In the second and third years of the middle preparatory phase, this is taught in public schools. Other countries view family life education as just one of the many life skills that young people require (UNESCO & UNFPA, 2012).

In Kenya, the change in family life education was a decline in marital satisfaction as manifested by an increase in marital violence, an upsurge in cases relating to custody and maintenance of children, and an increase in divorce cases (Meru County Law, 2016). Data from the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics indicated that there were a total of 567,990 divorced and separated people in Kenya as per the 2009 population census whereas Kithinji (2009) attributed the differences in marital satisfaction to the impact of colonialism, Kithinji's study attributed the differences in stability in marriages to differences in family life knowledge and marital satisfaction.

The study was guided by the Emotional Focused Theory (1988). Emotionally focused theory was developed by Dr. Sue Johnson and Dr. Les Greenberg in 1980s to help couples with relationship problems. It works on the bases that human emotions are connected to human needs. So, by activating and working through patients feelings, they can adapt and change problematic emotional states and improve their relationships. This theory inspired the research because family is a social unit and emotional focused institution, yet it was the epicenter of all data collection exercises that were carried out in this study. The objective of this study was therefore to evaluate the levels of marital stability among married couples in selected parishes in CAN, Kenya. The study was guided by one research question thus "what are the levels of marital stability among married couples in selected parishes in CAN, Kenya?".

LITERATURE REVIEW

Karney and Bradbury (2020) revealed in their study that although getting married is no longer a requirement for social acceptance, most people do marry in their lifetimes, and couples across the socioeconomic spectrum wish their marriages to be satisfying and long lasting. Their review evaluated the past decade of research on the determinants of satisfaction and stability in marriage, concluding that the scholarship of the past 10 years has undermined three assumptions that were

formerly accepted as conventional wisdom. Their results indicated that research exploiting methods such as latent class growth analyses reveal that, for most couples, marital satisfaction does not decline over time but in fact remains relatively stable for long periods. Second, contrary to predictions of behavioral models of marriage, negative communication between spouses can be difficult to change, does not necessarily lead to more satisfying relationships when it is changed, and does not always predict distress in the first place. Third, dyadic processes that are reliably adaptive for middle-class and more affluent couples may operate differently in lower income couples, suggesting that influential models of marriage may not generalize to couples living in diverse environments. Thus, the accumulated research of the past 10 years indicates that the tasks of understanding and promoting marital satisfaction and stability are more complex than we appreciated at the start of the decade, raising important questions that beg to be answered in the years ahead.

According to Nadar (2018), marriage provides a basic structure that establishes a family relationship and raises the next generation (Nadar, 2018). Marrilee & George (2010) described marriage as an intimate relationship inherently ordered to procreation and sharing of family life, which calls for permanence and exclusive commitment in whatever way the couple decides. A stable marriage is based on the couples satisfaction, love, and mutual respect in the relationship (Karney & Bradbury, 2020).

Marital communication is verbal and nonverbal exchange of information between spouses. It is the process of sending and receiving information between husband and wife as they interact in the marriage relationship (Nnadozie, 2014). Communication within marriage helps the partners to know, share, and understand their thoughts, past experiences, emotions, and weaknesses within and outside the relationship (Omeje, Ugwu & Ogidi, 2021).

A number of studies have shown that decisional forgiveness is associated with higher levels of marital stability (McCullough *et al.*, 1997; Wieselquist, 2009; Fehr *et al.*, 2010). There has only been some indirect evidence of the effects of decisional and emotional forgiveness on marital quality. Chi (2011) examined forgiveness by assessing decisional forgiveness and emotional forgiveness, and results showed that both processes of forgiveness substantially and prospectively correlated with marital quality among Chinese couples.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was implemented using the Mixed Methods Research Design. According to Masinde (2023), a mixed methods approach is characterized by the combination of at least one qualitative and one quantitative research component and therefore in this study, the concurrent convergent sub-type was used to

obtain both quantitative and qualitative data that independently addressed the quantitative and qualitative statements in the questionnaire used to collect data of the study.

