

Relationship Between Interactional Styles and Marital Satisfaction Among Christian Married Couples in two Selected Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya

¹Edna Oyiela Aseka, ²Niceta Wanja Ireri, ³Jared Bravin Menecha
^{1,2,3}Department of Psychology, Africa International University
Corresponding email: edna_aseka@yahoo.com

How to cite this article: Aseka, E. O., Ireri, N. W., Menecha, J. B. (2024). Relationship Between Interactional Styles and Marital Satisfaction Among Christian Married Couples in two Selected Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology & Religious Studies*, 4(2), 1-12.

Abstract

There exists a high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, even among church couples. This study sought to examine the relationship between interactional styles and marital satisfaction in Christian married couples in two selected churches in Nairobi County. The study adopted a quantitative research method and used a descriptive study research design. The findings indicated a statistically significant strong positive correlation between marital satisfaction and interactional styles. The study concluded that communication was critical to the quality of a marriage. This implies that the greater the qualities of communication in a marriage, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction. The research recommended that the church should create greater awareness of the importance and significance of constructive conflict resolution as a vehicle for enhancing marital satisfaction among Christian couples.

Keywords: *Communication, Marital Satisfaction, Christian Couples*

1.0 Introduction

Marriage has, as cited by Tummala (2008), been described as the most important and fundamental human relationship because it provides the primary structure for establishing a family relationship and also the next generation. According to Estella (2017), -marriage serves various needs such as the fulfillment of sexual, social, and psychological needs; reproduction, peace and comfort; personal and social development; and health and social security. A good marriage provides individuals with a sense of meaning and identity in their lives (Tummala, 2008); a good marriage should yield both physical, and psychological health, and happiness to a married couple, a feeling referred to as marital satisfaction (Estella, 2017).

Despite marriage being a highly desirable relationship, statistics indicate that marital satisfaction is not usually achieved; and that having a satisfying marriage is increasingly becoming —out of the ordinary (Tummala, 2008). Divorce and marital breakdown are on the rise. Some estimates as observed by Tashman (2007), indicate that fifty percent (50%) of people who get married end up in divorce court and approximately fifty percent (50%) of marriages that do not end in divorce; one can speculate that a large percentage of them may opt for an informal divorce, or what can be called —emotional divorce.

A study carried out by Njenga and Langat (2015) focused more on -marital conflict management among couples. The study found out that marital conflict is a part of everyday life and how couples handle conflict in their relationship affects the strength and type of

relationship a couple may have. Therefore, any form of spousal conflict may have the power to destroy or build a marriage. Thus, the researcher was interested in investigating the relationship between spousal communication and marital satisfaction among Christian couples.

1.1 Problem Statement

Kenya is a Christian-dominated country; approximately 70% of Kenyans are Christians (42% Protestant, 28% Catholic); about 24% are adherents of indigenous religions; 6% are Muslim (East Africa Living Encyclopedia). Statistics on the state of marriages in Kenya are shocking and this trend has taken an upward trajectory. Omoro (2018) cited an earlier InfoTrak survey of 2010 which showed that only 40% of Kenyans are happily married. The report further reported that 29 % of marriages in Kenya are crumbling. A 2015 survey report published by Daystar University titled *–Redeeming Christian Marriage and Family in Kenya* brought to light more alarming statistics. The survey sampled 1200 Kenyans spread across different marital status (married, divorced, and separated), drawn from 46 out of the 47 counties. Key findings: 42% of divorced couples had divorced by their fifth anniversary; 77% had divorced by their 10th anniversary; and only 23% divorced after the tenth anniversary. The study survey by Daystar University also established a 10% divorce rate across the nation (Daystar University Publication, 2015). As Onyango (2013) observes, there exists a high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, not even the church has been spared. Although people have associated high levels of religiosity with high levels of marital satisfaction, little is known as to the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction among Christian couples. This study therefore sought to examine the relationship between interactional styles and marital satisfaction in Christian married couples in two selected churches in Nairobi County.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study is anchored on the communication Model developed by Dan Jackson and Jay Haley—members of Bateson’s schizophrenia perfect institution. In a bid to understand behavior, communication theorists suggest disregarding the past while they search for patterns with which to understand behavior in the present. Bertulaffy (1950) as cited by Okello (2005), stated that –communication theorists found several ideas useful in explaining how family functions. In this model, relationships between communicants can be described as either complementary or symmetrical.

