

# Impact of Spousal Availability On the Strengthening of Marriage: Evidence from Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT:** *The sustenance of marriage unions between two consenting adults has been fraught with a lot of challenges including but not limited to rampant divorces, domestic violence and depression. As societies evolve with the advent of industrialization and heightened technological growth, marital couples have tended to grow apart and become less available for one another with less than pleasant consequences. This study therefore examined the impact of spousal availability on the strengthening of marriage in Nigeria. Survey research design method was adopted for the study. Primary data was used in obtaining information through a well-structured questionnaire administered to seventy (70) married individuals in Nigeria and sixty-five (65) questionnaires were returned and analyzed. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The research hypotheses were analyzed using the Pearson correlation coefficient and multiple regressions. The result showed that spousal availability had a statistically and positive impact on marital strength in Nigeria ( $AdjR^2 = 0.65$ ;  $F$ -statistics  $(_{(3, 44)} = 30.42$ ;  $p$ -value  $= 0.00 < 0.05$ ) and that attentiveness to emotional needs is the most important quality desired by Nigerian married couples. The study recommended that to ensure longevity of marriages, spouses need to be more selfless in considering the needs of their partners and avoid marriages in proxies as couples living in different towns, cities or countries contradict and inverse to the result of this study.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Spouse Availability, Marriage Union, Marital Strength, Togetherness, Longevity

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## I. INTRODUCTION

By God's original design as captured in the holy scriptures, man is not supposed to live alone<sup>1</sup> Upon physical, mental and social maturity, he is supposed to leave his parents, find a significant other and join to her to become one united couple under God. Marriage in this context is assumed to be one between two different sexes and this position is maintained throughout the paper. Marriage in the Christian setting is a covenant between two parties with a lifelong commitment to stick to one another. However, there is a growing debate amongst scholars that the union can be described as a shift from being a covenant relationship to a contract relationship (Palmer 1972). They posit that with the advancement in societies, individual partners now see the marriage institution as one that can be freely entered or exited from in the same manner as do regular commercial contracts. Others have asserted that while it is contractual, certain elements which emphasizes the women's economic independence is often challenged by the menfolk (Mann 1983). Whether viewed as contractual or covenant, the substance still remains that individual members of the union are expected to respect the marital vows made to one another, one of which is to leave and cleave. This notion of cleaving implies absence of third parties as no one is intended to come in between the marital couple. This notion of cleaving demonstrates support for the principle of monogamy in marriage and when truly done can be a panacea to reduction in marital tension (Amanze and Amanze 2014). This view is supported by Ekpendu (2016) who stressed that the failure to cleave is one of the major factors responsible for marital breakdowns.

**Statement of the Problem:** The concept of spousal availability stems from the original notion of cleaving to one another. Spousal availability has four (4) major dimensions or levels – emotional, physical, financial and spiritual dimensions. None of the dimensions are inferior to one another but must actually be in the right proportion and elements to guarantee marital stability. As marriages are contracted under various settings, there appears to be no universally agreed principles on how the identified dimensions can fully interact with one another in the marriage space. Additionally, there is currently a dearth of available research on the impact of these proxies simultaneously on the marital union particularly in the Nigerian setting. It is against this backdrop that the researcher decided to carry out this work. Spousal availability on the one hand shall be proxied by the earlier identified four dimensions i.e. emotional availability, physical availability, financial availability and spiritual availability while marriage strength shall be proxied by marriage satisfaction. The objective of this paper therefore is to examine the impact of spousal availability in the strengthening the marital union.

## II. CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

**Emotional Availability:** Emotions are a big part of individual living and also play critical role in successful marriage living. Couples who marry do so not only to establish a contractual relationship but one where emotional intimacy is given its pride of place. Bloch et al (2014) stressed that the ability to regulate emotion is a key successful factor in marriages. This view is corroborated by Shahid and Kazmi (2016) who emphasized that emotional regulation by married couples is a strong judge of marital fulfillment. The human emotion is an affective, mental state characterized by demonstration of mutual feelings by the individual. These feelings could be positive (joy, love, togetherness etc.) or negative (anger, sorrow, fear etc.). The development of these emotions commences from childhood especially from the direct care of parents. Once formed whether positive or negative traits, these are carried through into adulthood and subsequently into the marriage space. Partners must be sensitive to each other's emotional needs and must be intentional about each other's feelings. This view is supported by the works of Fahd and Hanif (2019) who stressed that emotion expressivity typified in this case by partner availability and gender was a significant predictor of psychological well-being and hence marital success. This concept has also been referred to as being emotionally interdependent (Sels et al 2016) which is a state in which marital partners have positive mutual feelings for one another and express it. Other scholars have referred to it as emotional skillfulness, which entails the ability to identify and communicate emotions between partners in such a way that marital satisfaction is secured (Cordoba et al 2005).