The study was carried out in selected parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (CAN), Kenya. Geographically, the CAN covers two counties - Nairobi and Kiambu, covering an area of 3,721sq. Km. the archdiocese comprises of 15 deaneries, 115 parishes and over 4,000 Small Christian Communities, with 2.03 million faithful (CAN, 2022). This population is highly cosmopolitan due to the fact that Nairobi city is the capital of Kenya, and therefore attracts workforce from all communities in Kenya and the world at large. The study location was ideal for data collection due to readily available records of married couples for the last 5 to 25 years hence sampling was practical.

The target population were the Catholic faithful living and worshipping in catholic churches within the archdiocese of Nairobi, who have exchanged their marital vows in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi for the last five to twenty years. These were 19,828 in number, distributed in the various deaneries in the archdiocese albeit in varying proportions (Archdiocese, 2023). This number was obtained after thorough scrutiny of the holy matrimony records in all the Archdiocesan records for the years 1997-2017.

The sample of this study was selected by multistage sampling, a combination of census, proportionate quota and simple random sampling techniques, due to the tier-like arrangement of the sampling units i.e. deaneries, parishes and actual respondents within the archdiocese. To execute this, census sampling was used to select all the 14 deaneries in the research area, since the researcher was interested in collecting data from respondents of all socio-economic classes, who are spread out in the Nairobi metropolitan area, from which the CAN was formed. The Yamane (1967) formula was used to determine the sample size hence by using 19828 as the target population, the formula yielded 784 as the required number of respondents. To this end 392 married couples in the research area were used, making a total of 784 respondents. Proportionate quota was used to determine the number of parishes in each of the deaneries in the research area and also the number of respondents in each selected parish. Simple random sampling was then used to select the actual parishes and respondents.

Data was collected using the Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ). The MSQ is a standard instrument, developed by Perron (2006) for measuring marital stability among couples. It was a close-ended questionnaire, which sought information on the Marital Stability of the selected respondents in the research area. The MSQ had two sections labelled A and B. Section A was for capturing demographic information about the

respondents while Section B had 16 items on a five-point likert scale, seeking data on the various indicators of marital stability among the married couples in the research area. Some of the statements in therein were negatively worded while others were positively worded. Data collected by the MSQ was used to address the second and third research questions.

The positively worded statements in the MSQ were scored in descending order i.e. strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1. Negatively worded statements were on the other hand scored in reverse order i.e. strongly agree=1, agree=2, undecided=3, disagree=4 and strongly disagree=5. This way, responses that correspond to a respondent's high level of marital stability always obtained a score that was higher than that of a response depicting a comparatively lower marital stability level, regardless of whether the statement was negatively or positively worded.

The researcher assessed content validity of the questionnaire by consulting counselling psychology research experts within CUEA. This helped the researcher to determine whether items in the questionnaires were accurate in terms of capturing data on the various indicators of marital stability among the sampled respondents. The experts were asked in writing to carry out the validation process, using a rating scale and scoring guide developed by the researcher. A threshold of 0.65 was used to determine whether the questionnaires were valid or not (Masinde, 2023). Results revealed that the MSQ questionnaire had ratings of 0.78 hence valid as it surpassed the threshold set by Masinde (2023). The raw data was coded in SPSS and analyzed descriptively to generate frequencies and percentages and represented in tables, histograms, pie charts and bar graphs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to evaluate the levels of marital stability among married couples in Catholic Arch-diocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The corresponding research question was "what are the levels of marital stability among married couples in Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya?" To address this objective and research question, all the sampled respondents were given the Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ) whose responses provided the basis of answering the second research question. There were 16 items in section C of the MSQ which captured information on the various indicators of marital stability as outlined in the conceptual framework. The statements in the MSQ were on a 5-point likert scale, whose responses were analyzed descriptively by computing frequencies and percentages.

Descriptive Analysis of Marital Stability

The first statement in the MSQ was "I am committed to ensuring my marriage lasts forever".

Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

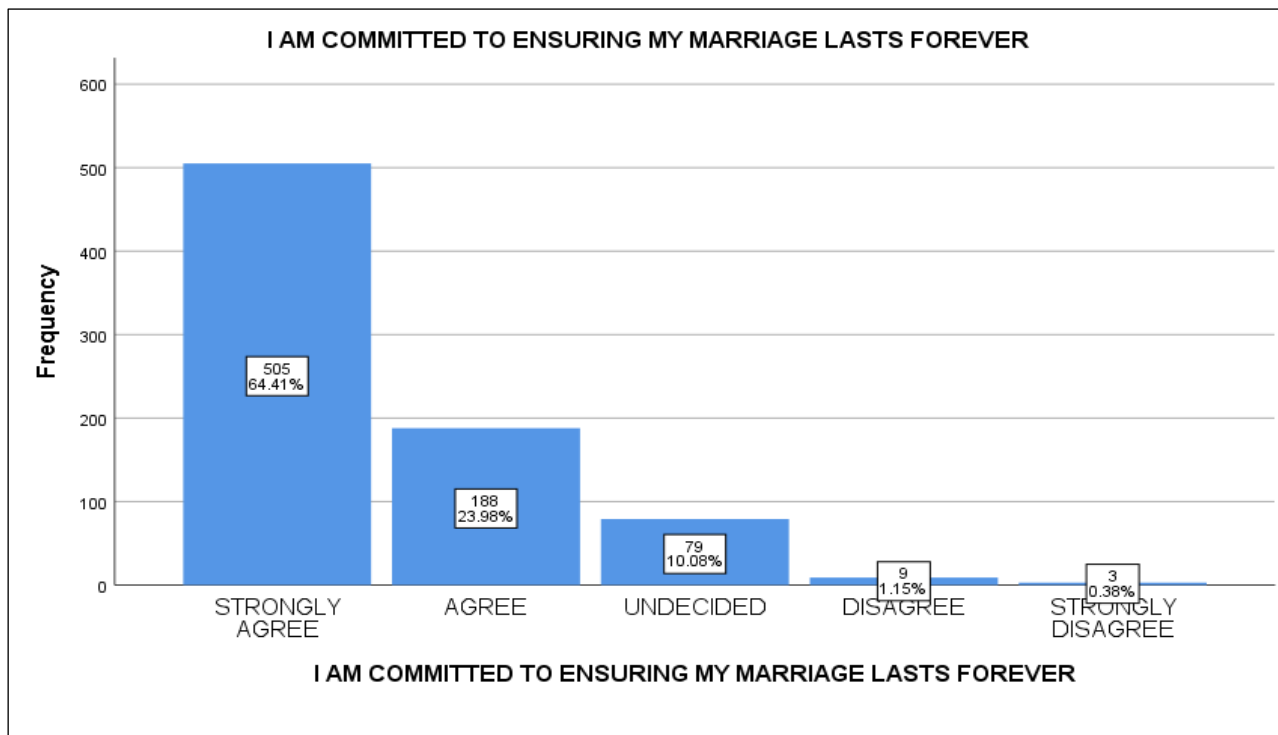


Figure 1: Commitment to Marriage

As the bar graph indicates, majority were affirmative of the statement. This shows high level of marital stability with respect to commitment as it gave a positive impression of the sampled couples ensuring their respective marriages last forever.

The second statement in the MSQ was “I communicate my marriage concerns to my spouse”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