Complementary relationships are those based on differences; differences that fit together. For instance, a relationship where one partner is assertive and the other submissive, with each reinforcing the other’s position (Okello, 2005). Conversely, proportioned communication relationships depend on equality among the partners in a relationship where the behavior of one partner tends to reflect that of their partner. Patterns of interaction are indeed identical with communication and communication patterns change, as communication is linked to chains of stimulus and response. This model helps account for the differences in communication behaviors across distressed and non-distressed couples.

2.2 Empirical Review

Couples exhibit a wide variety of behaviors when they engage in conflict which in most cases affects their marital satisfaction differently. According to Birditt and Fingerman (2005) these behaviors –range from name-calling and arguing, to listening and discussing the problem, avoiding the situation and person, doing nothing, and letting the situation blow over. The way

a couple communicates in conflict and non-conflict situations has a direct influence on marital satisfaction.

Distressed couples are more defensive than non-distressed couples (Genshaft, 1980). Margolin and Wampold (1981) also observed less problem-solving, and more verbal and non-verbal negative behaviors in distressed couples than in non-distressed couples. Birchler, Weiss, and Vincent (1975) —obtained data that portrayed that distressed couples tend to engage in fewer positive interactions and more negative behavioral interactions during casual conversation and problem-solving than non-distressed couples. The more the couples become distressed the more they will find themselves engaged in even more conflict and there is a tendency that they will be able to participate in fewer recreational activities together as a couple.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research method and used a descriptive study research design. The target population of the study was 450 married church members, in the researcher used Yaro Yamane formulae to derive a sample of 212 married church members. A structured questionnaire was used to undertake the survey; Marital Satisfaction Scale and Conflict Resolution Style Inventory were the main tools for data collection. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and more specifically Pearson’s and Spearman correlation technique was used to establish the relationship between the study variables. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic techniques.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Marital Satisfaction

This study sought to establish the levels of marital satisfaction among Christian couples in the two selected churches in Nairobi County. To measure and score marital satisfaction the study used the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) questionnaire. The RDAS questionnaire is made up of three subscales namely; *dyadic consensus*- degree to which one agrees with the spouse; *dyadic satisfaction*- degree that spouse feels satisfied with the partner; and *dyadic cohesion*- degree to which a spouse participates in activities with the partner. The scale has 14 items that rate aspects of marital satisfaction on a 6 or 5 Likert scale. Scores range from 0 to 69 whereby higher scores are an indication of greater relationship satisfaction while lower scores indicate greater relationship distress. The cut-off score for the RDAS is 48 such that scores of 48 and above indicate marital non-distress and scores of 47 and below indicate marital/relationship distress (Crane et al., 2000). Table 1 below presents the frequency of distressed marriages and non-distress marital relationships among respondents in the two selected churches in Nairobi County; Distress marriages (RDAS sum score < 48); Non-distress (RDAS sum score > 48).

Table 1: Marital distress case summary

Satisfaction category		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Distress marriage	113	53.3
	Non-distress marriage	99	46.7
	Total	212	100.0

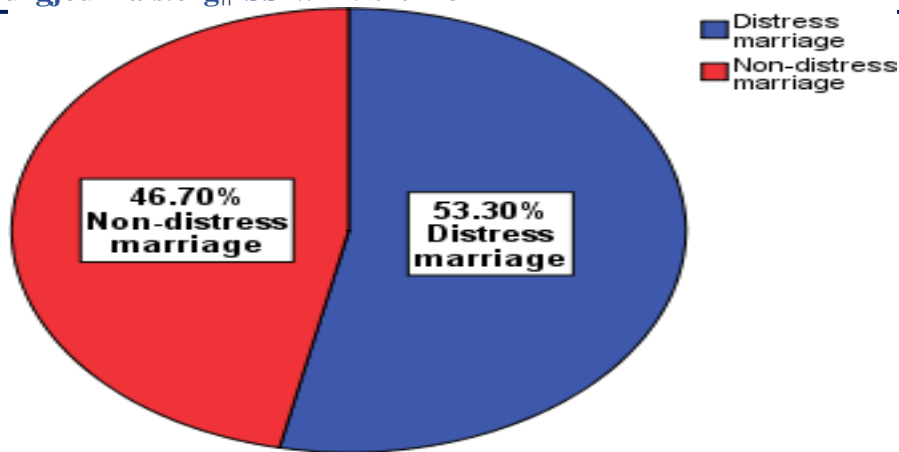


Figure 1: Distribution of distress and non-distress marriages

4.2 Interactional Styles

Interaction style was established by analyzing respondents' responses to questionnaire items: RDAS 5 (Agreement/ disagreement on conventionality (correct or proper behavior); and item RDAS 8 (How often do you and your partner quarrel).

