

## SOCIAL PHOBIA AND GENDER AS CORRELATES OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED PERSONS IN AWKA METROPOLIS, ANAMBRA STATE

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### Abstract

This study examined *Social Phobia and Gender as Correlates of Marital Satisfaction among Married Persons in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State*. A total of three hundred (300) participants were sampled for the study. The participants consisted of married persons residing in Awka Metropolis and were selected using a convenience sampling technique. Their ages ranged from 20 to 60 years, with a mean age of 37.5 and a standard deviation of 0.214. Two instruments were used for the study, namely the Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) developed by Hudson (1982) and the Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN) developed by Connor et al. (2000). The study adopted a survey research design with a cross-sectional approach, and Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test the hypotheses. Two hypotheses were postulated for the study. The first hypothesis, which stated that social phobia would significantly correlate with marital satisfaction, was rejected ( $r = 0.051, p > .05$ ). The second hypothesis, which stated that gender would significantly correlate with marital satisfaction, was also rejected ( $r = -0.101, p > .05$ ). Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that clinical psychologists, marriage counsellors, and therapists should be cautious in addressing the behavioural dynamics of social phobia and gender in marital satisfaction among married persons.

**Keywords:** *Social Phobia, Gender, Married Persons, Marital Satisfaction*

### Background to the Study

Marital satisfaction is the description of the ways married persons view the level of pleasure as well as the contentment they derive from their marital relationships. Marriage being an important institution was predetermined by God (Umeaku, 2025a). Different cases of marital issues are constantly reported by the females as the bases of marital dissatisfaction such as; care free attitude, negligence, lack of financial support, lack of respect, infidelity, emotional abuse, night crawling, physical and verbal abuses. These variables have significant effects on the general emotional well-being, thereby leading to depression, anxiety and stress in their relationships. According to Nwanna, (2021), certain factors such as; helping in taking care of the household affairs, financial stability and provision of necessary needs of the family contribute to marital satisfaction though these variables differ among people. Marital dissatisfaction is a key problem in our society as a result of numerous child labour, divorces and societal conflicts it creates (Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Afram & Kashdan, 2015). Hence, social phobia and gender as correlates of marital satisfaction will be investigated in this study.

Social Anxiety also known as social phobia was defined by The American Psychiatric Association (APA, 2013), as the persistent fear of one or more social situations. This intense anxiety is due to fear of being judged, embarrassed, rejected or humiliated in social settings. And this can lead to avoidance of situations where interpersonal interaction is needed such as speaking in public, meeting new people or speaking to authority figures (Davila & Beck, 2002). Social anxiety is a wide spread condition that is expressed on a continuum of severity, the higher end is what psychologist defined as social anxiety disorder (Heimberg et al, 2010).

Hofmann (2007), pointed out that fear of negative evaluation is the core feature of social anxiety and error in information processing contributes to this fear. This is because one who has social anxiety normally overestimates the dangers of social events; they have this exaggerated feeling of risk in social interaction which makes them to avoid social situations and interactions altogether (Afram & Kashdan, 2015).

Different researchers on social anxiety tried to examine the way people with social anxiety relate with people they are not familiar with, while certain studies have shown that social anxiety has a damaging effect on close relationship as well as romantic relationship (Cumming & Rapee, 2010). Moreover, it is believed that how social anxiety affects romantic relationship may vary depending on the context and the degree of social anxiety (Afram & Kashdan, 2015), while some researchers discovered that social anxiety is associated with avoidance of intimacy

