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Intimacy and Marital Satisfaction Among Christian Married Couples among Christian Married Couples in Two Selected Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

There exists high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, even among church couples. This study sought to examine the relationship between intimacy 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 intimacy. The study concluded that intimacy was critical to the quality of a marriage. This implies that the greater the quality of intimacy 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: *Intimacy, 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 gives individuals a sense of meaning and identity in their lives, according to Tummala (2008). Moreover, a fulfilling marriage should bring about physical and psychological health, as well as happiness, for a couple. This state of well-being is often called marital satisfaction, as noted by Estella (2017). Intimacy in marriage includes emotional, physical, and sexual closeness between partners. Studies show that conflict is a natural part of close relationships, such as marriage, and it can greatly affect how close couples feel to each other. As Lulofs and Cahn (2000) suggest, conflict can arise in various forms of relationships, and the intensity of conflicts tends to increase with the closeness of the relationship. In marriages, conflicts can

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range from minor disagreements to major issues, and how these conflicts are resolved can greatly influence the level of intimacy in the relationship.

Mohland (2011) highlights that conflicts, if not addressed promptly and effectively, can lead to more significant issues and even marital distress. This is supported by Zeidner and Kloda (2013), who assert that unresolved conflicts can erode the intimacy and connection between spouses.

Tolorunleke's (2014) study on the causes of marital conflicts among couples in Nigeria further underscores the impact of conflict on intimacy. The study found that marital conflicts in Nigeria often stem from issues related to meeting sexual needs and providing for the family. These findings suggest that conflicts related to intimacy and financial security can significantly affect the level of closeness and connection between spouses in a marriage.

Even though conflicts are bound to happen in marriages, the way couples handle and resolve these disagreements plays a significant role in the intimacy and connection within their relationship. Good communication, understanding each other's feelings, and a readiness to tackle problems together can assist couples in keeping their bond strong and close, even when they encounter difficulties.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

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 conducted by Daystar University, titled "Redeeming Christian Marriage and Family in Kenya," revealed some concerning statistics. The survey included 1,200 Kenyans from various marital statuses, including those who are married, divorced, and separated. Participants were from 46 of Kenya's 47 counties. The key findings showed that 42% of divorced couples had ended their marriage by their fifth anniversary. By the tenth anniversary, this number rose to 77%, indicating that only 23% of divorces occurred after ten years of marriage. 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 intimacy 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

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The study builds on the communication model developed by Dan Jackson and Jay Haley, who were part of Bateson's group focusing on schizophrenia. This approach to understanding behavior suggests that we should focus on the present rather than the past, looking for patterns that explain current behavior. According to Bertulaffy (1950), as referenced by Okello (2005), this perspective offers valuable insights into family dynamics. The model categorizes relationships between communicators as either complementary, where individuals assume different roles that balance each other, or symmetrical, where individuals mirror each other's behaviors or roles.

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 the differences in communication behaviors across the distressed and non-distressed couples.

2.2 Empirical Review

Intimacy can be in various forms, of which one of them is through religion. This can be described as having a personal relationship with God and being able to practice and believe in Him. Since marriage has traditionally been associated with religious ceremony and affirmation; it is not surprising that researchers would be interested in the relation of marital satisfaction to religiosity (Haseley. 2006). Much research has been done on distal religion variables that are related to marriage (e.g. individual's frequency of church attendance, homogamy of partners' church affiliation). Religiosity is described as —the beliefs as applied to an individual's life (Parsons et al, 2007). —Religiosity also refers to —the extent to which an individual feels that religious beliefs influence his or her life (Pittman et al, 1983).

Religion can be seen as a framework that shapes our everyday lives, influencing how we perceive the world around us and how we respond and act in our daily routines. Taylor & Crocker (1981) describe religion as a kind of schema—a mental structure that helps individuals interpret their surroundings, fill in missing information, and use shortcuts that make problem-solving easier and quicker. This perspective suggests that religion provides a set of tools that guide understanding and decision-making in various situations.

Mahoney and colleagues introduced the concept of a more proximal variable that views marriage as having a spiritual character and significance within the marital relationship. This religious variable as cited by Haseley (2006) —explores the extent to which partners perceive God to be active or reflected in the marital relationship. Mahoney and colleagues posited —that within many Judeo-Christian traditions, marital vows between husband and wife are likened to the love and covenant between God and people; and God is often described as potentially influencing or being present in marriage (Mahoney et al; 1999).