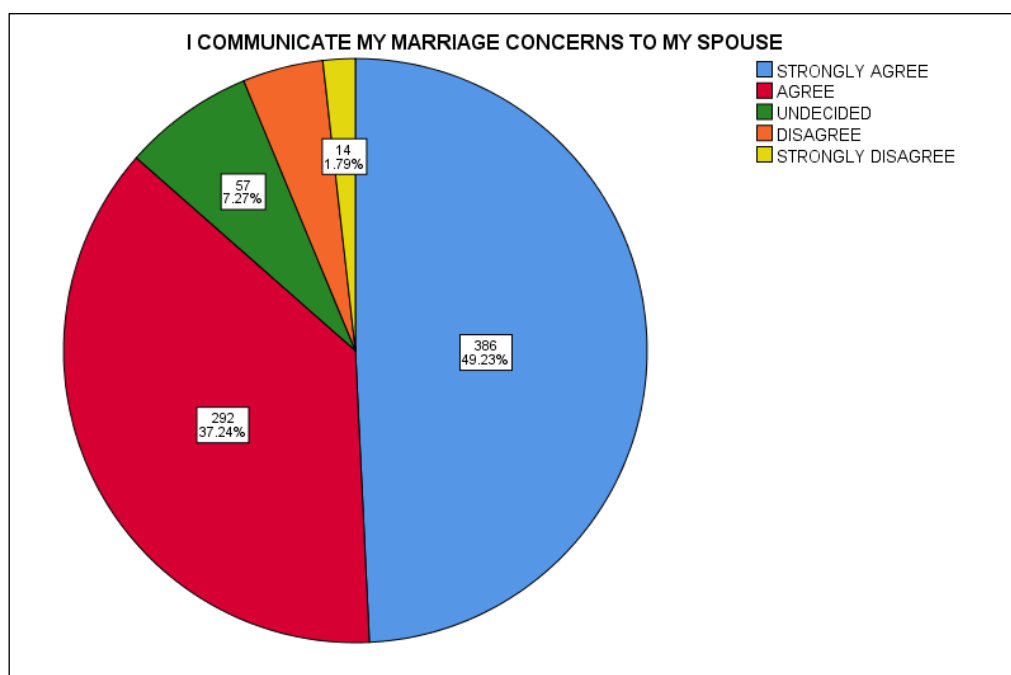


Figure 2: Communication of Marriage Concerns

As the pie chart indicates, majority were affirmative of the statement. This shows high level of marital stability with respect to communication, as it gave a positive impression of the sampled couples practicing communication with their respective spouses about their marriage concerns.

The third statement in the MSQ was “I relate well with my spouse”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