On conventionality, distressed marriages posted high scores of disagreements 0.9 %

—Always disagree| 3.5 % —Almost always disagree| 23.9 % —Frequently disagree|; and less agreements 12.4% —Almost always agree| 13.3 % —Always agree. | Non-distress marriages recorded zero disagreements and high scores of agreement 15.2 % —Almost always agree| and 80.8 % —Always agree. | Figure 2 summarizes a comparison across both groups.

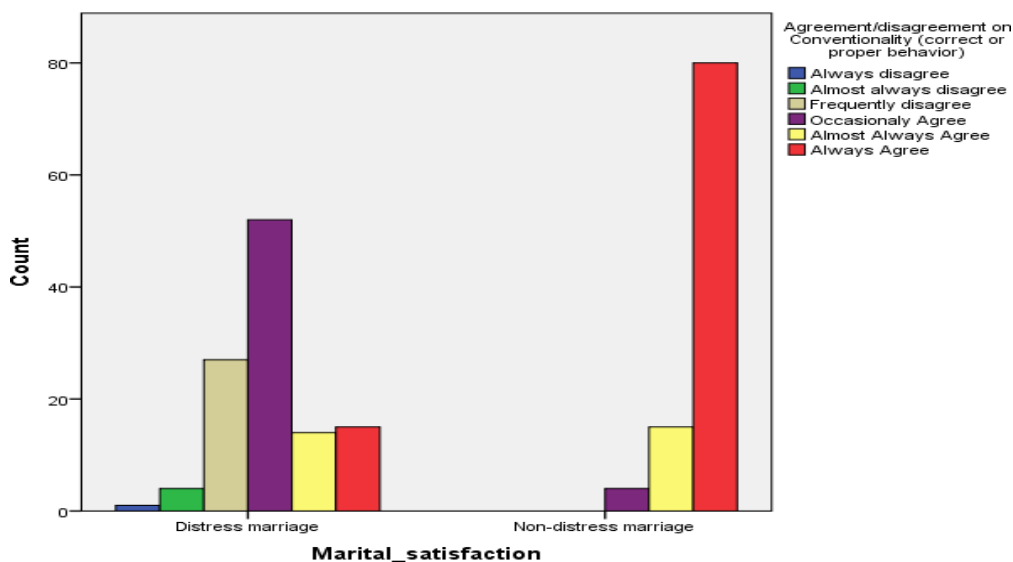


Figure 2: Conventionality distress vs. non-distress marriages

Analysis of the frequency of quarrels reveals that respondents in distressed marriages experienced more quarrels 4.4 % —All the time|9.7 % —Most of the time|19.5 % —More often than not| and 31.9 % —Rarely|; than respondents in non-distress marriages 38.4 % Occasionally| 56.6 % —Rarely| and 5.1 % —Never —. Figure 3 compares the frequency of quarrels in both categories.

