

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED CIVIL SERVANTS IN RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the relationships between self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills, and marital satisfaction. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 22,622 married civil servants in Rivers State, while a sample of 396 respondents was selected using a multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS) and analysed using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) at a .05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between self-awareness and marital satisfaction ($r = .501, p < .05$), empathy and marital satisfaction ($r = .735, p < .05$), self-regulation and marital satisfaction ($r = .705, p < .05$), self-motivation and marital satisfaction ($r = .553, p < .05$), and social skills and marital satisfaction ($r = .721, p < .05$). The study concluded that the dimensions of emotional intelligence examined significantly and positively relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. The study recommended the incorporation of emotional intelligence development into marital counselling and employee wellness programmes.

KEYWORDS: Emotional intelligence, self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills, marital satisfaction.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage is one of the most important social institutions in every society, serving as a foundation for family life, social stability, and individual well-being. It provides emotional, social, psychological, and economic support to spouses and contributes significantly to the development of healthy families and communities. In Nigeria, marriage is highly valued and regarded as a lifelong commitment that promotes companionship, mutual support, procreation, and social cohesion. Despite its importance, contemporary marriages are increasingly confronted with challenges such as poor communication, emotional disconnection, financial pressures, work-family conflicts, and unresolved disagreements, which often result in marital dissatisfaction, separation, or divorce. These challenges have attracted the attention of researchers, counsellors, and psychologists who seek to understand the factors that promote or undermine marital satisfaction.

Marital satisfaction refers to the degree to which spouses perceive their marriage as fulfilling, rewarding, and meeting their emotional, social, and psychological needs. It reflects the overall evaluation of the quality of the marital relationship and the extent to which individuals experience happiness, stability, intimacy, and harmony in their marriage. According to Nwosu and Okoye (2021), marital satisfaction is the extent to which spouses perceive their marital relationship as fulfilling their emotional, social, and psychological needs. Similarly, Solomon and Jackson (2022) describe marital satisfaction as a dynamic process influenced by several personal and relational factors, including communication patterns, emotional regulation, and personality characteristics. High marital satisfaction is associated with emotional well-being, family stability, and positive parenting outcomes, whereas low marital satisfaction is often linked to frequent conflicts, emotional distress, poor family functioning, and marital instability.

In recent years, concerns about marital dissatisfaction have increased globally and within Nigeria. Reports of marital conflicts, separation, and divorce have become more common among working couples who face multiple demands from their occupational and family roles. Married civil servants constitute a unique category of working adults because they are often required to balance professional responsibilities with family obligations. The nature of civil service work, characterized by workload pressures, administrative responsibilities, financial challenges, and role demands, may create stress that affects interpersonal relationships and marital adjustment. In addition, prevailing economic realities, rising cost of living, and socio-cultural expectations in Nigeria place additional pressure on married couples, thereby influencing the quality of marital relationships. These realities suggest that understanding

factors associated with marital satisfaction among married civil servants is both timely and necessary.

Although economic conditions, cultural expectations, and social factors influence marital relationships, scholars have increasingly argued that internal psychological factors play a crucial role in determining the quality and stability of marriages. Among these psychological factors, emotional intelligence and personality traits have received considerable attention because of their influence on interpersonal relationships, communication patterns, emotional adjustment, and conflict management. Emotional intelligence explains how individuals perceive, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions, while personality traits describe enduring patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that influence interactions with others. Together, these psychological characteristics may significantly determine how spouses respond to marital challenges and maintain satisfying relationships.

In the present study, emotional intelligence is conceptualized as a multidimensional construct comprising five interrelated dimensions: self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, and social skills. These dimensions collectively explain how individuals recognize, understand, regulate, and utilize emotions in themselves and in their interactions with others. Each dimension contributes uniquely to the quality of interpersonal relationships and is therefore considered relevant to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Self-awareness is one of the dimensions of emotional intelligence examined in this study. It refers to an individual's ability to recognize and understand his or her own emotions and the influence of those emotions on thoughts, behaviours, and interpersonal relationships. Individuals with high self-awareness are more likely to identify their emotional strengths and weaknesses, regulate inappropriate emotional reactions, and communicate more effectively with their spouses, thereby promoting marital satisfaction.