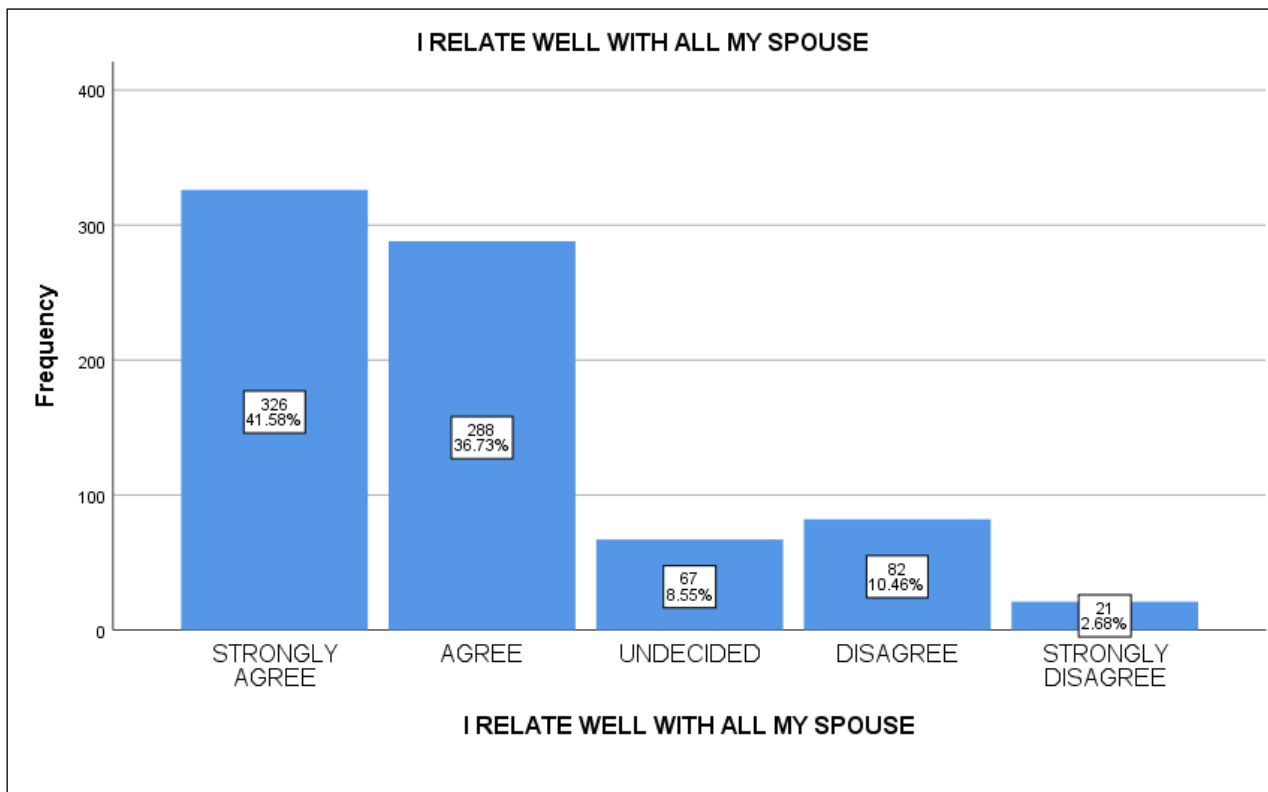


Figure 3: Relation with Spouse

As the bar graph indicates, majority were affirmative of the statement. This shows high level of marital stability with respect to intra-couple relations, as it gave a positive impression of the sampled couples relating well with one another.

The fourth statement in the MSQ was “I show affection to my spouse”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

Table 1: Showing of Affection to Spouse

| Response | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Strongly Agree | 350 | 44.6 |
| Agree | 305 | 38.9 |
| Undecided | 77 | 9.8 |
| Disagree | 38 | 4.8 |
| Strongly Disagree | 14 | 1.8 |
| Total | 784 | 100.0 |

As the table indicates, majority were affirmative of the statement. This shows high level of marital stability with respect to affection among spouses, as it gave a positive impression of the sampled couples showing affection for one another.

The fifth statement in the MSQ was “I have never cheated on my spouse”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

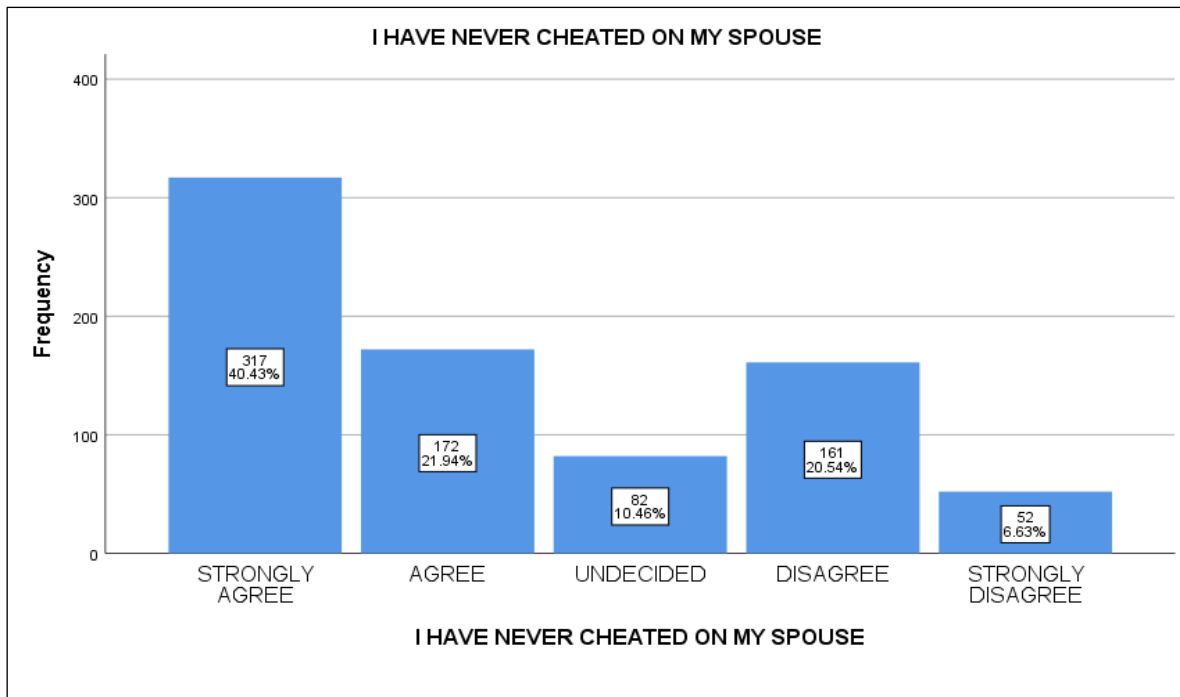


Figure 4: Cheating among Spouses

As the bar graph indicates, just more than half were affirmative of the statement. This shows moderate level of marital stability with respect to cheating among spouses, as it gave an ambivalent impression of infidelity among the sampled couples.