In a marriage setting, couples use the following statements to describe their marriages: —God is good in my marriage, —In our marriage, God is at the center. —My marriage is symbolic of God and what I believe about God (Mahoney et al, 1999, P. 333). Therefore, it is important to emphasize the relationship between marriage and spirituality in the analysis of marriage and spirituality.

Religion has a great influence and role in marital satisfaction because it provides a philosophy of life for individuals. Rokeach (1973) observed that people use religious values to evaluate their world and guide their behavior. Intimacy in religion influences many areas of family and marriage life, including communication style, divorce rates, and marital reconciliation. Research findings as reported by Bradbury and colleagues (2000) —support the idea that religiosity reasoning and attributions influence marital satisfaction, marital happiness, marital adjustment, and marital stability. The relationship between religion and marital satisfaction have indicated generally an overall positive association between religiosity and marital satisfaction.

Research on the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction has explored factors such as church attendance, religious commitment, and church affiliation in relation to how satisfied people are in their marriages. One study by Burchinal in 1957 found that being affiliated with a church did not have a strong link to how happy people were in their marriages. Similarly, a study by Koehne in 2001, which looked at church attendance and marital satisfaction from a gender perspective, concluded that going to church did not significantly affect marital satisfaction for either men or women. However, it's important to note that both of these studies relied on very basic methods, using just two questions to gather information. This raises concerns that these findings might not fully capture the picture, and a more thorough investigation into religiosity could potentially show a meaningful connection between going to church and being satisfied in a marriage.

Studies have found a positive relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Heaton & Pratt, 1990; Snow & Compton, 1996). Heaton & Pratt (1990) found that the belief that the Bible contains answers to all-important human problems was positively associated with marital satisfaction. Snow & Compton's study (1996) reported that the —importance of religion in couples lives was positively correlated with marital satisfaction. It was also found that couples who used prayer during marital conflict exhibited decreased negativity, contempt, and hostility while increasing emotional intimacy with their partner (Butler, Stout & Gardner, 2002).

Research findings indicate that the greater the religious congruence between couples, the greater marital satisfaction, and the fewer family and religious stressors. The findings compared interfaith couples, Jewish and Christian, and same faith couples (i.e., both partners Christians and both partners Jewish). The more congruent couples are in matters of religious beliefs, the greater their marital satisfaction and religious commitment. In the same regard, Kohn (2001) compared interfaith and interracial couples, to homogeneous couples whose partners shared similar faith and racial heritage. Findings indicated that intermarried couples (interfaith and interracial) reported less family support, more severe problems with religion, as well as greater discrepancies in acculturation levels. Kohn's findings further revealed that interfaith couples reported less marital satisfaction and greater conflict regarding their children's religious education than similar faith couples.

Sullivan (2001) sought to describe the link between religiosity and marital satisfaction. Sullivan put forth three models: the direct model, indirect and compensatory model. In Sullivan's direct model, religiosity directly affects the couple's marital satisfaction. On the indirect model, Sullivan (2001) —Religiosity indirectly affects marital satisfaction by affecting other dimensions of marital quality such as commitment to marriage, attitudes towards divorce, willingness to sort for help in times of marital distress, which over time may affect marital satisfaction. The compensatory model cites that risk factors to marital satisfaction are moderated by religiosity.

According to Sullivan (2001), religiosity might act as a buffer for couples facing challenges, helping them stay satisfied in their relationship despite these issues. For example, couples who are very religious and have one partner with neurotic tendencies might still experience higher levels of marital satisfaction compared to less religious couples with a similar dynamic. Sullivan also points out that more religious couples tend to have more conservative views on divorce, a stronger commitment to their marriage, and are more inclined to seek support during tough times in their marriage. These factors collectively contribute to greater marital satisfaction.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study used a descriptive research design to explore its topic. It focused on a specific group of 450 married individuals who are members of a church. To decide on a smaller group from this population for detailed study, the researcher applied the Yaro Yamane formula, resulting in a sample size of 212 married church members. To gather information, the study employed a structured questionnaire, which included the Marital Satisfaction Scale and the Conflict Resolution Style Inventory as the primary instruments for collecting data.. 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

This section presents the findings of the study.