with their partners on the other hand, some socially anxious person exhibit excessive dependent behaviour towards their partner for emotional support.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Marital satisfaction is an important asset in the hands of couple for progress, success and onward movement. Absence of marital satisfaction hinders the optimal progression and success in such a family or union (Umeaku, 2025b). Fundamentally, marriage or family is the unit of every nation and the presence of marital dissatisfaction will continuously produce situations that are dissatisfying across all the spheres of the country (Umeaku et al, 2022). Many studies have been conducted on marital satisfaction, using various factors, research designs, and locations. However, much remains to be done; divorce, marital breakups, and domestic violence appear to be increasing daily. Furthermore, several studies have looked at different areas and localities but there seems to be a dearth of research work in studying Social Phobia and Gender as correlates of Marital Satisfaction among Married Persons in Awka metropolis, Anambra state, in the south eastern part of the Nigeria. Moreso, no study has been able to show the relationships among social phobia, gender and marital satisfaction among married persons living in the city (Awka Metropolis). Finally, this research work has come to provide a further literature in this area, and establish the relational direction among social phobia, gender and marital satisfaction among married persons.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this study was to ascertain if social phobia and gender will be correlates of marital satisfaction. Specifically, the study sought to examine;

1. If Social phobia will correlate with marital satisfaction.
2. If Gender will correlate with marital satisfaction.

### **Research Questions**

1. Will Social phobia significantly correlate with marital satisfaction?
2. Will Gender significantly correlate with marital satisfaction?

### **Relevance of the Study**

This study will have both practical and theoretical relevance. The outcome of this study will provide some important information that will guide not just researchers but practitioners as well as married persons. As a body of research this work will look into empirical, theoretical and conceptual aspect considering the various variables that influence marital satisfaction, thereby educating the readers and the stakeholders of the impact as well as the relationship among these factors. Lastly, this research work will add to existing knowledge in the field of social phobia studies, gender studies and marital satisfaction studies in our society. Practically, the study will give insight on among the variables of interest and how they can be managed to enhance marital satisfaction across and among married persons.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The Big Five Personality Theory is used as the theoretical framework for this study (McCrae & Costa, 1987). This is because being a personality theory; it explains certain traits across genders as well as traits that are susceptible to social phobia and can influence marital satisfaction among married persons. For instance, if married persons are conscientious in their relationships with their partners, being focused in the marriage there will be an optimal level of marital satisfaction. Invariably, if the extraverted, are opened to each other, stay with each other as well as enjoy social contacts from their partners, they will enjoy marital satisfaction. Therefore, in the light of the above, the big five personality theory is the suitable theory for this study, the big five personality theory being adopted as the theoretical framework of this study (McCrae & Costa,1987), the theory explained in details what each personality trait contains and they are well fitted for explaining marital satisfaction among married persons. A study conducted by Davila and Beck (2002), and the research title was Is Social Anxiety Associated with Impairment in Close Relationships? A Preliminary Investigation. In this research, one hundred and sixty-eight adults with a range of social anxiety where interviewed, and the data was analyzed. The design used for analysis was multiple regression analysis. In their result, their first analysis predicting avoidance of expressing strong emotion from social anxiety was significant (beta = .19, t = 2.35, p = .02). The second analysis predicting fear of rejection to social anxiety was also significant (beta = .30, t = 4.11, p < .001) and lastly the third analysis predicting interpersonal chronic stress and social anxiety was also significant (beta = -.25, t = -3.38, p = .001). In summary, they discovered that social anxiety were strong predictors of interpersonal style.

A work done by Montesi et al (2012), and the research title was On the Relationship Among Social Anxiety, Intimacy, Sexual Communication, and Sexual Satisfaction in Young Couples. Participants were one hundred and fifteen undergraduate and their partners in monogamous, heterosexual, committed intimate partnerships of at least three months. A predictive part model was used to test the hypothesis. The statistics used to analyze data are;

Goodness of fit ( $X^2$ ), Comparative fit index (CFI)(Bentler, 1990) and Root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) (Hu & Bentler, 1999). The final result for this analysis are  $X^2$  (16,  $N=206$ ) = 3.85,  $p = .80$ , CFI = .99, RMSEA = .052 (90% confidence interval = .00–.18). And their findings were interpreted as; Social anxiety predicted fear of intimacy ( $p < .001$ ), which, in turn, predicted dissatisfaction with ability to communicate openly about sex ( $p < .01$ ). Finally, dissatisfaction with ability to communicate openly about sex predicted sexual dissatisfaction ( $p < .01$ ).