**Physical Availability:** Physical availability refers to the physical presence of either or both partners in a sustained and continuous manner within the context of marriage. Physical presence in the conduct of marriages is just as important as physical presence in the course of the marriage. A number of jurisdictions also insist that the existence of a global pandemic such as Covid-19 does not preclude the necessity of physical presence for the successful conduct of marriages (Green and Spiegel 2020). In the Nigerian context also, marriages conducted without the physical presence of the partners is also alien to the Marriage Act and thus run the risk of been termed illegal except the parties can successfully argue mitigating circumstances to be determined by a court of competent jurisdiction Erhiakporeh (2020). According to Azhari et al (2020) physical presence of couples who are co-parenting can positively modify each other's brain activity. Apart from social benefits associated with closeness and affinity, regular presence of partners at home can aid brain development of the married partners. Absenteeism at home is often associated with the pull of work and the desire for career growth and job successes. However, this sometimes occurs to the detriment of strong and healthy family life. (Saginak and Saginak 2005) argued that achieving work life and family balance facilitates marital success. Further elements of physical availability include sexual intimacy, regular spousal face to face conversations and physical display of affection such as hugs, cuddling, kisses and physical touch. Sexual intimacy in the context of marriage positively impacts physical and mental health (Kardan-Souraki 2016). Similarly, spousal face to face conversations is positive when it elicits sincere responses from the spouses as this gives the respective partners feeling of marital safety (Laurenceau et al 1998). According to Debrot et al (2013), physical touch by married partners has the potential of conveying a sense of strengthened bond and enhancing general well-being. A hug or touch can aid the release of the oxytocin hormone which facilitates social bonding and sexual reproduction in couples. These little elements put together have therefore been found to be capable of igniting the marriage fire and by extension strengthening the marriage union.

**Financial Availability :** For the purpose of this paper, financial availability is defined as a concept that embraces the principles of financial fidelity, financial intimacy and financial conscientiousness in individual married partners. A married couple is said to demonstrating financial fidelity if no financial secret is withheld from one another (Jeanfreau et al 2018). According to Rick et al (2011), married partners following the 'opposites attract' notion, were more probable to tie the knot with a spouse that exhibited opposite financial traits. Where financial infidelity reigns, financial conflict is likely to rule (Junare and Patel 2012). The combination of these two: financial infidelity and financial conflict if improperly managed will yield poorer levels of marital satisfaction and ultimately separation or divorce (Dew and Dakin 2011). The challenge of financial infidelity among married couples is so serious that according to a recent survey by the United States National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE), more than 40% of married couple's exhibit one form of financial infidelity or spousal cheating (Taylor 2018). Carleton Kendrick cited in Stritop (2020) asserted that the chief reasons why married couples are financially dishonest include pragmatism, control, guilt, and fear. Other factors include conflicting goals of the married partners, addiction, resentment and sexual infidelity. Financial intimacy goes deeper than financial fidelity because it starts first from the heart. It involves absolute honesty and full disclosure about everything financial to one's significant other. When partners decide on a life-long commitment to spend the rest of their lives together, they are assenting to sharing in collective expenses, assets build-up, liabilities and windfalls. According to Thakor and Kedar (2012),

it implies been financially naked with absolutely nothing to conceal. Spouses that are available to one another need to demonstrate on a consistent basis that their finances are not outside the orbit of full disclosure no matter how pressured they are as a lack of financial intimacy can become a bedrock for the advent of future marital problems. Financial conscientiousness entails being meticulous and exhibiting financial diligence and commitment on the part of each married partner. Couples that are financially conscientious strive to minimize incidences of impulsive spending in the overall interest of the family. It is a personality trait if well honed, is capable of promoting positive aging and a long healthy family life (Roberts et al 2012).

**Spiritual Availability:** Married partners need to have a relationship with the divine one individually and jointly and take deliberate steps to worship together daily (Braithwaite 2015). There is increasing empirical evidence that married couples who participate in spiritual activities often have enhanced qualitative romantic relationship (Langlais and Schwanz 2017). Couples, who share common spiritual orientations are more apt to stick as one, enjoy better marital experience and less likely to divorce than others which do not (Call and Heaton 1997). According to Mahoney et al (2001), spiritual teachings properly imbibed by marriage partners can help strengthen marriages. Shared spiritual teachings and practices also appear to help married couples prevent or quickly resolve marital conflict (Lambert and Dollahite 2006). This is because spiritual teachings generally emphasis core positive principles such as commitment and fidelity, honesty, compassion, forgiveness for one another, selflessness, mutual respect and empathy. For example, the spiritual teaching on forgiveness was found to increase marital satisfaction of married couples (David and Stafford 2013).