Empathy is another dimension of emotional intelligence examined in this study. According to Deary (2019), empathy is the ability to recognize, understand, and share the feelings of another person. It involves putting oneself in someone else's position and appreciating their partners' feelings and perspectives, thereby promoting emotional connection and mutual understanding.

Self-regulation is another dimension of emotional intelligence examined in this study.. Eslami (2014) defined self-regulation as the ability to manage and control one's thoughts, emotions and behaviours in order to achieve goals, respond appropriately to situations, and make responsible decisions. Thus, it involves the ability to manage emotional reactions and respond

constructively during challenging situations. Self-regulation encourages persistence, commitment, and positive engagement in relationship despite difficulties. Thus, self-regulation was investigated to find out its relationship with marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Self-motivation is another dimension of emotional intelligence examined in this study. Self-motivation refers to the internal drive that enables an individual to initiate, sustain, and regulate goal-directed behaviours without requiring external pressure or incentives (Ryan & Deci, 2024). In marital relationships, self-motivation may help couples understand and manage conflicts by encouraging each partner to actively engage in the relationship, persist in efforts to resolve disagreements, and seek constructive solutions even when challenges arise. Self-motivated spouses are more likely to take responsibility for their actions, pursue personal growth, and work collaboratively toward mutual understanding and harmony. This is so because this intrinsic drive may foster resilience during difficult times, as each partner is inclined to maintain commitment, communicate effectively, and invest effort in emotional repair and reconciliation rather than withdrawing or blaming. Thus, self-motivation will be investigated to find out its relationship with marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Social skills are another dimension of emotional intelligence examined in this study. Social skills refer to the ability to communicate effectively, manage interpersonal relationships, resolve conflicts, and demonstrate empathy and cooperation in social interactions (Brackett et al., 2011). In the context of marriage, strong social skills may enable spouses to express their needs and emotions constructively, listen actively, negotiate disagreements amicably, and provide emotional support, thereby fostering intimacy, trust, and overall peace in relationships (Anyakoha & Nwolisa, 2025). This dimension of emotional intelligence contributes to healthier marital interactions and may enhance marital satisfaction among married civil servants. Thus, social skills were investigated to determine their relationship with marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

In the context of Rivers State, however, married civil servants are confronted with occupational, financial, family, and interpersonal responsibilities that may affect the quality of their marital relationships and, consequently, their marital satisfaction. Despite the potential relevance of emotional intelligence in helping individuals manage these challenges and maintain satisfactory marital relationships, there remains a need to empirically establish how its specific dimensions relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. Therefore, this study investigated the relationships between self-awareness,

empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, social skills, and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Statement of Problem

Marriage is expected to provide emotional support, companionship, stability, and psychological well-being for spouses. However, recent observations in Nigeria indicate increasing cases of marital instability, frequent conflicts, separation, divorce, and domestic violence among married couples. These problems have continued to threaten family stability, children's welfare, and societal development despite the availability of marriage counselling services, religious interventions, and family support systems. The persistence of these challenges suggests that many couples still experience difficulties in maintaining satisfying marital relationships.

Among married civil servants in Rivers State, the situation appears more challenging because of the nature of their occupation. Long working hours, heavy workloads, increasing economic hardship, financial responsibilities, and workplace pressures often reduce the time available for effective communication and emotional bonding between spouses. Consequently, many married civil servants experience frequent misunderstandings, poor conflict resolution, emotional distance, and dissatisfaction in their marriages. These conditions have contributed to increasing marital instability, which may eventually result in separation, divorce, domestic violence, poor psychological well-being, and reduced productivity at work.

Although researchers have identified several external factors such as income, educational level, occupational stress, cultural expectations, and family responsibilities as contributors to marital dissatisfaction, these factors do not fully explain why some couples maintain satisfying marriages despite experiencing similar challenges while others experience persistent marital problems. This suggests that internal psychological characteristics may also play an important role in determining marital satisfaction.