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 is in agreement 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 distress marriages and non-distress marital relationships among respondents in the two selected churches in Nairobi County; Distress marriages (RDAS sum score < than 48); Non-distress (RDAS sum score > than 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

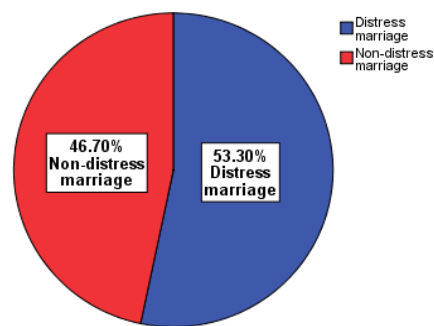


Figure 1: Distribution of distress and non-distress marriages

4.2 Intimacy

Intimacy was an analysis of respondents' responses to questionnaire items: RDAS 1 (Agreement/ disagreement on religious matters); RDAS 2 (Agreement/ disagreement on demonstration of affection); and item RDAS 4 (Agreement/ disagreement on sex relations). On religious matters, respondents in distress marriages posted more disagreements 14.2 % —Frequently disagree and less agreement 23.9 % —Almost always agree 3.5 % —Always agree; than non- distress marriages 2 % —Frequently disagree. 23.2 % —Almost always agree and 66.7 % —Always agree. Figure 2 below shows the comparison across both groups

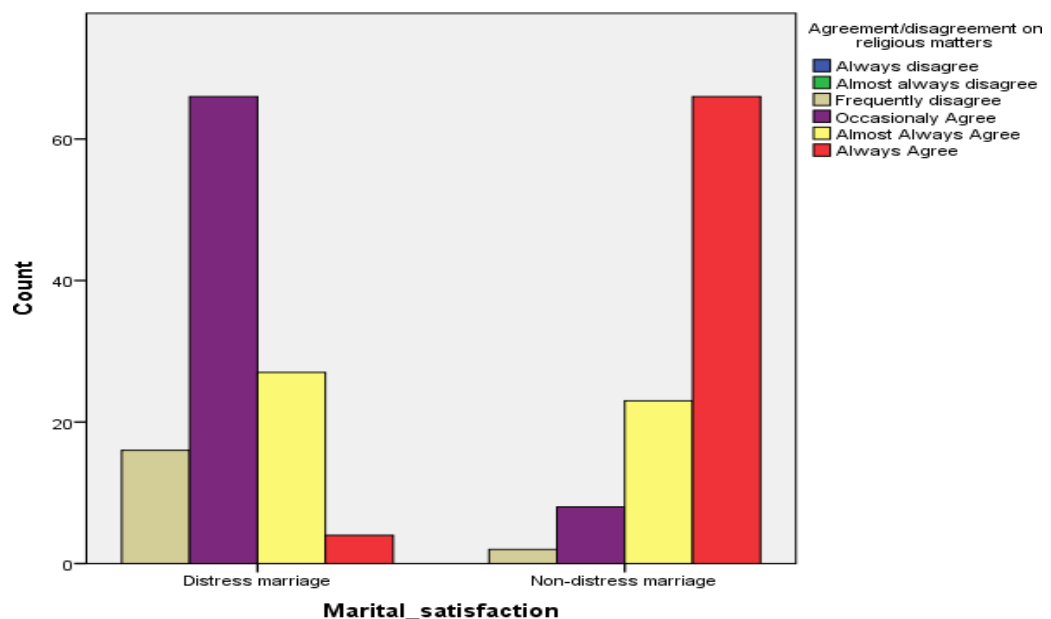


Figure 2: Religious matters distress vs. non-distress marriages

On demonstration of affection distress marriages posted greater disagreements 3.5 % —Almost always agree 24.8 % —Frequently disagree than agreements 7.1 % —Almost always agree and 0.9 % —Always agree. Non-distress marriages recorded significantly less disagreements 6.1% —Occasionally agree and high scores of agreements 34.3 %—Almost always agree and 59.6% —Always agree. Figure 3 below presents a comparison across both categories.