Research conducted by Cuming and Rapee (2010), and the research title was Social anxiety and self-protective communication style in close relationships. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15.0.1 was used to calculate descriptive statistics and carry out correlational analyses. Participants used in the study were drawn from a community which ages range from 18 to 74. Total number of 312 participants (75 males and 237 females) were used in the study. Analysis was done separately for males and females. For males, social anxiety was not significantly correlated with any of the disclosure, relationship quality or relationship duration variables, but was positively correlated with depression. For females, with respect to both romantic relationships and close friendships, social anxiety was negatively correlated with self-disclosure, disclosure of negative emotions, disclosure of positive emotions and support, and was positively correlated with conflict.

Afram and Kashdan (2015), conducted a study whose title is Coping with rejection concerns in romantic relationships: An experimental investigation of social anxiety and risk regulation. The aim of their study was to investigate whether people with greater social anxiety respond defensively when the threat of being rejected by one's romantic partner becomes salient. Participants were 51 couples recruited from Mid-Atlantic university. Statistic uses to analyzed data was multiple regression analysis. As hypothesized, greater social anxiety predicted more negative partner assessments in the rejection condition ( $B = -.47$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t(94) = -2.77$ ,  $p < .0$ ). Surprisingly, social anxiety also predicted more positive partner assessments following the neutral condition ( $B = -.46$ ,  $SE = .17$ ,  $t(94) = -2.63$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

Olabimitan (2021) in a study titled "financial distress, sexual satisfaction and gender as predictors of marital distress among married traders in Lagos state" investigated financial distress, sexual satisfaction and gender as predictors of marital satisfaction. It adopted a cross sectional survey design and the hypotheses were tested using independent T test. A total of 426 participants comprising married males and females were selected using accidental sampling technique. The result indicated that there was a significant negative influence of financial distress on marital distress among married traders at ( $t = -4.759$ ;  $df(425)$ ;  $P < .01$ ), in addition, there was negative significant influence of sexual satisfaction on marital distress among couples ( $t = -4.958$ ,  $df(425)$ ;  $P < .01$ ) and finally, the results showed that there were significant differences between men and women on marital distress among couples ( $t = 3.237$ ,  $df(425)$ ;  $P < .01$ ).

Uwaoma et al (2016) carried a research titled "Influence of Self Esteem and Gender on Marital Satisfaction among Igbo Married in Owerri Urban Area". The study was aimed to investigate self esteem and gender on marital satisfaction. The participants involved 250 married couples drawn from Owerri urban in Imo state, Nigeria. A cross sectional survey design was adopted and Two-Way Anova was used in analyzing the collected data. The result showed that self esteem significantly influence marital satisfaction at [ $F(1, 246) = 40.81$ ,  $p = .000$ ], gender at [ $F(1, 246) = .24$ ,  $p = .62$ ], but the interaction effect between gender and self-esteem at [ $F(1, 246) = .14$ ,  $p = .71$ ] was not significant. They recommended that married persons with low self-esteem should seek psychological support in order to help salvage their marriages.

Jackson et al (2014) carried out a Meta Analysis on the topic titled "Gender Differences in Marital Satisfaction: A Meta-analysis". The purpose of the study was to empirically test the broadly held assumption and belief that women experience lower marital satisfaction than their counterparts. A total of 226 independent samples were brought together and a sum of 11010 participants was included in the study. The overall results and the outcome of the study indicated a statistical significant across the both genders, yet, very small gender difference in marital satisfaction between husbands and wives, with the wives, being slightly satisfied than the husbands in the negative direction. The moderator for the analysis indicated that the inclusion of clinical samples involves in wives in married therapy shows about 51% less likely to be satisfied with their marital relationship than their husbands. The effect size for those that are non-clinical or otherwise known as community base samples shows that there is no significant difference across males and females in marital satisfaction within the general population. Furthermore, the moderator analysis shows no difference across genders in marital satisfaction.

