

# **Causes of Marital satisfaction and the criteria of choosing partners for marriage as Perceived by the People of Navrongo in The Upper East Region of Ghana**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The study examined the causes of marital satisfaction and the criteria of choosing marriage partners as perceived by the people of Navrongo in the Upper East Region of Ghana. Data were gathered through the use of Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI). The sample size was 384 participants comprising 192 males and 192 females who responded to the Marital Satisfaction Inventory. The stratified and quota sampling procedures were used to select the respondents for the study. The study showed that some couples in Navrongo were not satisfied with their marriages as indicated by respondents to the MSI. Seven scales were used as indicators for marital satisfaction. These included, relationship, affection, love and appreciation, character, temperament, in-law issues, marital roles, and general evaluation. Couples would have been satisfied if the mean scores of the various scales were high enough to fall within the specified satisfied range. The study showed that many married couples chose their partners through courtship than those who were married through betrothal. In Navrongo, more females are betrothed than males and males prefer courtship to betrothal. On the other hand, many men chose their partners through courtship than their female counterpart. Marital satisfaction and the criteria of choosing a partner for marriage by respondents also showed that 86.17% of those who married through betrothal were not satisfied with their marriages whereas 90% of respondents who married through courtship were also not satisfied with their marriages. Only about 13.8% and 10% for respondents of betrothal and courtship were satisfied with their marriages respectively.*

**Keywords:** Cohabitation, Elopement, Appellations, Fiancée, Fiancé

## **INTRODUCTION**

Marriage according to the Oxford Dictionary (1998) is the legal union of a man and woman in order to live together and often to have children. According to Abudu (2008) “the traditional definition of a man getting into a union with a woman or several of them for the purpose of raising a family is still very popular worldwide” (p. 4). Explicitly and contrary to Abudu’s assertion about marriage which could be accepted

in some communities of the African society, the exposition of marriage falls short of what modern Ghana and the laws of Ghana would celebrate as marriages. The court of Ghana accepts the concept of one man marrying one woman.

Marriage from the biblical point of view was instituted by God. In Genesis Chapter 2:18, God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner. Marriage, to Akinade (1997), is the union and cohabitation of two people of the opposite sex with a permanent commitment to each other and their children when they are born and are dependent on them. Akinade's explanation of marriage would be contested by people who are of the same sex and yet cohabitate.

To Thompson and Hickey (1999) cohabitation is where two people live together without legal marriage. Marriage can be explained as the relationship between a man and a woman who have made a legal agreement to live together (Broderick, 1994). By implication, when a man marries a woman, they become a husband and wife. After marriage, couples would plan to have children and to raise them to the best of their ability till they become independent. According to Broderick, "most couples decide to marry because they love each other and want to spend the rest of their lives together" (p. 219). The foundation for successful should be love. These days, people marry because of materialism. In the event that the materials are no longer available, the marriage can break.

A contrasted view of marriage by Schwartz and Scott (2003) from the United States defined marriage as a legal contract between a woman and a man who are at a specified age and who are not already legally married to someone else. Schwartz and Scott expounded the understanding of marriage as a union between people that unites partners sexually, socially and economically; that is relatively consistent over time, and that accords each member certain agreed upon rights.

According to Glenn (as cited in Benokraitis, 2008), marital happiness decreases when couples experience poverty, job loss, and financial problems. Therefore it does not necessarily mean that marriage would make one happier than he/she is. With regard to marital happiness, Benokraitis indicated that "marriage itself isn't a magic potion that makes us healthier and happier" (p. 300). The quality of our marriage is much more important for our health than simply getting or being married. Medical memo (as cited in Benokraitis, 2008) reveals that the quality of the marriage is critical for our emotional and physical well-being.

Marrying the right person can result in much personal happiness and fulfilment. Marrying the wrong person may result in much misery (Rice, 1999). Cultures all over the world vary according to their traditions and so is the marriage institution. Whereas in some cultures marriages are arranged for the couples, courtship is an individual affair in some cultures. Dating is a method by which young men and women get to know one another, learn to get along socially, and select mates by mutual choice. Before World War 1, courtship consisted mainly of the young man paying formal visits to the young woman and her family (Rice). According to Saxton (as cited in Rice, 1999), dating is unknown in China and India and it is forbidden in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya and other Muslim countries. In India, sociologists estimated that 95 percent of all marriages were still arranged, including the majority of those among the educated class (Bumiller, 1992).