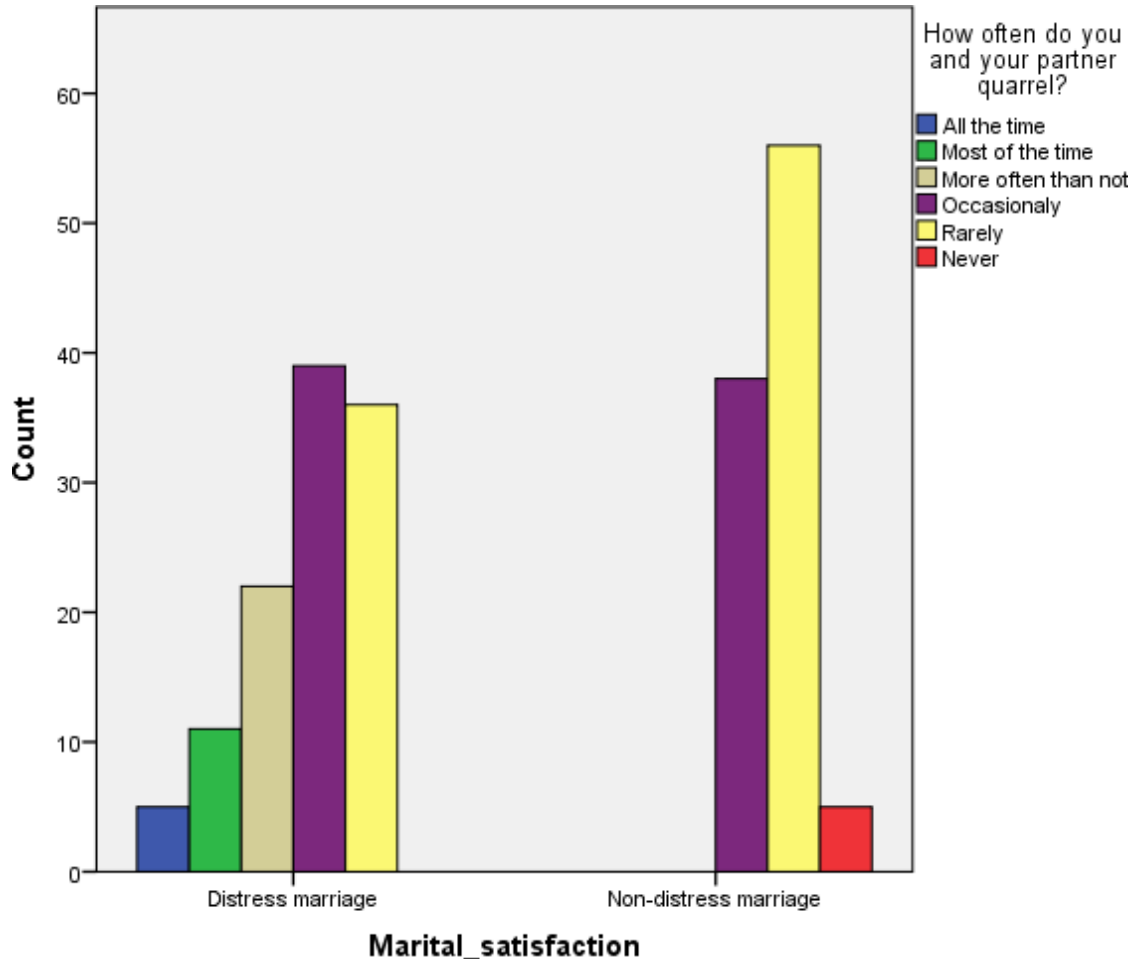


Figure 3: Frequency of quarrel distress vs. non-distress marriages

Constructive Resolution Styles

Positive conflict resolution subscale is made up of four questionnaire items: CRSI 2 (Focusing on the problem at hand); CRSI 6 (Sitting down and discussing differences constructively); CRSI 10 (Finding alternatives that are acceptable to each of us); and item CRSI 12 (Negotiating and compromising).

On focusing on the problem at hand: respondents in non-distress marriage reported more incidences of occurrence 1% —Rarely| 2 % —Sometimes| 47.5 % —Often| 49.5 % —Always|; than distress marriage respondents 3.5 % —Never| 25.7 % —Rarely| 19.5 % —Sometimes| 49.6 % —Often| 1.8 % —Always|. This implies that non-distressed marriages explored focusing on the problem at hand more often than not when resolving conflicts. Figure 4 below presents a comparison Summary for distress vs. non-distress marriage groups.