Ottu and Akpan (2011) conducted a research with the title "Predicting marital satisfaction from the attachment styles and gender of a culturally and religiously homogenous population". The aim of the study was to investigate the influence or effect of attachment, style and gender on marital satisfaction. Two by two analysis of variance

were adopted for the analysis of data, the results shows that there is a significant difference between individuals who have secure and insecure attachment styles of marital satisfaction at  $[F(1,146) = 360.21, P < .05]$ , showing that attachment styles are salient indicators of marital satisfaction, but, there was no significant difference between gender and marital satisfaction at  $[F(1,146) = 2.58, P > .05]$ , the interaction effect with respect to attachment styles and gender was significant at  $[F(1,146) = 5.00, P < .05]$ . The results show that gender is a key factor in marital satisfaction.

Dike-Aghanya et al (2019) conducted a study with the title "Religiosity, Gender and Personality Traits as Predictors of Marital Satisfaction among Christian couples". The aim of the study was to investigate whether religiosity, gender and personality traits can predict marital satisfaction. A total of 214 participants were selected for the study. A predictive design was adopted for the study and Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient, and multiple regression was adopted for the analysis of data. The result shows that religiosity and openness to experience significantly predicted marital satisfaction at  $(B = .72, P < .05; B = .10, P < .05)$ , but gender did not predict marital satisfaction at  $(B = -.08, P < .05)$ . They recommended that prospective couples should seek partners with openness to experience trait to ensure marital satisfaction.

### Hypotheses

1. Social phobia will significantly correlate with marital satisfaction.
2. Gender will significantly correlate with marital satisfaction.

### Methods

#### Participants

A total of 300 married persons from Awka Metropolis in Anambra Senatorial Zone of Anambra State served as participants for the study. The towns that were involved in the study were towns under Awka South Local Government in Anambra Central Senatorial Zone which include; Amawbia, Umuopku and Awka (the Core-Multi-Nuclei Urban Design). The males were one hundred and eighteen (118) in number, while the females were one hundred and eighty-two (182) in number, representing thirty-nine percent (39%) and sixty-one percent (61%) respectively. Their ages ranged from 20 (twenty) to 60 (sixty) years. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the villages, while convenient sampling technique was used to select the participants of this study, because the selection of the participants was based on availability, accessibility and willingness of the participants to participate in the study.

#### Instruments

The instruments used for collecting data in this study are:

##### 1. Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS):

The instrument used in this study for data collection on marital satisfaction was the index of marital satisfaction by Hudson (1982). This instrument is a 25-item inventory that is designed to measure the degree or severity of the problems or satisfaction that one's spouse or partner perceives to be having in the marital relationship with his or her spouse. The instrument has a Likert response pattern ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = Rarely or none of the time, 2 = A little of the time, 3 = sometimes, 4 = A good part of the time and 5 = Most or all of the time. There are direct scoring and reverse scoring items. Where the direct scoring is for negative word items which are items: 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 18, 22, 24, and 25; while the reverse scoring items are the positive word items which are: 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21 and 23.

To obtain raw scores, the result of the direct scores and the reverse scores were added together and 25 was subtracted from the raw score to obtain the clients final score, scores below 30 will be taken to indicate a satisfaction in relationship, while any score above 30 will be taken to indicate dissatisfaction in marital relationship. The items in the questionnaire include: I feel my partner is affectionate enough, I feel that my partner treats me badly, I feel that my partner really cares for me, I feel that I would not choose the same partner if I had it to do over, I feel that I can trust my partner and I feel that our relationship is breaking up.

The reliability coefficients reported by Hudson (1982) are, Cronbach Alpha internal consistency = .96, 2-hour-test-retest = .96. A concurrent validity coefficient of .48 was obtained by Anene(1994) by correlating Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) with Marital Stress Inventory (MSI). Also, Abamara (2019) reported alpha coefficient reliability of 0.70.