Microsoft® Student 2009 [DVD] (2008) stated that:

Betrothal, engagement or formal agreement to marry, may take the form of a verbal promise or a written contract between two individuals. The betrothal is an ancient custom dating from biblical times when marriages were arranged by one's parents or guardians. During the Middle Ages arranged betrothals were used to strengthen royal dynasties, establish diplomatic alliances, and increase estates and fortunes. Until recent times, it remained common for parents to arrange marriages in much of the world, especially the Eastern and Muslim countries. In some societies, the custom still exists.

This system of the process of marriage is similar to betrothal among some communities in the Northern part of Ghana where parents give their young daughters, as a promise for marriage, to a young man sometime before the girl is matured for marriage. Elopement is another form of marriage where a lady runs away to marry secretly. In a more primitive type of elopement, the fiancé makes arrangement with strong men who will whisk the fiancée away to the fiancé's house and the old ladies vocalize appellations and the marriage is assumed effected. Elders from the fiancé clan are sent to the kidnapped lady's family to officially inform the parents that their daughter is married to their son.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Haseley (2006) conducted a research in America on the topic, marital satisfaction among newly married couples: associations with religiosity and romantic attachment style. Adonu (2005) on his part looked at, psychosocial predictors of marital satisfaction in British and Ghanaian cultural settings. Alder (2010) adds up to the number of researchers who delved into marital satisfaction. Adler's thesis topic was Age, education level, and length of courtship in relation to marital satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction is not a new topic in research because apart from the few foreign researches that were stated earlier, some researchers within Ghana also did work on marital satisfaction. Examples include Ahene (2010) who worked on the marital satisfaction: A case study of spouses in Cape Coast Pentecostal and Charismatic churches. Ackumey (2011) also did similar work but the topic was the impact of conflict management of marital satisfaction among couples of Duakor, Cape Coast, Ghana. However, I wish to focus on the criteria of choosing a partner for marriage among the people of Navrongo and as to whether it is betrothal or courtship that is mostly. The study also investigates whether the criteria of choosing a partner for marriage by the people of Navrongo brings about marital satisfaction.

### **Purpose of the Study**

According to Berkman and Syme (as cited in Sarafino, 2002), "marriage is often thought to convey a protective health benefit to people by providing social support. Consistent with this idea, studies have found that married people live longer than divorced and never-married individuals" (p. 104). This statement can only be true if there is harmony in marriages. The objectives of the study were therefore to examine the criteria for choosing a marriage partner and the causes of marital satisfaction among the people of Navrongo in the Upper East Region of Ghana

The following research questions were formulated to provide a focus for the study:

Research question 1: What criteria are mostly considered in choosing a partner for marriage among the people of Navrongo?

Research question 2: What are the causes of marital satisfaction as perceived by married spouses in Navrongo?

### **Significance of the Study**

Rice (1999) indicates that all couples, both those who achieve marital success and those who do not, experience problems and stress in and outside their relationship. A distinguishing factor between the two couples is that those who experience successful marriages are able to solve their problems and manage marital stress properly.

It is hoped that counsellors would benefit from the findings of this study in the following way; equipping themselves with specific issues in marriages that can bring about marital satisfaction. Counsellors will use those issues like relationship, affection, character, in-law issues, marital roles, temperament and general evaluation to guide their clients in their marriages.

It is also hoped that when spinsters and bachelors come across this material they would be informed about the criteria of choosing a marriage partner; that is, marriage through betrothal and marriage through courtship so that they can make an informed decision on which way to go. The study is also focused on whether the criteria of choosing a marriage partner has anything to do with marital satisfaction.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

The study basically focused on the criteria of choosing a partner for marriage and the causes of marital satisfaction as perceived among the people of Kassena-Nankana Municipality. The study was delimited to only two criteria of choosing marriage partners. The study also examined how married couples were satisfied in their marriages. The scope of this research did not include measures to make those who were not satisfied to attain satisfaction. Other districts in the Upper East Region of Ghana were not included in the study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

When this research work was embarked upon, some possible challenges were envisaged to militate against the smooth conduct of it. However, what was encountered far exceeded what was anticipated. Some of the limitations included communication barrier, poor attitude of some respondents such as not willing to cooperate and lack of accessibility to some communities.