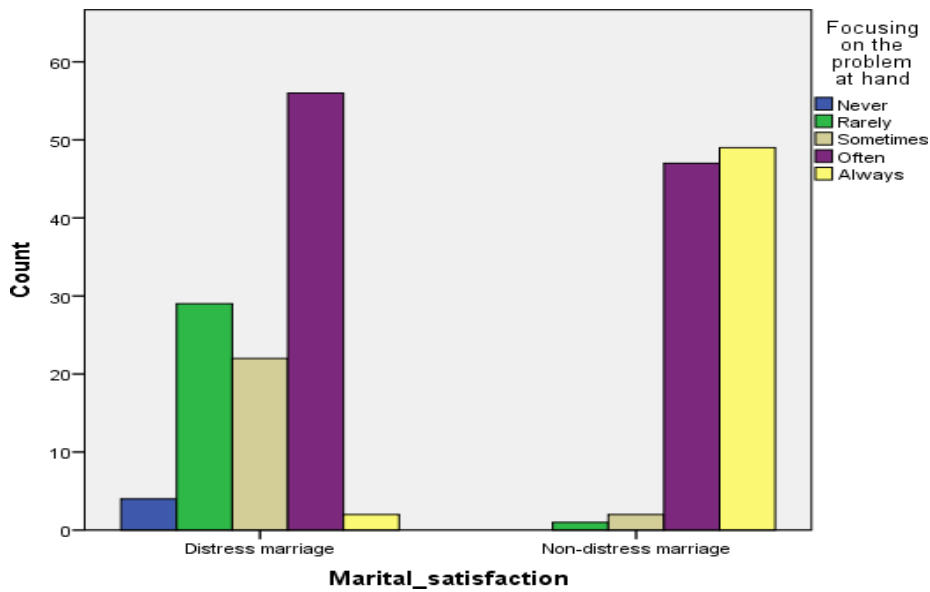


Figure 4: Focusing on problem distress vs. non-distress marriage

Constructive discussion of differences; non-distress marriages posted more incidences of occurrence 0 —Never| 1 % —Rarely| 53.5% —Often| 44.3 % —Always| than distress marriage group 3.5 % —Never| 34.5 % —Rarely|13.3 % —Sometimes| 45.1 % —Often and 3.5 % —Always. | Figure 5 presents a comparison summary for distress vs. non-distress groups.

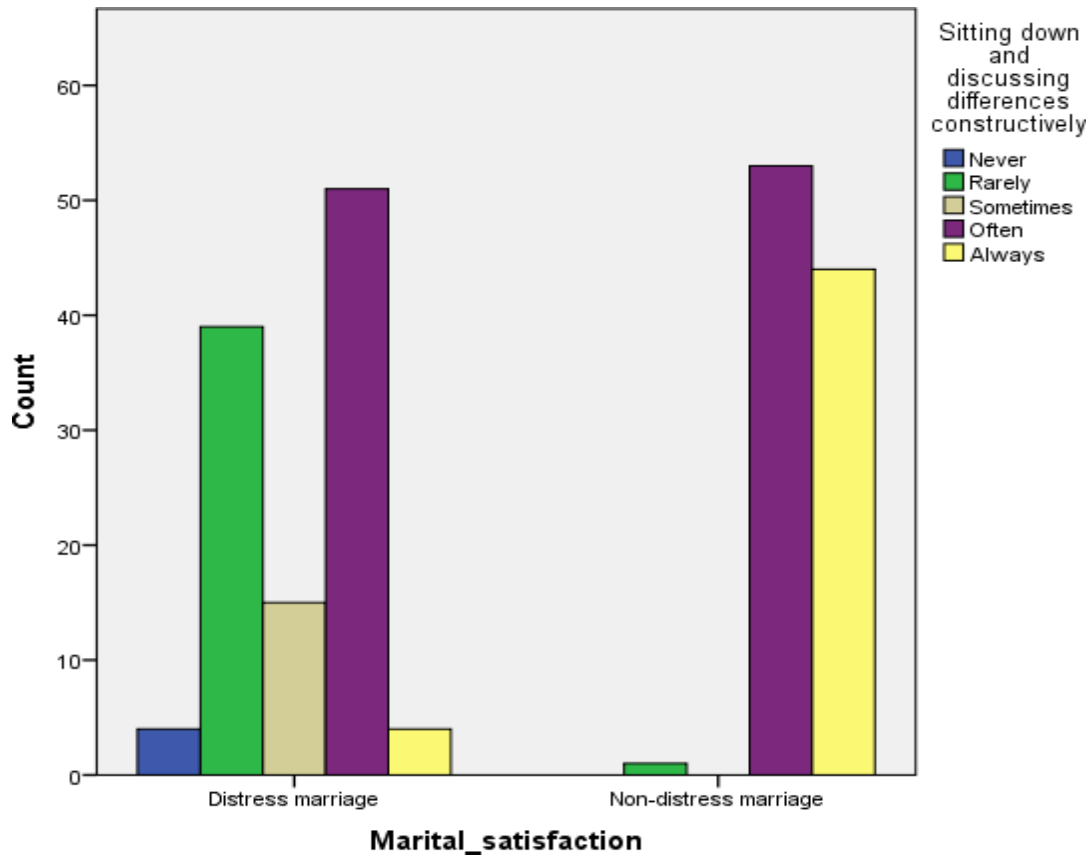


Figure 5: Constructive discussion of differences distress vs. non-distress marriage

On finding alternatives workable for each: non-distress marriages reported higher prevalence of counts 1 % —Rarely| 65.7 % —Often| 33.3 % —Always|; than distress marriage group 38.1 % —Rarely| 32.7 % —Often| and 10.6 % —Always.| Figure 6 below presents a comparison of distress versus non-distress marriage groups.