##### 2. Social Phobia Inventory (SPIN):

The instrument used in this study for data collection of social anxiety would be the Social Phobia Inventory by Conner et al (2000). The social phobia inventory is a 17 item self reporting scale that tends to measure the level or degree of social anxiety that an individual has. The instrument is a Likert style response pattern ranging from 0 to 4, where 0 = Not at all 1 = A little bit 2 = Somewhat 3 = Very much 4 = Extremely. The scale is rated over

the past week and includes items assessing each of the symptom domains of social anxiety disorder (fear, avoidance, and physiologic arousal). The items corresponding to these scales are as follows: Fear - 1, 3, 5, 10, 14, 15 (Range 0-24); Avoidance - 4, 6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16 (Range 0-28); Physical symptoms: 2, 7, 13, 17 (Range 0-16). All the items in the questionnaire are recorded using direct scoring by adding score together, the total SPIN score ranges from 0-68. Where the degree of social anxiety is measured depending on the score of the participants, this means that very high scores indicate higher severity while very low score indicate absence of social anxiety in the participant. Some questions like I am afraid of people in authority, I am bothered by blushing in front of people, Parties and social events scare me, I avoid talking to people I don't know, being criticized scares me a lot, etc. are found in this instrument.

Conner et al (2000) examined the reliability of SPIN using Test retest validity and internal consistency. In test-retest validity, Spearman correlation coefficient was used and 0.78 ( $P < 0.001$ ) was obtained. In internal consistency Cronbach alpha was used and the score obtained was 0.94 for the full scale. The validity of the instrument was measured also by Conner et al (2000) using Convergent, Divergent and construct validity. The SPIN showed good convergent validity as it was significantly correlated with Fear of Negative Evaluation (FNE) (0.72) and Social Interaction Anxiety scale (SIAS) (0.68). The SPIN showed good Divergent validity as it was not significantly correlated with measures of depression and self-esteem. Correlating the SPIN and the Beck Depression Inventory was 0.51, and the correlation between the SPIN and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale was 0.48. Finally, for construct validity, the correlation between the SPIN and the FNE was 0.81, and the correlation between the SPIN and the SIAS was 0.86.

It is also important to state that the SPIN was validated in Nigeria by Chukwujekwu and Olose (2018). According to them, the internal consistency of the SPIN in the Nigerian sample was 0.93, and the test-retest reliability was 0.86. And the factor structure of the SPIN was found to be consistent with the original version of the measure. Overall, the study found that the SPIN was a valid and reliable measure of social anxiety in a Nigerian sample.

### **Procedures**

The researchers with the help of two research assistants went to the field, with copies of questionnaires which were administered to married persons in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State and this was done by tracing the locations or places where they could be found, which are; the churches (Roman Catholic, Anglican and Perfect Life Message International Ministry), schools (Nnamdi Azikiwe University) and workplaces (Nnamdi Azikiwe University and Anambra State Civil Service's Ministries and Departments).

A combination of simple random sampling techniques and convenience sampling techniques were used to select the villages and participants in this senatorial zone respectively. To select the villages, the names of the villages were written down in pieces of papers, and the villages picked were selected and used for the study. This enabled a true representation of the Core-Multi-Nuclei urban design across the Anambra Central Senatorial Zone. To select the participants, convenience sampling technique was adopted. Ethically, before completing the questionnaire, rapport was established, and the purpose of the study was adequately explained to the participants. Firstly, the informed consent was established with the participants and confidentiality was guaranteed. Secondly, they were assured of anonymity as well as privacy in the study. Thirdly, the consents of the participants were obtained before the copies of the questionnaires were administered and they were adequately informed about choice to withdraw from the research at any given time they deem fit, they were given the assurance that whatsoever their responses were, would continue to be confidential. Three hundred and twenty (320) copies of questionnaires were administered, three hundred and ten (310) copies were returned, but three hundred (300) copies were valid; by the end of their responses, when the questionnaires were gathered, the valid ones were coded and analyzed using SPSS Version 21 with the appropriate statistics.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Married persons who live in Awka Metropolis

### **Exclusion Criteria**

Engaged, married or divorced persons who live in Awka Metropolis

### **Design and Statistics**

The study is a survey with a cross-sectional design, and SPSS version 21 was used for statistical analyses. Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used for data analyses in order to ascertain the relationships among the variables of interest on marital satisfaction among the married persons.