Despite the growing body of literature on personality traits, and marital satisfaction, empirical findings remain inconsistent. While some studies reported significant positive relationships, others found weak, negative, or insignificant relationships depending on the study population and cultural context. Furthermore, most previous studies were conducted outside Rivers State or focused on teachers, healthcare workers, students, or the general married population, with limited attention given to married civil servants.

The problem, therefore, is that despite the increasing incidence of marital instability, separation, divorce, domestic violence, and declining marital satisfaction among married civil

servants in Rivers State, it is not yet clearly established whether personality traits (openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism) significantly relate to their marital satisfaction. This gap in empirical knowledge necessitated the present study on emotional intelligence, personality traits, and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out the extent to which emotional intelligence relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

The following specific objectives guided the study:

1. Determine the extent to which self-awareness relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
2. Examine the extent to which empathy relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
3. Find out the extent self-regulation relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
4. Ascertain the extent to which self-motivation relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
5. Determine the extent to which social skills relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study:

1. To what extent does self-awareness relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?
2. To what extent does empathy relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?
3. To what extent does self-regulation relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?
4. To what extent does self-motivation relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?
5. To what extent do social skills relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are formulated which guided the conduct of this study and were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. Self-awareness does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
2. Empathy does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
3. Self-regulation does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
4. Self-motivation does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.
5. Social skills do not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was appropriate because the study sought to determine the extent of the relationship between dimensions of emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction without manipulating the variables.

The population of the study comprised 22,622 married civil servants in Rivers State (Rivers State Civil Service Commission, 2026). A sample of 396 married civil servants was selected for the study using a multistage sampling technique. Six ministries were selected through simple random sampling. Three departments were subsequently selected from each ministry, resulting in 18 departments. Respondents were selected from the identified departments using simple random sampling.

Data for the study were collected using the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS) and the Marital Satisfaction Scale (MSS). The Emotional Intelligence Scale was adapted from the emotional intelligence framework developed by Goleman (1998). The instrument measured five dimensions of emotional intelligence: self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, and social skills. The Marital Satisfaction Scale was used to measure respondents' level of satisfaction in their marital relationships. The instruments were structured using a four-point Likert response format ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). The instruments were subjected to face and content validation by experts in the relevant areas of educational measurement and research. Their observations and recommendations were incorporated into the final versions of the instruments. The data collected were analysed

using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). The hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Question one: To what extent does self-awareness relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?

Hypotheses One: Self-awareness does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Table 1: Showing Pearson Product Moment Correlation On the relationship between self-awareness relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Variables	N	r	Sig.	Remarks
Self –awareness	396	.501**	.000	Statistically significant
Marital satisfaction				

Table 1 showed that the correlation coefficient obtained was .501. The result revealed a moderate positive relationship between self-awareness and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers state. The relationship between self-awareness and marital satisfaction is statistically significant at .000 when compared to the alpha level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis which stated that self-awareness does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State was rejected. It was therefore concluded that self-awareness significantly and positively relates to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: To what extent does empathy relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?

Hypotheses Two: Empathy does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Table 2: Showing Pearson Product Moment Correlation On the relationship between empathy and marital satisfaction.

Variables	N	r	Sig.	Remarks
Empathy	396	.735**	.000	Statistically significant
Marital satisfaction				

Table 2 showed that the correlation coefficient obtained was .735. The result revealed a strong positive relationship between empathy and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers state. The relationship between empathy and marital satisfaction is statistically significant at .000 when compared to the alpha level of 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis which states that empathy does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State was rejected. The finding therefore establishes that empathy significantly and strongly relates to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: To what extent does self-regulation relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?

Hypotheses Three: self-regulation does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Table 3: Showing Pearson Product Moment Correlation On the relationship between self-regulation and marital satisfaction.