The sixth statement in the MSQ was “I don’t get sexual satisfaction from my spouse”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

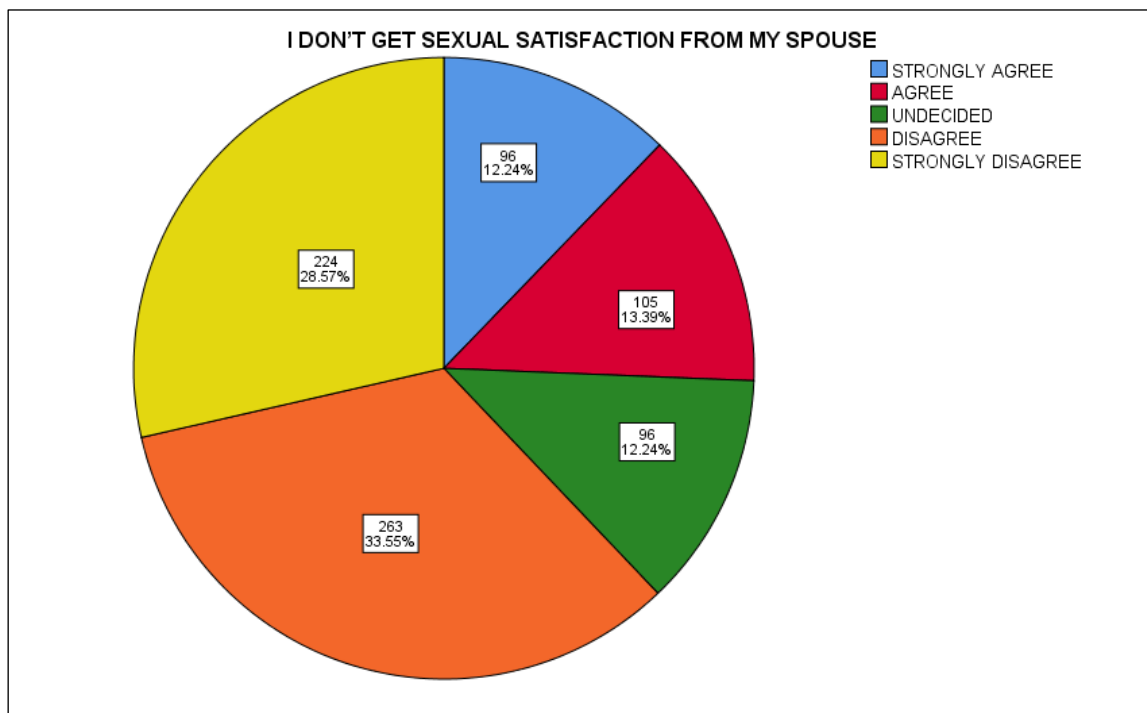


Figure 5: Sexual Satisfaction among Spouses

As the pie chart indicates, just above a quarter were affirmative of the statement. This shows high level of marital stability with respect to affection among spouses, as it gave a negative impression of not getting

sexual satisfaction among majority of the sampled spouses.

The seventh statement in the MSQ was “we have grown as a couple since exchanging our marital vows”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this

statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

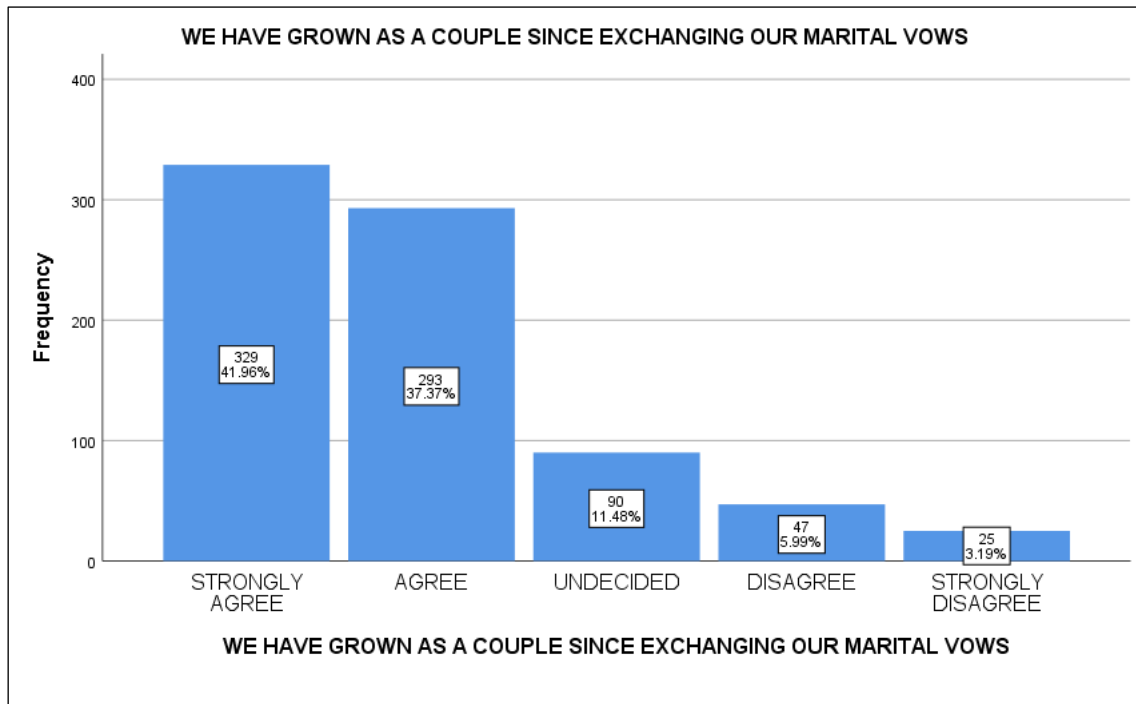


Figure 6: Growth among Couples

As the bar graph indicates, more than three quarters were affirmative of the statement. This shows moderate level of marital stability with respect to growth among spouses, as it gave a positive impression of growth among the sampled couples from the time of exchanging their marital vows.

The eighth statement in the MSQ was “my spouse helps me grow as a person”. Responses of the sampled respondents to this statement were analyzed by computing frequency counts and percentages thus:

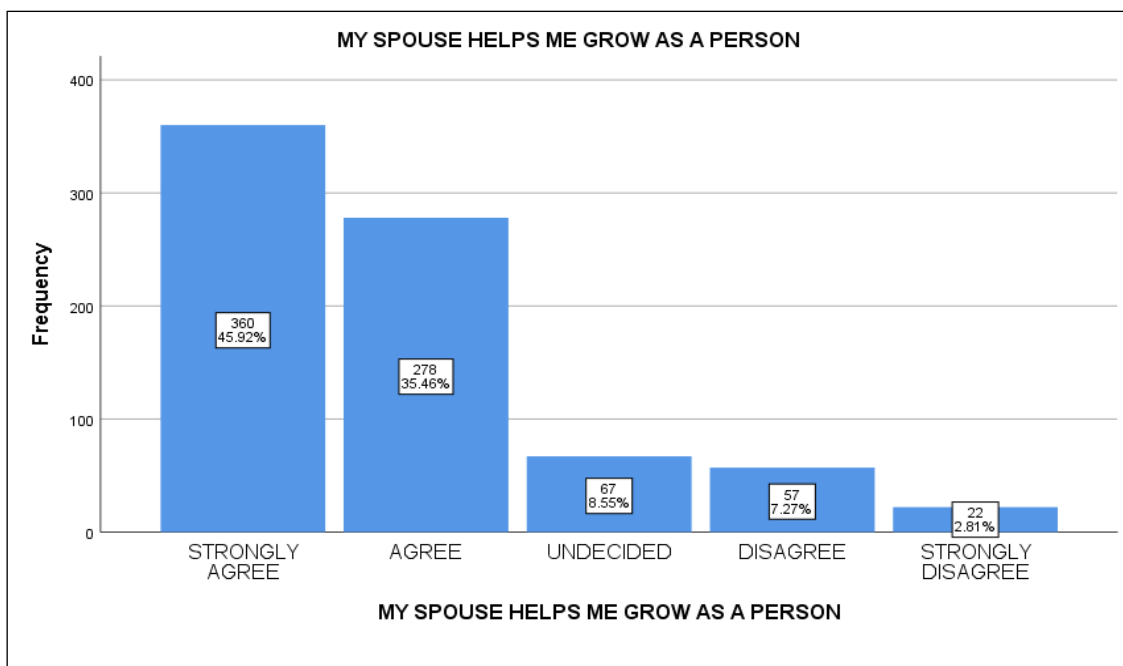


Figure 7: Help of Growth from Spouses

As the bar graph indicates, more than three quarters were affirmative of the statement. This shows high level of marital stability with respect to help of growth among spouses, as it gave a positive impression of spouses helping one another to grow as individuals.