**Results**

**Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation**

GENDER	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
MALE	3.0895	118	.23625
FEMALE	3.1336	182	.19724
Total	3.1163	300	.21414

**Table 2: The Correlational Analysis of the Study Variables: Social Phobia, Gender and Marital Satisfaction**

		SP	GENDER	MS
SP	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N	300		
GENDER	Pearson Correlation	-.039	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.496		
	N	300	300	
MS	Pearson Correlation	.051	.101	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.382	.081	
	N	300	300	300

The first hypothesis which stated that social phobia will significantly correlate with marital satisfaction was rejected at  $r=.051$ ;  $p<.382$ . The second hypothesis which stated that gender will significantly correlate with marital satisfaction was rejected at  $r=-.101$ ;  $p<.081$ .

**Summary of Results**

1. Social phobia did not significantly correlate with marital satisfaction at  $r=-.051$ ;  $p<.382$ .
2. Gender did not significantly correlate with marital satisfaction at  $r=-.101$ ;  $p<.081$ .

**Discussion**

This study examined Social Phobia and Gender as Correlates of Marital Satisfaction among Married Persons in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State. The first hypothesis which stated that social phobia will significantly correlate with marital satisfaction was rejected and this in agreement with the study of Davila and Beck (2002) which found that social phobia has negative impacts on close relationships. It is further in consonance with the work of Montesi et al (2012), who found that social phobia triggers fear and dissatisfaction in marriage. Finally, it is supported by the study of Cuming and Rapee (2010) which showed that social phobia positively correlated with depression, negatively correlated with self-disclosure.

The second hypothesis which stated that gender will significantly correlate with marital satisfaction was rejected and it is consistent with the work of Uwaoma et al (2016) who discovered that males and females did not differ in marital satisfaction. It is further supported by the work of Jackson et al (2014) who identified that both males and females did not differ in marital satisfaction. Moreso, it is in agreement with the study conducted by Dike-Aghanya et al (2019) which found that gender does not predict marital satisfaction among Christian couples. But it is in disagreement with the study of Olabimitan (2021) who found out that there are gender differences in marital satisfaction. It also, differ from the work of Ottu and Akpan (2011) who found that gender is a key factor in marital satisfaction.

Undeniably, looking at the findings of this current study, and in comparison, of the findings with the previous studies, it can be visibly observed that different variables are accountable for the findings of this current study. The present study revealed that neither social phobia nor gender significantly correlated with marital satisfaction among married persons in Awka Metropolis. This indicates that marital satisfaction among urban dwellers does not have a significant relationship with either of the variables of interest.

**Implications of the Study**

This study has great implications both in theoretical and practical aspects. The implications of the study include; Married persons do not enjoy marital satisfaction if any of the partners is suffering from social phobia, and gender does not play significant roles in marital satisfaction; counsellors and psychotherapists should pay more attention by advising married persons on the implications of social phobia among gender roles among married persons.

### Limitations of the Study

The major limitation of the study is geographical limitation. The research was carried out only in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State which can influence the extrapolation of the outcome of this study to the general population of interest.

### Recommendations/Suggestions for Further Studies

There should be a further study within another geographical zone of the country for a further confirmation, and comparative study should be carried out between younger and older married persons on social phobia and gender as correlates of marital satisfaction.

### Conclusion

The study titled *Social Phobia and Gender as Correlates of Marital Satisfaction among Married Persons in Awka Metropolis, Anambra State* adopted a survey research design with a cross-sectional approach, and Pearson product-moment correlation was used for data analysis. Two hypotheses were tested, and both were not supported. The findings revealed that neither social phobia nor gender significantly correlated with marital satisfaction. Therefore, there is a need for further studies to explore other constructs and variables that may significantly correlate with marital satisfaction among urban dwellers, as research of this nature would be beneficial to psychotherapists, counsellors, and scholars interested in human relationships and marriage.

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