Variables	N	r	Sig.	Remarks
self-regulation	396	.705**	.000	Statistically significant
Marital satisfaction				

Table 3 presents the result of the relationship between self-regulation and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. The result shows a correlation coefficient of $r = .705$ and a significance value of $p = .000$. The coefficient of .705 reveals a strong positive relationship between self-regulation and marital satisfaction. Since the significance value of .000 is less than the .05 alpha level, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that self-regulation does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State was rejected. It was concluded that self-regulation significantly and positively relates to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Research Question Four: To what extent does self-motivation relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?

Hypotheses Four: self-motivation does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Table 4: Showing Pearson Product Moment Correlation On the relationship between self-motivation and marital satisfaction.

Variables	N	r	Sig.	Remarks
self-motivation	396	.553**	.000	Statistically significant
Marital satisfaction				

Table 4 shows the result of the relationship between self-motivation and marital satisfaction. The result yielded a correlation coefficient of $r = .553$ and a significance value of $p = .000$. The coefficient of .553 indicates a moderate positive relationship between self-motivation and marital satisfaction. The probability value of .000 is less than .05; hence, the relationship is statistically significant. The null hypothesis which states that self-motivation does not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State was therefore rejected. It was concluded that self-motivation significantly and positively relates to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State

Research Question Five: To what extent does social skills relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State?

Hypotheses Five: social skills do not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

Table 5: Showing Pearson Product Moment Correlation On the relationship between social skills and marital satisfaction.

Variables	N	r	Sig.	Remarks
Social skills	396	.721**	.000	Statistically significant
Marital satisfaction				

Table 5 presents the correlation result for the relationship between social skills and marital satisfaction. The result shows a correlation coefficient of $r = .721$ and a significance value of $p = .000$. The correlation coefficient of .721 indicates a strong positive relationship between social skills and marital satisfaction. Since the probability value of .000 is less than the .05 level of significance, the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis which states that social skills do not significantly relate to marital satisfaction among married

civil servants in Rivers State was rejected. It was concluded that social skills significantly and positively relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION

The study revealed a statistically significant moderate positive relationship between self-awareness and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. This indicates that higher levels of self-awareness are associated with increased levels of marital satisfaction, suggesting that spouses who possess a better understanding of their emotions, thoughts, strengths, weaknesses, and behavioural patterns are more likely to experience satisfying and stable marital relationships. The observed moderate correlation further implies that although self-awareness contributes meaningfully to marital satisfaction, it does not operate in isolation but rather interacts with other psychological, interpersonal, and socio-environmental factors that shape marital outcomes. Consequently, self-awareness can be regarded as an important emotional intelligence competency that enhances effective communication, emotional regulation, empathy, constructive conflict resolution, and mutual understanding between spouses, thereby promoting healthier and more fulfilling marital relationships among married civil servants in Rivers State. The present finding is consistent with the study of Reis and Shaver (2011), who found that integrative self-knowledge was positively associated with marital satisfaction among Iranian couples. According to Reis and Shaver (2011), individuals who possess greater understanding of their thoughts, emotions, and life experiences are more likely to demonstrate healthier interpersonal adjustment. This supports the present result because self-aware spouses may better understand their personal expectations and emotional needs, thereby reducing unnecessary misunderstandings within marriage.

The study also revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between empathy and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. This finding indicates that married civil servants who demonstrate higher levels of empathy are more likely to experience greater satisfaction in their marital relationships. The strength of the relationship suggests that empathy constitutes a critical dimension of emotional intelligence that enhances the quality of spousal interactions through understanding, compassion, emotional responsiveness, and effective interpersonal communication. The result implies that spouses who are capable of accurately perceiving, understanding, and responding appropriately to each other's emotional needs are better equipped to resolve conflicts constructively, provide mutual emotional support, and foster trust, intimacy, and commitment

within the marriage. Consequently, empathy serves as a protective interpersonal resource that promotes marital harmony, stability, and overall relationship satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. The result is consistent with the study of Reis and Shaver (2011), who found a significant positive relationship between marital empathy and marital satisfaction among married individuals. Their study reported that greater expression of empathy was associated with higher marital satisfaction, whereas dysfunctional anger was negatively associated with marital satisfaction. This supports the present finding by showing that empathy promotes positive emotional exchanges in marriage, while hostile emotional responses undermine marital well-being.

