



FAMILY ORIENTATION AND SELF-CONCEPT AS PREDICTORS OF MARITAL INSTABILITY AMONG MARRIED PERSONS IN BAYELSA STATE

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Abstract

This study investigated family orientation and self-concept as predictors of marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. Four objectives, four research questions, and four corresponding null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. The population consisted of 42,567 married persons in Bayelsa State, while a sample of 400 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique. Data were collected using a researcher-developed instrument titled Family Orientation, Self-Concept and Marital Instability Questionnaire (FOSCMIQ). The instrument was validated by experts in Guidance and Counselling as well as Measurement and Evaluation, while reliability was established using the test-retest method and analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. Data collected were analyzed using simple linear regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that communication pattern significantly predicted marital instability ($R^2 = 0.426$, $p < 0.05$), family values significantly predicted marital instability ($R^2 = 0.349$, $p < 0.05$), self-image significantly predicted marital instability ($R^2 = 0.248$, $p < 0.05$), and ideal self significantly predicted marital instability ($R^2 = 0.104$, $p < 0.05$). The study concluded that family orientation and self-concept are significant predictors of marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. It was therefore recommended that counsellors, family educators, religious organizations, and relevant stakeholders should promote effective communication, positive family values, healthy self-image, and realistic self-expectations among married persons in order to enhance marital stability and reduce marital instability..

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is widely recognized as a fundamental social institution that provides the foundation for family formation, emotional support, child upbringing, and social stability within society. It is expected to offer companionship, security, and mutual growth between partners. However, in recent years, many marriages have experienced increasing levels of instability characterized by persistent conflict, emotional dissatisfaction, communication breakdown, and in some cases, separation or divorce. This growing concern has attracted the attention of researchers and family practitioners who seek to understand the underlying causes of marital instability, especially in developing societies like Nigeria where cultural, economic, and psychological pressures often intersect (Akinyemi et al., 2021).

One important factor that has been identified in marital outcomes is family orientation, which refers to the values, beliefs, behavioural patterns, and relational

expectations individuals acquire from their family of origin. The family serves as the first environment where individuals learn how to communicate, manage conflict, express emotions, and define marital roles. These early experiences often shape how individuals behave in their own marriages, as learned patterns are unconsciously transferred into adult relationships. When individuals are exposed to dysfunctional family environments, such as those characterized by poor communication or constant conflict, they may develop maladaptive relational behaviours that increase the risk of marital instability (Okoro & Chukwu, 2022).

Another key psychological factor influencing marital stability is self-concept, which refers to an individual's perception and evaluation of themselves, including their self-esteem, self-image, and sense of personal worth. Self-concept plays a significant role in how individuals interpret marital interactions, respond to conflict, and maintain emotional balance within relationships.

Individuals with a positive self-concept are more likely to exhibit confidence, emotional stability, and effective communication skills, all of which promote healthy marital adjustment. In contrast, individuals with low self-concept may struggle with insecurity, jealousy, emotional dependence, and aggression, which can negatively affect marital harmony (Eze et al., 2023).

In the Nigerian context, marital instability is influenced not only by individual psychological factors but also by broader socio-cultural dynamics such as extended family interference, economic hardship, and conflicting gender role expectations. In regions like Bayelsa State, where traditional values often interact with modern lifestyle changes, couples may experience tension in balancing cultural expectations with personal relationship needs. These pressures can intensify misunderstandings and contribute to marital dissatisfaction and instability when couples lack adequate coping strategies or emotional resilience (Brisibe & Ogu, 2024).