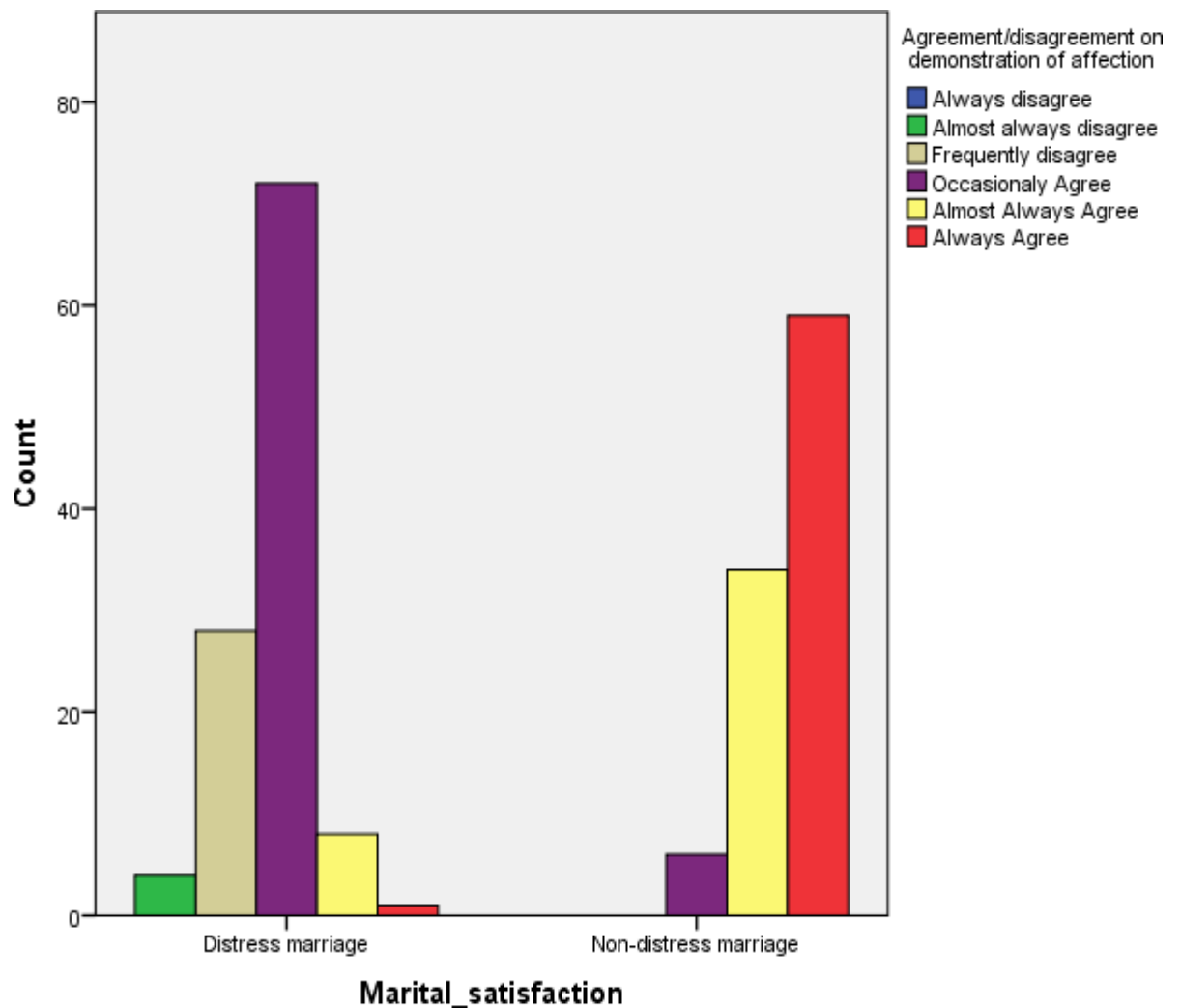


Figure 3: Demonstration of affection distress vs. non-distress marriage

On sex relations distress marriages reported more disagreements 4.4 % —Almost always disagree 11.5% —Frequently disagree and less agreements 15.9 % —Almost always agree 26.5 % —Always agree; than non-distress marriages 10.1 % —Occasionally agree 17.2 % —Almost always agree and 72.7 % —Always agree. Figure 4 below compares agreements/disagreements on sex relations in both groups.