**Marital Satisfaction:** Marital strength can be assessed by the extent in which the individual married partners experience satisfaction in their marriages. According to Durodoye (1997), marital satisfaction is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation of the specific components within his/her marital relationship. Marital satisfaction is thus individual specific. While several attempts has been made to develop quantitative tools to measure marital satisfaction, the impact of the subjective element due to differences in individual perceptions cannot be overemphasized. Examples of quantitative tools in use include the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS) developed by Spanier (1976), Marital Adjustment Test (MAT) modified by Locke & Wallace (1959), Marital Satisfaction Scale developed by Roach et al (1981), Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI) developed by Synder (1981), Kansas Marital Satisfaction Scale developed by Schumm et al (1986) and the Quality Marital Index (Norton 1983). Overall, while the quantitative tools have the potential of providing enormous insights into the extent or otherwise by which married couple's marital satisfaction can be measured, they nevertheless needs to be used with a great deal of caution due to extenuating circumstances that may be peculiar to each married partner.

### III. THEORETICAL REVIEW

**Social Exchange Theory:** The social exchange theory is credited to George Homans (1958). He recognized interactions and sentiments as the basis for explaining the establishment and power of social relations (Lawler and Thye 2006). It is a theory that seeks to explain how human social relationships are shaped, sustained, and ended. The theory views relationship from the prism of a cost benefit analysis and assumes that parties could be romantically involved. Thus, where it is presumed that associated costs or risks outweigh desired or expected rewards, then individuals in a social relationship such as marriages will abandon the relationship while if the converse holds, then individuals will stick to the relationship. Emerson (1976) supported the theory and added that for it to be profitably deployed it is better to consider the subject as a sociological construct rather than as an economic one. Critics of the theory have however pointed that its lack of theoretical precision will yield limited utility to practitioners (Cropanzano et al 2017). This theory is however considered germane to this study as it aligns with the notion of individual partners' desire of securing satisfaction in their marital journey.

### IV. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Sokolski and Hendrick (1999) evaluated the subject of fostering marital satisfaction using intrapersonal, interpersonal and environmental factors as proxies to measure marital satisfaction. The study adopted the survey method and elicited responses from 160 married couples. The study found that intrapersonal and interpersonal variables such as self-disclosure, commitment and love are good predictors of the extent of marital satisfaction between wives and husbands. Shahid and Kazmi (2016) studied the connection between emotional regulation and marital satisfaction. The study obtained data from two hundred (200) married couples chosen using purposive sampling technique. The study found that there is a significant positive correlation between Emotional Regulation and Marital Satisfaction. Data analysis using the regression tool indicated that Emotional Regulation is a major predictor of Marital Satisfaction. Male partners were also found to be more emotionally regulated than their female counterparts.

Milkie and Peltola (1999) examined the relationship between marital success and successful work and family life balance. Data for the study was obtained from two hundred (200) employed married couples. The study found that equality in division of labor coupled with marital satisfaction contributed to married couples achieving work and family balance. Additionally, individual couples' opinion of fairness in the sharing of work load enhanced couples' perception of success. The study therefore concluded that men and women share similar stance of success at balancing between employed work and family life. Jeanfreau et al (2018) investigated the relationship that existed between financial infidelity and marital satisfaction. The study was exploratory in nature and applied the convenience sampling method to an on-line audience made up of four hundred and fourteen (414) participants selected. Data obtained was analyzed using the SPSS package and the result showed that there is a significant relationship between financial infidelity, marital satisfaction and the Big Five personality traits. Specifically, the result showed that 27% of participants had kept a financial secret from their spouses and thus demonstrated financial infidelity. Additionally, the study discovered that marital satisfaction was lower for participants who had experienced financial infidelity than in others who have not. The finding also supported the view that couples who have experienced marital infidelity were more likely to commit financial infidelity also.