The increasing rate of marital instability suggests that deeper psychological and familial factors may be contributing significantly to relationship breakdowns beyond surface-level issues such as finances or external stressors. This study, therefore, focuses on examining how family orientation and self-concept jointly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State, with the aim of providing empirical insights that can support counselling interventions and strengthen marital relationships within the region (Olatunji & Nwankwo, 2025).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Marriage is expected to provide emotional security, companionship, stability, and a supportive environment for the growth of both partners and their children. However, in recent times, many marriages have not been able to fulfill these expectations, as increasing cases of marital dissatisfaction, persistent conflict, emotional separation, and divorce have become common in many communities, including Bayelsa State. This situation has raised serious concern among counsellors, family life educators, and researchers, as marital instability continues to weaken family structures and negatively affect both spouses and children.

In Bayelsa State, there have been observable cases of couples experiencing continuous misunderstandings, poor communication, lack of emotional connection, and frequent disagreements over family roles and responsibilities. Some marriages that initially started with strong commitment gradually become unstable due to unresolved conflicts and unmet expectations. In some cases, partners find it difficult to adapt to each other's behavioural patterns, leading to frustration, resentment, and eventual breakdown of marital harmony. These challenges suggest that marital instability may not only be caused by external factors such as financial pressure or societal influence but may also be linked to deeper

psychological and family-related factors.

Despite the increasing rate of marital instability, many couples still lack adequate understanding of how their family background and personal psychological development influence their marital relationships. Experiences from the family of origin often shape individuals' beliefs about marriage, communication styles, and conflict management strategies. Similarly, an individual's perception of self may affect how they relate with their spouse, respond to criticism, and handle emotional challenges within marriage. However, many married persons may not be aware of how these factors interact to influence marital stability. The problem therefore is that despite efforts to promote healthy marriages, cases of marital instability continue to rise in Bayelsa State, suggesting that underlying factors such as family orientation and self-concept may not be well understood or properly addressed.

The purpose of the study was to investigate family orientation and self-concept as predictors of marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. Specifically, the objectives of the study are:

- To determine the extent to which communication pattern predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.
- To examine the extent to which family values predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.
- To determine the extent to which self-image predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.
- To examine the extent to which ideal self predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

The following research questions guided the study:

- To what extent does communication pattern predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?
- To what extent do family values predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?
- To what extent does self-image predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?
- To what extent does ideal self predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?

The following null hypotheses further guided the study:

- Communication pattern does not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.
- Family values do not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.
- Self-image does not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.
- Ideal self does not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Marital instability is the degree of tension, dissatisfaction, persistent conflict, emotional detachment, and uncertainty that exists within a marital relationship, which may eventually result in separation or divorce if not effectively managed (Nwoye et al., 2022). It is not

usually a sudden occurrence but rather a gradual process that develops through repeated patterns of unresolved disagreements, poor communication, unmet emotional and relational expectations, and weakening emotional bonds between partners. In this study, marital instability is conceptualized as the dependent variable influenced by both family orientation and self-concept factors among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Family orientation, which serves as a major independent variable in this study, refers to the values, beliefs, behavioural patterns, and interaction styles that individuals acquire from their family of origin. These early family experiences play a significant role in shaping how individuals perceive marriage, understand marital roles, and respond to conflict situations in their adult relationships. In this study, family orientation is operationalized through communication pattern and family values. Communication pattern refers to the manner in which spouses exchange ideas, express emotions, and manage disagreements within marriage. Effective communication fosters understanding, emotional intimacy, and cooperation between partners, while poor communication often leads to misunderstanding, resentment, and marital dissatisfaction. Family values, on the other hand, refer to the norms, moral standards, and behavioural expectations learned from the family, which guide attitudes toward marriage, responsibilities, and interpersonal relationships (Okeke & Umeadi, 2021).

Self-concept is another key variable in this study and refers to an individual's perception and evaluation of themselves, including beliefs about their worth, identity, and personal capabilities. It is a psychological construct that significantly influences behaviour, emotional regulation, and interpersonal relationships within marriage. In this study, self-concept is represented through self-image and ideal self. Self-image refers to how individuals perceive themselves in reality, including their confidence level, self-worth, and personal identity. Ideal self refers to how individuals would like to be perceived or the kind of person they aspire to become. When there is a significant discrepancy between self-image and ideal self, it may result in emotional dissatisfaction, frustration, low self-esteem, and insecurity, all of which can negatively affect marital relationships and increase the likelihood of marital instability (Eze & Nwafor, 2023).