Measures were put in place to engage interpreters for interpretation during the administration of the inventory. However, any time interpreters were not available, work slowed down considerably especially communities where the illiteracy rate was high. Though measures were put in place to engage interpreter during the administration of the inventory, it was possible that some of the concepts were misconstrued. It was easy administering the Marital Satisfaction Inventory to the literate population than their illiterate counterparts. It must be stated that, generally, administering the inventory took a longer time than expected because of the determination to ensure that all items on the inventory were well ticked. With support from the research assistants, all items were cross checked to ensure a completed inventory.

Poor attitude of some of the respondents during the administration of the inventory was frustrating and discouraging. We took our time to explain our mission to respondents but some felt that the exercise

would generate income and so they needed their share of the money. Others also complained that the questions were invading their privacy. For instance, some respondents exclaimed especially among the illiterate folks when questions that were asked bordered on sexual satisfaction. This brought about time wasting because we had to spend more time on one respondent trying to explain our mission again and again while reassuring confidentiality in order to obtain responses. The way and manner by which they answered created suspicion as to the authenticity of responses.

Accessibility to some communities was also a challenge. We could not use a car to some of the places. The journey that was shorter ended up being longer because the alternative routes were very far. Areas that we decided to use bicycles led to energy sapping and serious fatigue. Procedure for sampling was slightly affected because of poor road.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study was designed to ascertain the criteria of choosing marriage partners and marital satisfaction as perceived by couples in the Kassena-Nankana East Municipal. The research design used for the study was the survey design. Survey research involves acquiring information about one or more groups of people about their characteristics, opinions, attributes or previous experiences. This is done by asking the respondents questions and tabulating their answers (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). Leedy and Ormrod further indicated that the ultimate goal is to learn about a large population by surveying a sample of that population and this approach is called a descriptive survey.

### **Population**

The population for the study constituted married people in the Kassena-Nankana Municipal. The total population of married people in the municipal as stated in the 2010 Ghana Statistical Service report was 33,439. Kassena-Nankana municipal formally known as Kassena-Nankana East district was the place chosen for the study. Kassena-Nankana municipal is located in the Upper East Region. It is bordered by the Republic of Burkina Faso, and the Bolgatanga, Bongo, Builsa, Sissala and Mamprusi West Districts. It stretches for 55 kilometres from north to south and 53 kilometres from east to west. The capital town of Kassena-Nankana municipal is Navrongo.

### **Sample and Sampling Procedure**

The sample size for the study was 384 respondents. Krejcie and Morgan (as cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007) posit that as the population increases, the sample size increases at a diminishing rate and remains constant at slightly more than 380 cases. The sample size of 384 which covered 35 electoral areas of the Kassena-Nankana Municipal of the Upper East Region of Ghana responded to the Marital Satisfaction Inventory. The stratified and quota sampling procedures were used to select the respondents to respond to the Marital Satisfaction Inventory in 35 zones. The respondents constituted 192 males and 192 females.

**Instruments**

The main instrument that was used to collect data was an adapted Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI). The Marital Satisfaction Inventory was designed for married couples to assist them find out the extent to which they were satisfied in their marriage. The instrument has two forms; thus Form A for men and Form B for women. Each of the forms contains 30 items, designed in a 4-point likert-type scale (Very True, True, Not True, and Not at all True). The instrument, however, has close-ended items on age, sex, religion, occupational status and two items which border on whether the spouse got married through betrothal or courtship.

The MSI has a scoring guide which breaks the MSI into seven (7) scales based on relationship, affection, (love and appreciation), temperament, In-law issues, marital roles and, general evaluation. In the MSI manual, the total score for the 30 items is 120 being the maximum score indicating very satisfied and a minimum score of 30 implying not at all satisfied. Two other bands (interval) between the maximum and minimum are not satisfied with an interval score of 46-75 and satisfied with an interval score of 76-105. Essuman (2010) further explained that couples with scores of 30-75 are in general not satisfied with their marriages. The instrument is categorised into seven scales and each scale has specific items peculiar to that scale which measures marital satisfaction for that scale. Depending on the mean that is obtained for the sub-total of that scale, marital satisfaction is thus determined. The table presented indicates categories of scales, their items and ranges for satisfied and dissatisfied.