Fard et al (2013) examined the nexus between religious attitude and marital satisfaction among married students of the University of Tehran. Data was obtained using a structured questionnaire administered on one hundred and fifty six (156) married students of the University. The sample size was drawn using the random sampling technique. The study adopted two measuring scales i.e. the St Religiosity Scale and the Dyadic Adjustment Scale. Findings from the study showed that there is a significant positive relationship between religious attitude and marital satisfaction. The study concluded by recommending that family therapists consider the impact of religious belief factors in resolving marital conflicts.

## V. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a survey research design using structured questionnaires administered to married individuals in Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to determine the sample size and seventy (70) questionnaires were administered on married individuals and out of which sixty five (65) came back from respondents. A 5 point Likert scale was adopted as a scale of measurement for this study and the data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics.

### *Hypotheses*

In order to test the impact of spousal availability on the strengthening of marriages with Nigeria as a focal point, the following null hypothesis were established:

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between emotional availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria.

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between physical availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria.

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between financial availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria.

H<sub>04</sub>: There is no statistically significant relationship between spiritual availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria.

### **Specifications**

$$Y=f(X)$$

$$Y= y_1$$

$$X=x_1, x_2, x_3$$

Y= Strength of Marriage = (Marriage Satisfaction)

X= Spousal Availability (SA)

y<sub>1</sub>= Marriage Satisfaction: (MARSAT)

x<sub>1</sub> = Emotional Availability (ENAV)

x<sub>2</sub> = Physical Availability (PHAV)

x<sub>3</sub> = Financial Availability (FNAV)

x<sub>4</sub> = Spiritual Availability (SPAV)

$$MATSAT_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1ENAV_i + \beta_2PHAV_i + \beta_3FNAV_i + \beta_4SPAV_i \text{-----Model}$$

**VI. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS**

This sub-section presents the results of the analysis of data collected from the respondents for the purpose of this study.

Table 1: Demographic Information

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Are you married?</i>		
Yes	65	100.0%
No	0	0.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	45	69.2%
Male	20	30.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>Do you and your spouse live together?</i>		
Yes	55	84.6%
No	10	15.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<i>How many years have you been married?</i>		
Less than a year	2	3.1%
1 - 5 years	21	32.3%
6 - 10 years	19	29.2%
11 - 15 years	10	15.4%
16 - 20 years	9	13.8%
20 years and above	4	6.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: SPSS Computation (2020)

The result in Table 1 shows that all the participants are married which make them qualified for this study. Among all the participants, 45 representing 69.2% are Females. Also, 84.6% are living together with their spouses and most of the participants representing 90.7% of the participants have been married with their spouse for 1 – 20 years.

**Emotional, Physical, Financial and Spiritual Availability:** The results of the analysis is based on questions that center on Emotional, Physical, Financial and Spiritual Availability

Table 2: Emotional, Physical, Financial and Spiritual Availability

		<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
What makes you feel specially loved in your marriage?	When your spouse is sensitive to your emotional needs	12	18.5%
	When your spouse demonstrates better understanding of you	41	63.1%
	Nothing in particular	0	0.0%
	When you receive gifts from your spouse on a special day	12	18.5%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
How do you feel about going on outdoor trips or vacation with your spouse?	Very happy	15	28.8%
	Somewhat happy	37	71.2%
	Neither happy nor unhappy	0	0.0%
	Unhappy	0	0.0%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
How satisfied are you with your spouse’s financial commitment to the marriage	Very satisfied	54	83.1%
	Dissatisfied	6	9.2%
	Neutral	5	7.7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
What do you think turns you	Spirituality	1	1.5%



on the most in your relationship with your spouse?	Physical presence	5	7.7%
	Financial deep pocket	12	18.5%
	Attentiveness to your emotional needs	47	72.3%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: SPSS Computation (2020)

The result from Table 2 shows that what makes most 63.1% of the participants feel specially loved in their marriage is when their spouses demonstrates better understanding of them and majority (83.1%) of them are satisfied with their spouse's financial commitment to the marriage. Overall, the responses to the question show that attentiveness to emotional needs is what turns most of the participant on in their relationship with their spouse.

**Regression and Presentation of Results:** This section presents the result of the regression analysis carried out in this study for hypotheses testing. The independent variables are Emotional Availability (EMAV), Physical Availability (PHAV), Financial Availability (FNAV) and Spiritual Availability (SPAV) while the dependent variable is Marital Satisfaction (MARSAT). Marital Satisfaction was measured with four selected items from each of the sections of the research instrument to ensure that the emotional, physical, financial and spiritual aspects are considered in developing the indicator.