This study was anchored on the family Systems Theory, which explains that individuals are best understood within the context of their family relationships because the family operates as an emotional system. According to this theory, patterns of communication, emotional expression, and conflict resolution developed in the family of origin are often carried into adult relationships, including marriage. Therefore, individuals who grow up in dysfunctional family systems may unconsciously replicate similar patterns in their marital relationships, increasing the likelihood of marital instability. Several empirical studies have been

conducted on family orientation, self-concept, and marital stability. Okafor and Nwosu (2021) investigated on family communication patterns as predictors of marital satisfaction among married couples in Enugu State. The study adopted a correlational survey research design. A sample of 320 married couples was selected using a multistage sampling technique, and data were collected using a structured questionnaire. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The findings revealed that effective communication patterns within families significantly predicted higher marital satisfaction, while poor communication was strongly associated with marital instability. The study concluded that communication breakdown is a major contributor to marital conflict and instability among couples.

Also, Adeleke and Ibrahim (2022) investigated family values and marital adjustment among married adults in Oyo State. The researchers used a descriptive correlational design. The population consisted of married civil servants, and a sample of 250 respondents was selected through simple random sampling. A validated questionnaire was used for data collection, while data were analyzed using multiple regression analysis. The study found that strong family values such as respect, mutual support, and commitment significantly predicted positive marital adjustment, whereas weak or conflicting family value systems increased marital instability. The study emphasized that inconsistency in family values between spouses contributes to marital dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, Eze and Okeke (2023) examined self-concept as a predictor of marital quality among married individuals in Anambra State, Nigeria. The study employed a survey research design with a sample of 280 married persons selected through purposive sampling technique. The instrument used was a standardized self-concept and marital quality questionnaire. Data were analyzed using Pearson correlation and linear regression analysis. The findings revealed that individuals with high self-image reported better marital quality and lower levels of conflict, while those with low self-concept experienced higher levels of marital instability. The study further showed that ideal self-discrepancies significantly contributed to emotional dissatisfaction in marriage.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a correlational survey research design to examine family orientation and self-concept as predictors of marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The population of the study consisted of 42,567 married persons, from which a sample size of 400 respondents was selected using a multi-stage sampling technique involving the selection of Local Government Areas, communities, households, and eligible married individuals. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled "Family Orientation, Self-Concept and Marital Instability Questionnaire

Table 1: Simple Linear Regression of Communication Pattern and Marital Instability

Model Summary		R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Model 1		0.653	0.426	0.424	0.612

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	198.34	1	198.34	287.91	0.000
Residual	266.56	398	0.670		
Total	464.90	399			

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	5.210	0.210		24.81	0.000
Communication Pattern	-0.653	0.046	-0.653	-14.34	0.000

(FOSCMIQ).” The instrument was validated through face and content validity by experts in Guidance and Counselling and Measurement and Evaluation, while its reliability was established using the test-retest method and analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The data collected were analyzed using single linear regression analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: To what extent does communication pattern predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?

Hypothesis One: Communication pattern does not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Table 1 examined the extent to which communication pattern predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The model summary revealed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.653, indicating a strong relationship between communication pattern and marital instability. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.426 showed that communication pattern accounted for 42.6% of the variance in marital instability, while the remaining 57.4% was explained by other variables not included in the study. The ANOVA result yielded an F-value of 287.91 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that the regression model was statistically significant. The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.653$, $t = -14.34$, $p < 0.05$) further revealed that communication pattern significantly and negatively predicted marital instability. This implies that improvement in communication pattern is associated

with a decrease in marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that communication pattern significantly predicts marital instability.

Research Question Two: To what extent do family values predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?