**Table 1: Scales Indicating Satisfied or Dissatisfied**

Scales	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
1: Relationship (items 2,5,10,20,21,25)	16-24	6-15
2:Affection,love & appreciation (items3,4,16,23,27)	13-20	5-12
3: Character (items 6,12,18,19,22,28)	16-24	6-15
4: Temperament (items 13,14,29)	8-12	3-7
5: In-law issues (items 11,17,24)	8-12	3-7
6: Marital roles (items 9,15,26)	8-12	3-7
7: General evaluation (items 1,7,8,30)	11-16	4-10

Table 1 shows the various scales and their items for marital satisfaction can be determined depending on the mean score that is obtained after computing all the items for a scale. For instance, items from the Marital Satisfaction Inventory on relationship include; 2, 5, 10, 20, 21, and 25. Therefore we generate relationship= marital2+ marital5+ marital10+ marital20+ marital21+ marital25. Generate relationship on satisfaction = 1 if relationship>15 & relationship!=. Replace relationship on satisfaction = 2 if relationship<16 & relationship!=.

**Data Collection procedure**

A pilot test was conducted in the Kassena-Nankana West district using the Marital Satisfaction Inventory in order to determine the reliability coefficient of the instrument and the appropriateness of the instrument. The Cronbach's Alpha obtained was 0.892 for N=30.

The data gathered for the study were scored and analysed statistically using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 16. Data were analysed using SPSS version 16.0. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to present data collected for the research.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research question 1:** What criteria are mostly considered in choosing a partner for marriage among the people of Navrongo?

Research question 1 sought to find out the criteria of choosing a partner for marriages as engaged in by the people of Navrongo. Table 2 shows frequencies and percentages of the criteria of choosing partner for marriage of respondents.

**Table 2: Criteria of choosing a partner for Marriage of Respondents**

Criteria of Marriage	Frequency	Percentage
Betrothal	94	24.48
Courtship	290	75.52
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100</b>

As to how the people of Navrongo marry, Table 2 shows 384 respondents out of which 94 respondents representing 24.5% marry through betrothal while 290 respondents representing 75.5% marry through courtship. This shows that majority of the people of Navrongo marry through courtship.

One major change of courtship is the increased opportunities for informal heterosexual contacts. High schools and colleges that used to be exclusively for men or women are now coeducational (Rice, 1999). Society has become more interactive in nature and for that matter suitors get the opportunity to go for dating and this explains why courtship as a method of choosing a partner in Navrongo is prevalent.

Although Table 2 reveals the proportions of the distribution of marriage through betrothal and courtship it is appropriate to know the nature of marriage by sex distribution. Table 3 indicates the nature of marriage and sex of respondents.

**Table 3: Criteria of choosing a partner for Marriage and Sex of Respondents**

Nature of Marriage	Male	Female	Total
Betrothal	39 (20.31%)	55 (28.6%)	94 (24.48%)
Courtship	153 (79.69%)	137 (71.4%)	290 (75.52%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>192 (100%)</b>	<b>192 (100%)</b>	<b>384 (100%)</b>

As shown in Table 3, more female of 55 respondents representing 28.65% married through betrothal than 39 male representing 20.3%. The criteria for choosing a partner for marriage is the reverse for courtship in terms of males and females. More male respondents of 153 representing 79.7% married through courtship whereas 137 female respondents representing 71.4 married through courtship. In Navrongo, more females are betrothed than males and males prefer courtship to betrothal. When it comes to choosing a partner for marriage, many people have their own orientation towards it. According to Les and Leslie (2001) people believe that successful couples are “meant to be” and “are made for each other. Gilford and Bengtson (as cited in Clements & Swensen, 2000) found no gender differences with regard to marital satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction and the method for choosing a partner for marriage was a relevant issue worth examining. Can it be said that if one chooses to marry through courtship and the other marries through betrothal one would be more satisfied than the other? Table 4 unfolded the profound method of choosing a partner for marriage; that is marrying through betrothal or courtship and marital satisfaction of respondents.

**Table 4: Marital Satisfaction and Method of Choosing a Partner for Marriage of Respondents**

Marriage	Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Total
Betrothal	13(13.83%)	81(86.17%)	94(100%)
Courtship	29(10.00%)	261(90.00%)	290(100%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>42(10.9%)</b>	<b>342(89.1%)</b>	<b>384(100%)</b>

Marital satisfaction and the method of choosing a partner for marriage by respondents as shown in Table 4 revealed that 86.17% of those who married through betrothal were not satisfied with their marriages and 90% of respondents who married through courtship were also not satisfied with their marriages. Only about 13.8% and 10% for respondents of betrothal and courtship were satisfied with their marriages respectively. There was no significant difference between betrothal and courtship as methods of choosing partners in terms of marital satisfaction. Marital satisfaction to Burr (1970) is a subjective condition in which an individual experiences certain degree of attainment of goal or desire.