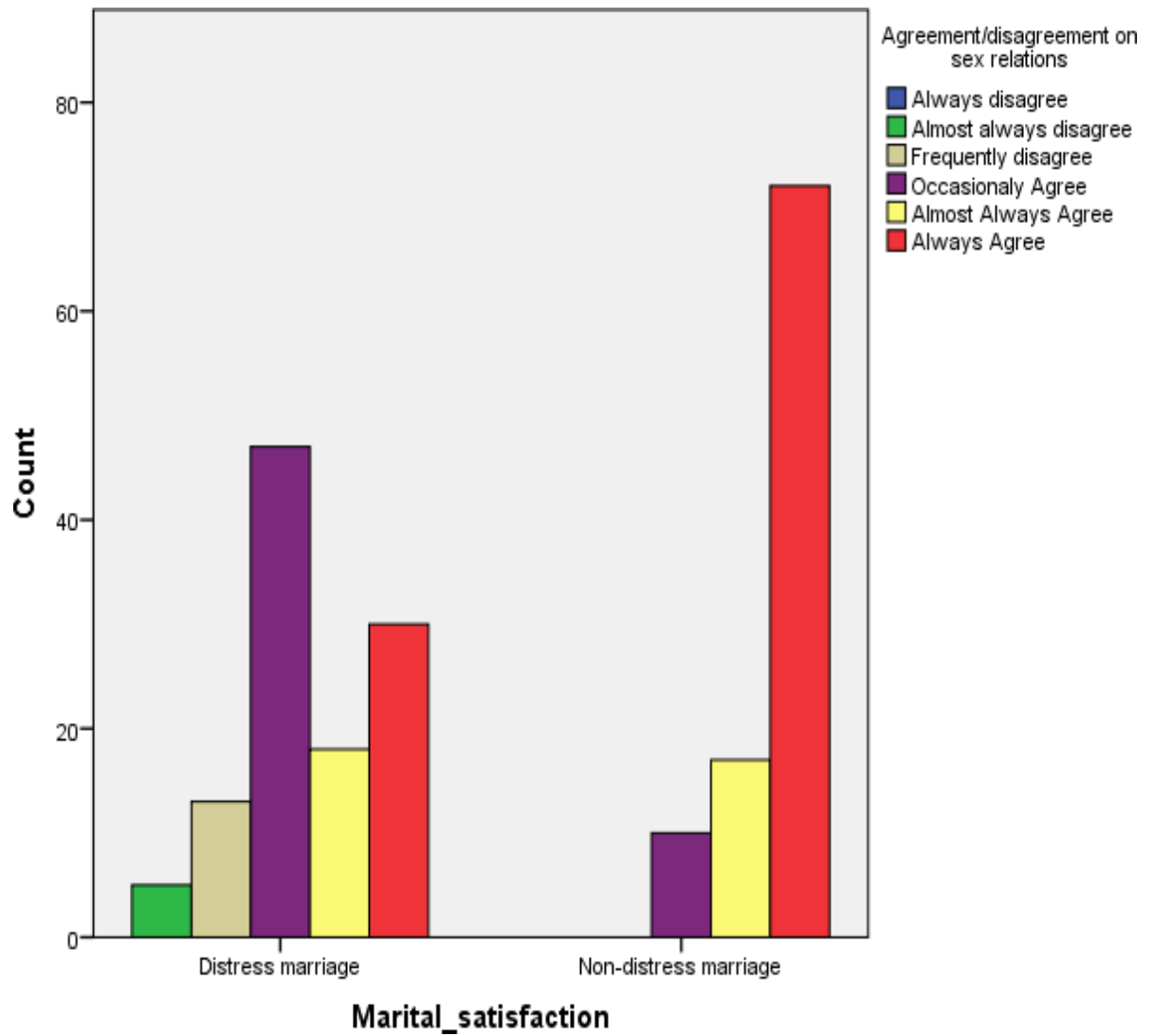


Figure 4: Sex relations distress vs. non-distress marriage

4.3 Demographic Indicators of Marital Satisfaction

Table 2 shows the demographic indicators of marital satisfaction.

Table 2: Demographic Indicators of Marital Satisfaction

		Age	Years in Highest level of marriage	Years in Highest level of education	Number of children	Marital satisfaction
Marital satisfaction	Correlation	-.170*	-.133	.332**	-.227**	1.000
	Coefficient					
	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 ($r = -.227$, $p < .05$).

4.3 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 The corresponding sections present the model summary and analysis of variance for the study.

Table 3: Model Summary

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Model Summary^b

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: 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

The study concludes that marital satisfaction among Christian couples in Nairobi County, Kenya, is significantly influenced by the presence of positive communication, spousal support, interaction styles, and intimacy, with a notable majority of marriages experiencing distress. The data indicates that effective communication, supportive behaviors, positive interactions, and deep intimacy are directly correlated with higher levels of marital satisfaction. Conversely, the prevalence of negative conflict resolution methods, such as engagement in conflict and withdrawal, is associated with lower marital satisfaction, highlighting the stark difference in conflict resolution strategies between distressed and non-distressed marriages. This underscores the critical need for fostering constructive communication, support systems, intimacy, and conflict resolution strategies to enhance marital satisfaction and reduce distress among Christian married couples in the region.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that the church plays a pivotal role in promoting the importance and significance of constructive conflict resolution as a key factor in enhancing marital satisfaction among Christian couples. To achieve this, the church is encouraged to organize and conduct regular marriage seminars or programs, ideally led by individuals who are role models in terms of their experience, integrity, and adherence to Christian ethics. Furthermore, it is suggested that church leaders and members who exemplify positive marital relationships be acknowledged and invited to serve as mentors for other couples. By sharing their successful experiences and strategies for maintaining or improving marital satisfaction, these role models can provide valuable guidance and inspiration to others striving to strengthen their own marital bonds.

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