



## **Influence of Parents In-Law's Interference on Marital Stability among Young Couples in Ondo State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This study focused on influence of parents-in-law on marital stability among young couples in Ondo State. The purpose was to determine the influence of parent-in-law (fathers or mothers in-law) on marital stability among young couples. The descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted and population of the study consisted of all parents-in-law in Ondo State. The sample consisted of 150 parents-in-law of 10 years below selected from three local governments in Ondo State. Multistage random sampling procedure, Random sampling technique and purposive sampling techniques were used in selecting the sample. The instrument used was questionnaire titled 'Parents-in-law Influence on Marital Stability (PIMS)' which was designed by the researchers. The face and content validity of the instrument were ensured through experts' suggestions and guidance which helped to scrutinize the items. Test retest method was used to ensure reliability of the instrument which yielded coefficient value of 0.87. Data generated were subjected to descriptive analysis of Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and t-test. Results of the study showed that there was no significant relationship between parents-in-law's interference and marital stability among young couples but there was a significant gender difference in influence of parents-in-law's interference on marital stability. Based on the findings, pre-marital counseling was recommended for would-be couples to help them understand themselves and parents in-law before marriage. Also, young couples should learn to understand each other, plan to make their marriage work and disallow parents' in-law interference from causing instability in their marriage.*

**Keywords:** Parents in-law, Interference, Marital Stability, Young Couples

### **Introduction**

Marriage is the intimate union and equal partnership of a man and a woman. It comes to us from the hand of God, who created male and female in his image, so that they might become one body and might be fertile and multiply. Though man and woman are equal as God's children, they are

created with important differences that allow them to give themselves and to receive the other as a gift. Marriage is an important step in the life of every human on earth. Different cultures have different rituals and beliefs about marriage. Love, economic status, religious beliefs, and social acceptance are just a few reasons individuals



marry across differing cultures. Marriage is a recognized union of a man and a woman as husband and wife, a union that is intended to last their joint lives (Uwe and Obot 2000). However, in the mind of Nigerians especially in Ondo State, it is considered as a serious affair and one that wants to be involved must be a person of high commitment.

Many factors have combined to influence marriage institutions thus causing many problems which both young and old married couples must contend with such as interference by the parents' in-law which could land the relationship in separation or cause threat to its stability. The fact that two people agree or plan to live together as husband and wife calls for different expectations and hopes, some of which may be fulfilled while others may remain unfulfilled. Since couples are humans and not gods, it is only natural to expect that there will be differences in opinions, values, needs, desires and habits that are the stuff of everyday living. Bearing in mind the fact that no human relationship is devoid of conflict and misunderstanding once in a while, many families within the societies experience difficulties as a result of marital instability. This constitutes a major threat to sustainability of marital peace and stability in the society. According to Tolorunleke (2008), marriage should be an exciting and beautiful adventure and the relationship between husband and wife is intended to get better with every passing day or year. However, little things can slip into the

relationship and as Tolorunleke (2008) puts it, when these little things are not properly handled, they can cause friction and eventual separation between the marriage partners that may widen over the years.

Information from electronic media, magazines, newspapers, court proceedings and environmental observations revealed that marital instability abounds in the society today largely due to couples' experience in the process of trying to perform their marital roles as demanded by their society. Marital instability can be defined as the state of tension or stress between married partners as the couple try to carry out their marital roles while marital stability can be defined as remaining legally married without divorce, physical separation, or legal separation. Marital stability is related to but distinct from marital adjustment, marital quality, marital satisfaction, and marital success. It refers to the stability of the marital relationships. It is a state where that the relationship is not constantly faced with challenges that make the fulfillment of marital intentions possible.

It has been observed that many married couples experience marital instability in Nigeria and especially in Ondo-State. In a study carried out in Ilorin metropolis by Dada and Idowu (2006), it was stated that the rate at which married couples experience marital instability is quite alarming. Many families have been and some are still seriously at war with themselves simply because of the influence of



some intervening factors in which interference by parents in-law is one. A parent-in-law is a person who has a legal affinity with another by being the parent of the other's spouse. A person is a son-in-law or daughter-in-law to the parents of the spouse, who are in turn also the parents of those sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law (if any) who are siblings of the spouse (as opposed to spouses of siblings). Together, the members of this family affinity group are called the in-laws (Idakwo, 2002).