To establish the levels of marital stability from the results of descriptive analysis of data captured by all the statements in section C of the MSQ, a single percentage score was calculated by first obtaining the composite MSQ score for each respondent then converting it to percentage. To this end, positively worded statements in the MSQ were scored in descending order i.e. strongly agree=5, agree=4, undecided=3, disagree=2 and strongly disagree=1.

Table 2: Classification of Levels of Marital Stability among the Respondents

| MS Level | Frequency | Percent |
|-------------------|-----------|---------|
| Low (20-46%) | 13 | 1.7 |
| Moderate (47-72%) | 447 | 57.0 |
| High (73%-100%) | 324 | 41.3 |
| Total | 784 | 100.0 |

As the table indicates, 1.7% of the respondents were found to have low level marital stability, 57.0% were moderate while 41.3% had high level marital stability. This shows that there were three levels of marital stability thus low, moderate and high.

The objective of this study as outlined in chapter one was to establish the levels of marital stability among married couples in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The corresponding research question was “What are the levels of marital stability among married couples in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya?” From data that was collected by the MSQ and analyzed descriptively, the findings revealed that there were three levels of marital stability among the respondents; low, moderate and high.

Several studies are in agreement with this revelation. For instance, Claire *et al.*, (2008) used data from six waves of the Study of Marital Instability over the Life Course (N = 1,998). They conducted a latent class analysis to test for distinct marital happiness trajectories. They found three distinct marital stability trajectories: low, middle, and high happiness. Initial levels of life happiness were strongly associated with membership in the marital happiness trajectories and with various demographic and attitude-related control variables. Using fixed effects regression with time-varying covariates, they also found that marital happiness trajectory membership was associated with subsequent changes in both life happiness and depressive symptoms. All respondents experienced a decrease in life happiness between Wave 1 and the end of their observed time in their marriage, but respondents in the high marital happiness trajectory experienced the smallest decline. Respondents in both the high and middle marital

Negatively worded statements were on the other hand scored in reverse order i.e. strongly agree=1, agree=2, undecided=3, disagree=4 and strongly disagree=5. The composite score in the 16 statements was obtained, then divided by 80 (the maximum possible score) and multiplying the quotient by 100. The maximum possible PWB score was therefore 100% while the minimum possible score was 20%. The percentage MSQ scores were then classified as low level (for those ranging from 20-46), moderate level (for those ranging from 47-72) and high level (for those ranging from 73-100), in line with recommendations of Perron (2006) the developer of this questionnaire. Results of this classification of the MSQ scores obtained for all the sampled respondents were as presented in Table 24.

happiness trajectories also experienced a decline in depressive symptoms across time.

Amato (2010) on the other hand posits that in moments of hardship, helping one another in tough times and embracing religion and contribute to couples’ well-being, and support therefore, fostering their marital relationships (Amato, 2010). Couples that have marital boundaries that preserve them in conflict situations, are happier, have higher life, and marital satisfaction (Tuttle & Davism, 2015). In the same vein, embracing fidelity in marriages discourages divorce tendencies and upholds marriage as sacred, and a place to engage with other institutions, couples, and families that support family and couple life (Tuttle & Davism, 2015), which is a revelation same as to the findings of this study with respect to the second objective and research question.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of empirical evidence arising from data that were collected in this mixed methods investigation, the major conclusion arrived at is that the marital stability of married couples in the CAN lies in three categories thus high, moderate and low levels at 57%, 41.3% and 1.7% of the married couples in the CAN respectively.

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Cite This Article: Kinoti Archangel Gabriel, Sabina Mutisya, Joyzy Pius Egunjobi (2024). The Levels of Marital Stability among Married Couples in Selected Parishes in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. *EAS J Psychol Behav Sci*, 6(2), 34-42.