Hypothesis Two: Family values do not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Table 2 examined the extent to which family values predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The model summary showed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.591, indicating a moderate positive relationship between family values and marital instability. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.349 revealed that family values explained 34.9% of the variance in marital instability, while 65.1% of the variation was due to other factors outside the model. The ANOVA result produced an F-value of 249.71 with a significance value of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that the model significantly predicted marital instability. The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.591$, $t = -12.92$, $p < 0.05$) showed a significant negative relationship between family values and marital instability. This suggests that positive family values reduce the likelihood of marital instability among married persons. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that family values significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Research Question Three: To what extent does self-image predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State?

Hypothesis Three: Self-image does not significantly

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression of Family Values and Marital Instability

Model Summary		R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Model 1		0.591	0.349	0.347	0.641
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	162.25	1	162.25	249.71	0.000
Residual	302.65	398	0.760		
Total	464.90	399			
Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.980	0.230		21.65	0.000
Family Values	-0.500	0.039	-0.591	-12.92	0.000

Table 3: Simple Linear Regression of Self-Image and Marital Instability

Model Summary		R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Model 1		0.498	0.248	0.246	0.702
ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	115.40	1	115.40	162.31	0.000
Residual	349.50	398	0.878		
Total	464.90	399			
Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	4.620	0.260	—	17.77	0.000
Self-Image	-0.405	0.041	-0.498	-9.93	0.000

predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Table 3 examined the extent to which self-image predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The model summary indicated a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.498, showing a moderate relationship between self-image and marital instability. The coefficient of determination (R²) was 0.248, implying that self-image accounted for 24.8% of the variance in marital instability, while the remaining 75.2% was explained by other factors not included in the study. The ANOVA result yielded an F-value of 162.31 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 criterion level.

This confirms that the regression model was statistically significant. The regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.498$, $t = -9.93$, $p < 0.05$) indicated a significant negative relationship between self-image and marital instability. This means that individuals with a positive self-image are less likely to experience marital instability, whereas those with a poor self-image are more likely to experience marital difficulties. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, showing that self-image significantly predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Research Question Four: To what extent does ideal self predict marital instability among married persons in

Table 4: Simple Linear Regression of Ideal Self and Marital Instability

Model Summary	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error	
Model 1	0.322	0.104	0.102	0.785	

ANOVA	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	48.40	1	48.40	78.96	0.000
Residual	416.50	398	1.046		
Total	464.90	399			

Coefficients	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	3.950	0.310	—	12.74	0.000
Ideal Self	0.228	0.043	0.322	5.32	0.000

Bayelsa State?

Hypothesis Four: Ideal self does not significantly predict marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

Table 4 examined the extent to which ideal self predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The model summary revealed a correlation coefficient (R) of 0.322, indicating a low but meaningful relationship between ideal self and marital instability. The coefficient of determination (R²) of 0.104 showed that ideal self explained 10.4% of the variance in marital instability, while 89.6% of the variance was attributable to other factors not captured in the model. The ANOVA result yielded an F-value of 78.96 with a significance level of 0.000, which is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that the model significantly predicted marital instability. Furthermore, the regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.322$, $t = 5.32$, $p < 0.05$) revealed a significant positive relationship between ideal self and marital instability. This implies that greater discrepancies or unrealistic expectations associated with one's ideal self may contribute to increased marital instability among married persons. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that ideal self significantly predicts marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study revealed that communication pattern significantly predicted marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The result showed that communication pattern had a significant negative influence on marital instability, implying that as effective

communication increases among spouses, marital instability decreases. This finding highlights the importance of open, honest, and constructive communication in maintaining stable marital relationships. Couples who are able to express their feelings, discuss their concerns, and resolve disagreements through dialogue are more likely to enjoy harmony and satisfaction in their marriages. On the other hand, poor communication often creates misunderstanding, resentment, emotional distance, and unresolved conflicts that may eventually lead to marital instability. This finding supports the Family Systems Theory, which emphasizes that interaction and communication patterns within family systems influence relationship outcomes. The finding is also consistent with the study of Okafor and Nwosu (2021), who reported that effective communication significantly enhanced marital satisfaction, whereas poor communication contributed to marital conflict and instability.