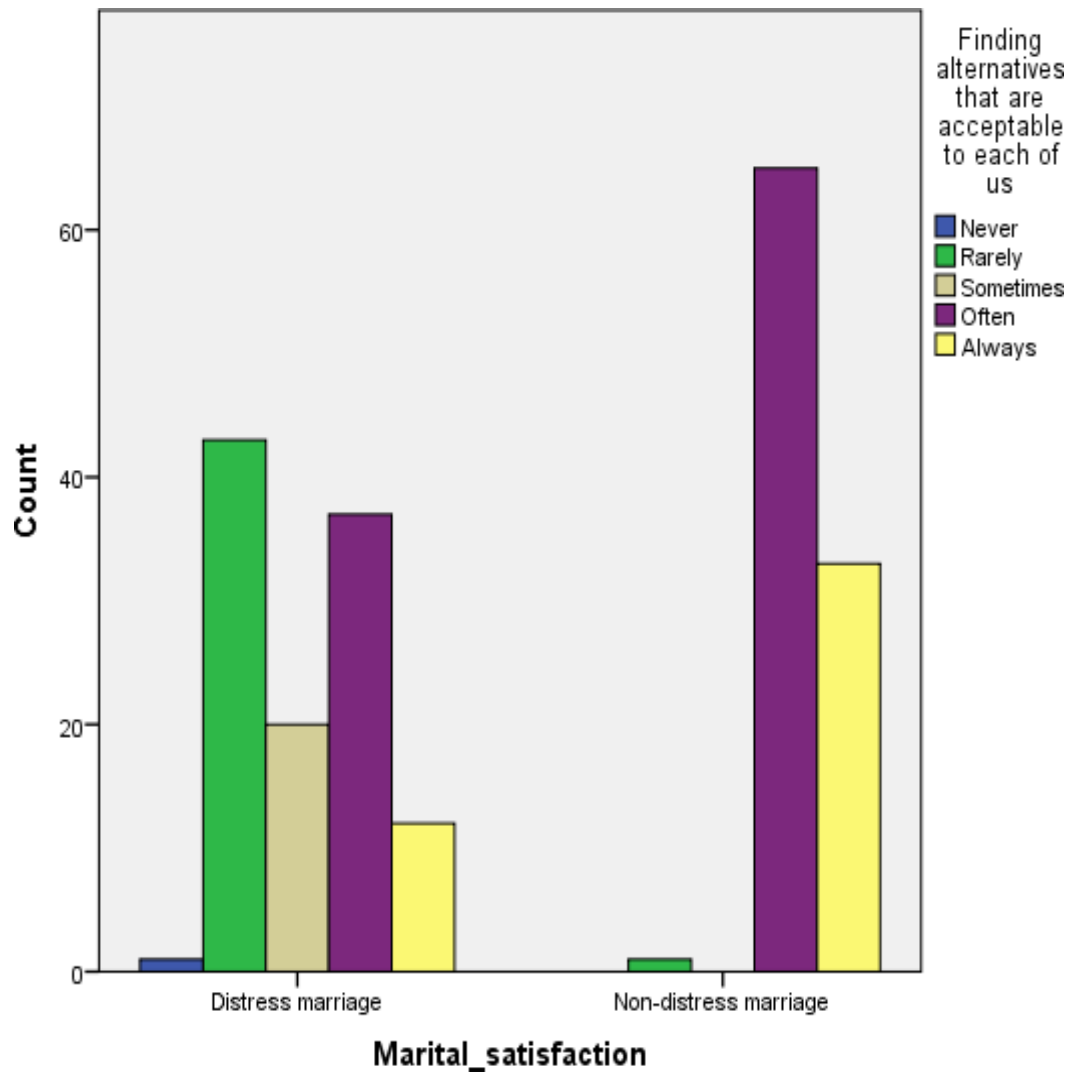


Figure 6: Workable alternatives distress vs. non-distress marriage

On negotiating and compromising: non-distress marriage group reported higher counts of occurrence incidences 1 % —Rarely| 29.3 % —Often| 69.7 % —Always|; than distress marriage group 27.4 % —Rarely| 15 % —Often| and 30.1 % —Always.