Table 3: Model Summary and ANOVA

<b>R</b>	<b>R Square</b>	<b>Adjusted R Square</b>			
0.818	0.670	0.648			
<b>ANOVA</b>					
	<b>Sum of Squares</b>	<b>Df</b>	<b>Mean Square</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Regression	23.727	4	5.932	30.42	0.000
Residual	11.701	60	0.195		
Total	35.428	64			

Source: SPSS Computation (2020)

The F-statistics value in Table 3 is 30.416 [P-value = 0.000] suggesting that the variables of availability significantly explain variations in Marital Status (MARSAT) Also, the adjusted R – squared 0.648 indicates that the variations in MARSAT are jointly explained by the variables of availability.

Table 4: Regression Coefficients: Availability and Marital Status

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	0.350	0.465		0.753	0.455
EMAV	-0.069	0.100	-0.060	-0.686	0.496
PHAV	0.375	0.107	0.409	3.495	0.001
FNAV	0.322	0.132	0.265	2.448	0.017
SPAV	0.293	0.106	0.288	2.778	0.007

Source: SPSS Computation (2020)

From Table 4, the unstandardized coefficient of Emotional Availability (EMAV) is negative and statistically insignificant [ $\beta = -0.069$ ; P-value = 0.496] suggesting *no statistically significant relationship between emotional availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria*. Physical Availability (PHAV) has a coefficient that is positively and significantly related to MARSAT at 1% level of significance [ $\beta = 0.375$ ; P-value = 0.001] this means that *there is statistically significant relationship between physical availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria*. Financial Availability (FNAV) and MARSAT have positive and significant relationships at 5% level of significance [ $\beta = 0.322$ ; P = 0.017] indicating that *there is statistically (8) significant relationship between financial availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria*. The result reveals

that a positive and significant relationship (6) exists between Spiritual Availability (SPAV) and MARSAT as evident from the  $\beta = 0.293$  and  $p\text{-value} = 0.007$ . This means that ***there is statistically significant relationship between spiritual availability and marriage satisfaction in Nigeria.***

## VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study findings revealed that spousal availability had a statistical positive significant effect on strength of marriages in Nigeria. Furthermore, attentiveness to emotional needs was found to be the most important quality desired by Nigerian married couples for the sustenance of the marriages. This is consistent with previous studies of Shahid and Kazmi(2016) who studied the relationship between emotional regulation and marital satisfaction and found that there was a significant positive correlation between emotional regulation and marital satisfaction(1) and that male spouses were found more emotionally regulated than the female spouses in their marital life(1). Azhari (2020) studied the impact that the physical presence of co-parenting couples had on brain activity and found that when spouses were physically together, they showed higher similarities in brain responses to the stimuli than when they were separated. This effect can only be found in proper couples and not in randomly harmonized study participants. Similarly, in terms of spiritual availability, the findings from the study is also in alignment with Langlais and Schwanz (2017) who observed that joint participation in spiritual activities often enhanced qualitative romantic relationship. This position is corroborated by the studies of Call & Heaton(1997) who found that couples who share similar spiritual faith are more likely to stick as one, enjoy better marital experience and less likely to divorce than others which do not.

## VIII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the impact of spousal availability on the strengthening the marriage: evidence from Nigeria. In carrying out this, the study employed four proxies to measure the independent variable of spousal availability: emotional availability (EMAV), physical availability (PHAV), financial availability (FNAV), and spiritual availability (SPAV) while the dependent variable strength of marriages was surrogated with marriage satisfaction (MARSAT). Using data obtained through online survey monkey from a structured questionnaire, a descriptive statistics and regression analysis were carried out. The result of the descriptive statistics revealed that 63.1% of the participants feel specially loved in their marriage and that their spouses demonstrated better understanding of them, while majority (83.1%) of them were satisfied with their spouse's financial commitment to the marriage. Overall, the responses to the question showed that attentiveness to emotional needs was the most significant factor that will strengthen their marriages. The regression analysis revealed that spousal availability had a joint statistically positive significant effect on strength of marriages ( $AdjR^2 = 0.648$ ,  $F\text{-Statistics} = 30.42$ ;  $P\text{-value} = 0.000$ ). Furthermore, the result revealed that emotional availability, physical availability, financial availability and spiritual availability will have a direct effect on the strength of marriages in Nigeria.

**Recommendations:** Based on the result of the study, the study recommended that marriage been a sacred institution, spouses should make the needed sacrifice to protect its sanctity. Both husbands and wives should not neglect emotional availability, physical availability, financial availability and spiritual availability. Couples should also avoid marriages in proxies, as couples living in different towns, cities or countries contradict and inverse to the result of this study.

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