Mothers-in-law warrant special consideration because they are more involved with married children and children-in-law (Fingerman & Hay, 2012), and engage in more frequent contact with the couple (Willson, Shuey, & Elder, 2013) than fathers-in-law. Stereotypes stemming back 50 years portray the mother-in-law as the most problematic family tie (Hosmer 2011). As a result, mothers-in-law evoke stronger emotional reactions than fathers-in-law (Willson, 2013). Mothers, according to many traditions in Nigeria see taking care of new born baby and the mother as a duty that must be performed by them. During this time, a nagging, intrusive and hot tempered mother-in-law can turn the home into hell for the wife through her interference in many things that ordinarily should not concern her. This has been observed to be common with illiterate mothers.

Individuals may hold positive and negative expectations of how their in-law will develop and change once the wedding takes place. Based on

stereotypes and media presentations of mothers-in-law according to Dada and Idowu (2006), brides and grooms may harbor fears that the other party will be intrusive and critical. Mother-in-law may worry about exclusion by the daughter-in-law or being denied direct access to the son. Such worries may be associated with negative relationship qualities before or after the wedding. From experience, any wrong step or decision taken by a married man especially in the first few years of marriage is usually blamed on the wife by his parents. In fact, failure to ensure existence of love bond between parents-in-law and the couple before marriage can continue to generate arguments and conflicts that can lead to instability. By contrast, a study of the in-law tie found most children and mothers-in-law describe the early relationship with positive expectations (Turner, Young, & Black, 2006).

No father or mother will like to be disconnected from their children after marriage. There have been cases of the two parents relocating to the new couple's house when they have new born baby especially when the father has retired and no one to take care of him. This is possible where there is strong love bond. However, unsolicited interference in couple's affairs by parents-in-law appears to be a major cause of instability in marriage in some cases. Some parents like to take side with their daughter or son when there is conflict in marriage instead of pacifying both sides to ensure peaceful co-existence. Turner et al (2006) opined that mothers-in-law



and daughters-in-law usually engage in negative expectations and feelings in their relationship. The hope for a warm and close relationship may manifest in stronger bonds after the wedding but mother or father in-law could be an agent of making the relationship not stable.

### **Statement of the Problem**

It has been observed that the rate at which young couples experience divorce and re-marriage indiscriminately is quite alarming in Ondo state especially in Akure metropolis. This appears to be due to interference of parents' in-law in the activities and home management of their children in marriage. Some of the affected spouses interviewed orally by this researcher mostly claimed that interference of mother-in-law caused instability in their marriage. It seems some families are seriously at war with themselves simply because of their failure to arrest, manage or resolve conflicting issues between couples or parents' in-law. Many young couples are going through a lot of stress and hardships as a result of marital conflicts orchestrated by their parents who try to know everything about them not minding the effects of it on their marital stability as had been observed by the researcher. These observations had put a burden on the researcher to carry out this study.

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were generated for the study:

1. Interference by parents-in-law will not significantly influence marital

stability among young couples

2. Gender will not significantly influence interference of parents-in-law in marital stability.

### **Research Method**

A descriptive research of the survey type was used for this study. The survey design was considered appropriate and adopted because it provides information on the influence of parent-in-law on marital stability among young couples in Ondo state. The population of the study consisted of all parents-in-law of 10 years below in Ondo State. One hundred and fifty parent-in-laws of 10 years below were selected as sample from three local governments in Ondo State through Multistage random sampling procedure was used to select the sample. In stage one, a Local Government area was chosen from each senatorial district with the use of Random sampling technique, in stage two, a town was chosen from each of the Local Government Areas with simple random sampling technique and in stage three, 50 parents –in-laws were selected from each of the three towns with purposive sampling technique making 150 parent-in-laws who are 10years below.