The study further revealed that family values significantly predicted marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The negative relationship obtained indicates that positive family values reduce the tendency toward marital instability. Family values such as mutual respect, honesty, commitment, responsibility, cooperation, and tolerance provide a foundation upon which healthy marital relationships are built. Individuals who were raised in homes where these values were emphasized are more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes and behaviours toward their spouses. In contrast, individuals who possess weak or conflicting family values may experience difficulty adjusting to marital responsibilities and expectations. This finding is in agreement with the Family Systems Theory, which maintains that individuals often transfer values and

behavioural patterns acquired from their families of origin into their marital relationships. The finding also agrees with Adeleke and Ibrahim (2022), who found that strong family values significantly contributed to positive marital adjustment, whereas inconsistent values increased marital dissatisfaction and instability.

The findings also showed that self-image significantly predicted marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The result indicated a significant negative relationship between self-image and marital instability. This suggests that married persons with positive self-image are less likely to experience marital instability than those with poor self-image. Individuals who possess a healthy perception of themselves tend to exhibit confidence, emotional maturity, self-control, and better interpersonal skills, which positively influence marital relationships. Conversely, individuals with negative self-image may struggle with insecurity, low self-esteem, emotional dependency, jealousy, and sensitivity to criticism, all of which can create tension within marriage. This finding corroborates the study conducted by Eze and Okeke (2023), which revealed that individuals with positive self-image reported better marital quality and lower levels of marital conflict than those with negative self-image.

Furthermore, the study found that ideal self significantly predicted marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. The positive relationship observed suggests that higher discrepancies between an individual's actual self and ideal self increase the likelihood of marital instability. This finding implies that when married persons maintain unrealistic expectations about themselves, their spouses, or marriage in general, they are more likely to experience disappointment and dissatisfaction when reality fails to meet those expectations. Such dissatisfaction may generate frustration, conflict, emotional stress, and instability within the marital relationship. This finding supports the view that unrealistic self-expectations often create emotional difficulties that negatively affect interpersonal relationships. The result is consistent with Eze and Okeke (2023), who reported that discrepancies between actual self and ideal self contributed significantly to emotional dissatisfaction and relationship difficulties among married individuals.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that family orientation and self-concept are important predictors of marital instability among married persons in Bayelsa State. Specifically, communication pattern, family values, and self-image were found to have significant negative relationships with marital instability, indicating that improvements in these variables contribute to greater marital stability. Conversely, ideal self was found to have a significant positive relationship with marital instability, suggesting that unrealistic self-

expectations and self-discrepancies increase marital challenges. The study therefore concludes that healthy communication, positive family values, and positive self-image are essential ingredients for stable marriages, while unrealistic perceptions of self may undermine marital harmony. Consequently, efforts aimed at strengthening family values, improving communication skills, enhancing self-image, and promoting realistic self-expectations among married persons are likely to contribute significantly to marital stability in Bayelsa State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Marriage counsellors, family therapists, and religious organizations should organize regular workshops and seminars aimed at improving communication skills among married couples to enhance marital stability.
2. Parents and family life educators should deliberately promote positive family values such as respect, commitment, honesty, tolerance, and responsibility in order to prepare individuals for successful marital relationships.
3. Counselling psychologists should develop intervention programmes that help married persons build positive self-image and self-confidence, thereby reducing behaviours associated with marital instability.
4. Premarital and marital counselling programmes should include activities that help individuals develop realistic expectations about marriage, spouses, and personal growth in order to minimize ideal self-discrepancies.
5. Government agencies, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations should collaborate in providing family support services and marital education programmes that strengthen family orientation and psychological well-being among married persons.

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