**Research question 2:** What are the causes of marital satisfaction as perceived by married spouses in Navrongo?

In analyzing this research question, the researcher used Essuman’s (2010) ‘score ranges’. According to Essuman, counselling is based on certain seven scales which he outlined as follows: relationship, affection, (love and appreciation), character, temperament, in-law issues, marital roles and general evaluation. He indicated the criteria for score ranges of “satisfied” or “dissatisfied”.



**Table 5: Indicators of Marital Satisfaction among Respondents**

MSI	N	Mean	Total Scores of Respondents
Relationship	384	12.0	4611
Affection, love & Appreciation	384	9.6	3677
Character	384	11.9	4575
Temperament	384	5.4	2088
In-law Issues	384	5.5	2112
Marital Role	384	6.0	2308
General Evaluation	384	6.9	2667

The overall mean score was 57.4 (total scores of respondents / N)

Table 5 shows the mean scores of all the seven scales specified in the Marital Satisfaction Inventory as; relationship 12.0, affection, love and appreciation 9.6, character 11.9, temperament 5.4, in-law issues 5.5, marital roles 6.0, and general evaluation 6.9. The satisfied ranges which is the criterion for determining marital satisfaction are; relationship 16-24, affection, love and appreciation 13-20, character 16-24, temperament 8-12, in-law issues 8-12, marital roles 8-12, and general evaluation 11-16 (Essuman, 2010). Considering the means for the scales, couples on the whole were not satisfied with their marriages, in all the scales (factors). Therefore, none of the seven factors brought about marital satisfaction. The overall mean score of the seven factors was found to be 57.4 which indicated that in all couples in Navrongo were dissatisfied with their marriages.

Baron and Byrne (1991) assert that “though jealousy can clearly poison a relationship, most marital unhappiness does not result from anything so specific” (p. 294). What this means is that couples can be discontented with their marriage without anything so glaring as the possible cause.

Many things improve in relationships, but things become more difficult. Every successful marriage requires necessary losses, and in choosing to marry, you inevitably go through a mourning process. For starters, marriage sometimes means giving up a carefree lifestyle and coming to terms with new limits. It means unexpected inconveniences (Les & Leslie, 2001).

Table 6 indicates marital satisfaction according to what respondents ticked. Frequencies and percentages are used in this Table.

**Table 6: Marital satisfaction according to Respondents**

Marital Satisfaction	Frequency	Percentage
Satisfied	42	10.9
Not Satisfied	342	89.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>100</b>

Marital satisfaction as shown in Table 6 reveals that out of 384 respondents, 342 representing 89.1% were not satisfied with their marriages. It is also shown that only 42 respondents representing 10.9% were satisfied with their marriage. Minority (10.9%) of married peoples of Navrongo indicated they were satisfied with their marriages. As to the extent to which couples are satisfied with their marriages, the study confirmed that about 90% of spouses were not satisfied. This findings probably confirms what Glen indicated. According to Glenn (as cited in Benokraitis, 2008), marital happiness decreases when couples experience poverty, job loss, and financial problems.

Marriage does not erase personal pain, insure financial security, or eliminate loneliness, because people get married primarily to further their own well-being, not to take care of their partner's needs. The bad traits and feelings one carried around before marriage remain as one leaves the wedding chapel (Les & Leslie, 2001). People need to learn to make their marriage work, for successful marriages have no automatic button to press.

## Conclusion

The study sought to assess the criteria that are mostly considered in choosing a partner for marriage as well as the causes of marital satisfaction as perceived by married spouses among the people of Navrongo.

The findings revealed that courtship as a method of choosing a partner was more profound than betrothal in Navrongo. Many people marry through courtship than betrothal.

Factors such as relationship, affection, love and appreciation, character, temperament, in-law issues, marital roles and general evaluation were the parameters used to evaluate couples level of satisfaction. Individually, some respondents were satisfied. However, on the whole these could not yield any marital satisfaction of couples in Navrongo. Couples were not satisfied in the following areas; relationship, affection, love and appreciation, character, temperament, in-law issues, marital roles, and general evaluation.

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