One instrument was used to collect data for this study. The instrument was a questionnaire titled “Parents-in-law Influence on Marital Stability (PIMS)”. It was designed by the researchers to elicit information on influence of Parents-in-law on Marital Stability. The questionnaire has 25 items with a four-point likert-type





scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

The face and content validity of the instrument were ensured through experts' suggestions and guidance which helped to scrutinize the items. Test retest method was used to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The instrument was administered on 20 parents-in-law in Erijinyan Ekiti outside the sample chosen for the study. Data collected were analyzed and the reliability test yielded 0.87 coefficient. This shows the consistency of the instrument.

The researchers personally visited the towns sampled where the instrument was thereafter administered to the respondents and collected back immediately after they have completed filling them. Data generated were analyzed using inferential statistics to test the null hypotheses generated. Hypotheses 1 and two were tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significant.

## Results

**Hypothesis 1:** Interference by parents-in-law will not significantly influence marital stability among young couples

**Table 1:** Influence of parents-in-law interference on marital stability

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	r-cal	r-tab
Interference of parents-in-law	150	106.03	25.38	298	2.749	1.960
Marital Stability	150	110.61	19.61			

Table 1 revealed that r-cal (2.749) was greater than r-tab (1.960). This implies that there was no significant relationship between interference of parents-in-law and marital instability.

Hence, the null hypothesis was not rejected.

**Hypothesis 2:** Gender will not significantly influence interference of parents-in-law in marital stability.

**Table 2:** Influence of gender on parents-in-laws' interference in marital stability

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-tab
Fathers-in-law	150	103.53	22.07	3.723	1.960
Mothers-in-law	150	113.11	22.50		



Table 2 revealed that  $r$ -cal (3.723) was greater than  $r$ -tab (1.960). This implies that there was a significant gender difference in influence of parents-in-law's interference on marital stability. Hence, the null hypothesis was not accepted. By implication, mothers-in-law influence marital stability than fathers-in-law.

### Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that there was no significant relationship between parents-in-law's interference and marital stability among young couples but there was a significant gender difference in influence of parents-in-law's interference on marital stability. The findings was in agreement with Fingerman and Hay (2002) who claimed that mothers-in-law warrant special consideration because they are more involved with married children and children-in-law. The finding is also consistent with Turner et al., (2006) who claimed that mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law usually engage in negative expectations and feelings in their relationship. The findings of this study generally support the claim of scholars like , Ogidan (2010), and Kolo (20099) who in separate studies revealed that marriages in Nigeria are besieged by numerous constraints such as interference of some parents' in-law that lead to increase in divorce and marital separation but as the length of marriage increases, there is possibility that both spouses will adjust which will ultimately lead to marital stability.

### Implication for Counseling

The implication of these findings is that marriage counseling is required to help young couples. Uwe and Obot (2000) described marriage counseling as a specialized area to help couples to settle their differences and work together to achieve the objectives for which they entered the union. The role of marital counseling to help couples in overcoming marital conflicts cannot be overemphasized. Counseling in this generation is useful to every stage of life. A counseling psychologist who will therefore work with couples that are experiencing marital conflicts needs to develop certain intervention strategies which will help couples to understand themselves, the threat to their union and take decisions that will help them to resolve their differences.

### Conclusion

From the study, it was obvious that conflicts among young married couples are inevitable and based on the findings of this work, it is concluded that parents' in-law significantly influence marital stability among couples.

### Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made;

1. There is the need for pre-marital counseling for would-be couples to help them understand themselves and parents in-law before marriage. They should be exposed to some of the matters that could lead to conflicts between them and parents in-law.



2. Young couples should learn to understand each other, plan to make their marriage work and disallow parents' in-law interference from causing instability of their marriage.
3. There is the need for pre-marital counseling for would-be couples to help them understand themselves and each other before marriage. They should be exposed to some of the problems that could lead to conflicts and how to manage them
4. Institutions of learning should include in the curriculum a period for pre-marital counseling for those that have attained the age of maturity.

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