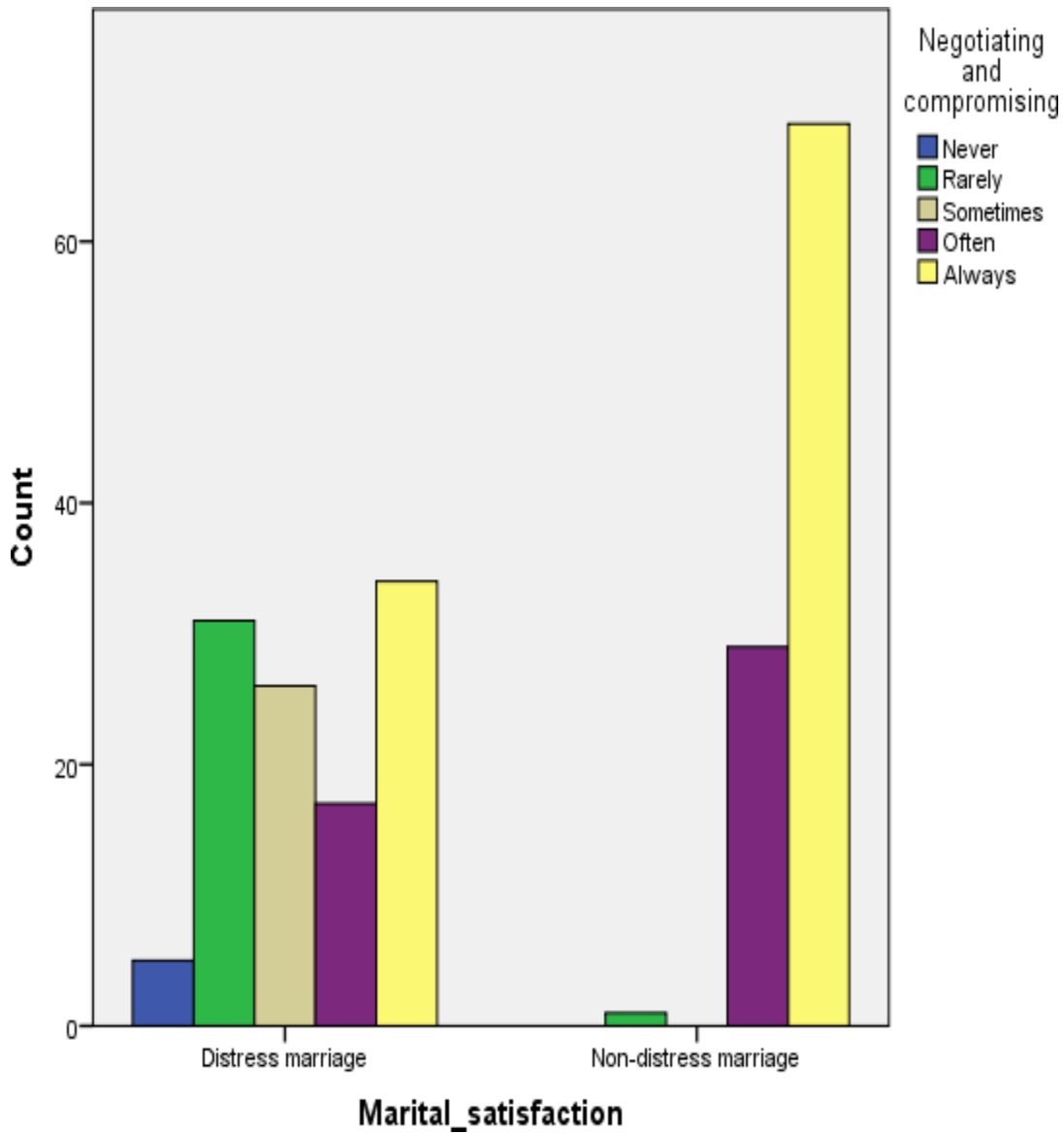


Figure 7: Negotiated compromise distress vs. non-distress marriage

4.3 Demographic Indicators of Marital Satisfaction

Table 2: Demographic indicators Spearman correlation results summary

		Age	Years in marriage	Highest level of education	Number of children	Marital satisfaction
Marital satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	-.170*	-.133	.332**	-.227**	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.013	.053	.000	.001	.
	N	212	212	212	212	212
	** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).						

The table indicates a statistically weak negative correlation relationship between age and marital satisfaction ($r = -.170, p < .05$). There was a direct but not significant negative correlation between years in marriage and marital satisfaction ($r = -.133, p > .05$). Findings showed a significant positive relation between highest levels of education and marital satisfaction ($r = .332, p < .05$); and a significant negative correlation between number of children and marital satisfaction ($r = -.227, p < .05$).

4.4 Marital Satisfaction Linear Regression Model

A general linear model was conducted with marital satisfaction as the independent variable. This model was considered important since it accounts for multiple predictor variables and allowed the researcher to account for all the potentially important variables in one model. Linear regression allowed the investigator to see the relationship of the independent variables to the dependent variable.

Table 3: Regression model summary

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.994 ^a	.988	.988	1.256
a. Predictors: (Constant), Intimacy, Communication, interactional style, Spousal support				
b. Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction				

Table 4: Regression model ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	26448.810	4	6612.202	4190.744	.000 ^b
	Residual	325.029	206	1.578		
	Total	26773.839	210			
a. Dependent Variable: Marital satisfaction						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Intimacy, Communication, Interactional style, Spousal support						

5.0 Conclusion

Interaction styles play a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of marital relationships. In a recent study comparing distress and non-distress marriages, researchers found significant differences in how couples interacted with each other during conflicts. Respondents in non-distress marriages reported experiencing higher levels of quality communication, spousal support, intimacy, and positive interaction styles compared to those in distress marriages. One key difference was observed in conflict resolution styles. Non-distress marriages tended to use more positive conflict resolution strategies, such as negotiation and compromise, while distress marriages were more likely to resort to negative tactics like throwing insults, launching personal attacks, and engaging in other harmful behaviors. These findings underscore the importance of understanding and cultivating positive interaction styles in marriages. Couples who can effectively communicate, support each other, and constructively resolve conflicts are more likely to maintain healthy and fulfilling relationships.

6.0 Recommendations

The church should create greater awareness of the importance and significance of constructive conflict resolution as a vehicle for enhancing marital satisfaction among Christian couples. The church should undertake initiatives for marriage seminars/programs; these should be undertaken more regularly and facilitated by role models with experience high integrity and Christian ethics. Church leaders and members whose marriages set a great example for others should be identified, recognized, and called upon to mentor couples and share the experiences and strategies they use to preserve/enhance marital satisfaction in their marriages.

References

- Birchler, G. R., Weiss, R. L., & Vincent, J. P. (1975). Multimethod analysis of social
- Birditt, K.S., & Fingerman, K.L. (2005). Do we get better at picking our battles? Age group differences in descriptions of behavioral reactions to interpersonal tensions. *The Journals of Gerontology Series B: Psychological Sciences and Social Sciences*, 62, 61-64.
- Estella, W. N. (2017). *The relationship between the level of marital satisfaction and marital infidelity in Nairobi County, Kenya*. (Masters theses, USIU, Kenya). Retrieved from

[http://erepo.usiu.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11732/3580/NDUNGU%20ESTERLINA%20W ANJIRU%20MAPSY%202017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](http://erepo.usiu.ac.ke/bitstream/handle/11732/3580/NDUNGU%20ESTERLINA%20W%20ANJIRU%20MAPSY%202017.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y)

- Genshaft, J. L. (1980). Perceptual and defensive style variables in marital discord. *Social Behavior and Personality*, 8, 81-84.
- Margolin, G., & Wampold, B. (1981). Sequential analysis of conflict and accord in distressed and non-distressed marital patterns. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 49, 554- 567.
- Njenga, E.W., & Langat, J. (2015). A study of marital conflict management among couples in Ainamoi Division of Kericho County. *Kabarak Journal of Research & Innovation*. 3, 2 (Dec. 2015), 98-109.
- Okello, M. O. (2005) *Factors influencing marital conflict among church wedded couples in Pentecostal churches in Masinga Division, Machakos District, Kenya*. (Master Theses, Kenyatta University). Retrieved from <https://ir-library.ku.ac.ke/handle/123456789/2310>
- Okhakhume, A.S., Rotimi, O. & Aroniyiaso, O. T. (2016). Influence of socioeconomic status and marital satisfaction on domestic violence among couples living in Nigeria. *International Journal of Applied Psychology*. 6 (6): 179-184. Retrieved from <http://article.sapub.org/10.5923.j.ijap.20160606.03.html>
- Onyango, N. (2013). *Uncommon solutions to common problems*. Nairobi: Flame keepers. reinforcement exchange between maritally distressed and nondistressed spouse and stranger dyads. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 349-360.
- Tashman, M. (August 2017). Marital satisfaction. <https://www.yourmarriagecounselor.com/marital-satisfaction/>
- Tummala, A. (2008). *Marital satisfaction*. In: Loue S. J., Sajatovic M. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Aging and Public Health*. Springer, Boston, MA.