The finding of this study revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between self-regulation and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. This finding indicates that married civil servants who possess higher levels of self-regulation are more likely to experience greater satisfaction in their marital relationships. The magnitude of the relationship suggests that self-regulation is a fundamental component of emotional intelligence that promotes healthy marital functioning by enabling spouses to effectively manage their emotions, control impulsive behaviours, and respond constructively to interpersonal challenges. The finding further implies that individuals who demonstrate emotional self-control, patience, and thoughtful decision-making are better equipped to handle marital disagreements, reduce unnecessary conflicts, and maintain mutual respect and understanding within the relationship. Consequently, self-regulation serves as an essential psychological resource that fosters effective communication, emotional stability, conflict resolution, and long-term marital harmony, thereby enhancing the overall quality and satisfaction of marriage among married civil servants in Rivers State. The result is consistent with the work of Finkel, Slotter, Luchies, Walton, and Gross (2013), who found that self-control was positively related to relationship quality and constructive responses to relationship problems. According to Finkel et al. (2013), individuals with greater self-control are better able to resist destructive impulses and respond more constructively when confronted with relationship difficulties. This supports the present result because self-regulation may enable spouses to avoid retaliatory behaviours, remain calm during conflict, and pursue long-term marital goals rather than reacting to immediate frustration.

The finding of this study revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between self-motivation and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. This finding indicates that married civil servants who possess higher levels of self-motivation are more likely to experience greater marital satisfaction than those with lower levels of this

emotional intelligence component. The positive relationship suggests that self-motivation, characterized by intrinsic drive, optimism, perseverance, resilience, commitment to personal and relational goals, and the ability to remain focused despite challenges, contributes positively to the quality of marital relationships. Individuals with high levels of self-motivation are more likely to invest sustained effort in nurturing their marriages, approach marital challenges with determination, maintain a positive outlook during periods of conflict, and demonstrate commitment to achieving long-term relationship goals. These attributes promote constructive communication, mutual support, emotional resilience, and effective problem-solving, thereby enhancing marital adjustment's and relationship stability. Although the relationship is moderate rather than very strong, the finding underscores self-motivation as an important emotional competence that contributes significantly to marital satisfaction while indicating that other dimensions of emotional intelligence, personality traits, and contextual factors also influence the overall quality of marriage among married civil servants in Rivers State. The finding is consistent with the work of Oniel (2019), whose investment model of commitment proposes that individuals remain committed to relationships when they are satisfied, have invested resources in the relationship, and perceive limited attractive alternatives. Self-motivation is relevant to this position because internally motivated spouses may be more willing to invest time, emotional energy, patience, and effort in sustaining the marriage. Such investment may promote relationship stability and satisfaction.

The finding of this study revealed a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between social skills and marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. This finding indicates that married civil servants who demonstrate higher levels of social skills are more likely to experience greater marital satisfaction than those with lower levels of this emotional intelligence component. The strong positive relationship suggests that social skills, which encompass effective communication, active listening, interpersonal competence, cooperation, conflict resolution, and relationship management, play a critical role in fostering healthy and satisfying marital relationships. Individuals with well-developed social skills are better equipped to express their thoughts and emotions appropriately, understand their spouses' perspectives, resolve disagreements constructively, and maintain positive interpersonal interactions that strengthen emotional intimacy and mutual trust. Consequently, social skills serve as an essential interpersonal resource that promotes effective communication, marital adjustment, relationship stability, and overall marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. Similarly, Hahlweg and Richter (2010) reported that communication and problem-solving skills are important predictors of marital quality.

Their findings indicate that couples who can express concerns clearly, listen to one another, and solve problems collaboratively tend to experience better relationship outcomes. This supports the present finding because social skills provide the practical interpersonal foundation through which spouses manage daily marital demands.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that self-awareness, empathy, self-regulation, self-motivation, and social skills significantly and positively relate to marital satisfaction among married civil servants in Rivers State. The findings demonstrate that emotional competencies play an important role in the quality of marital relationships.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counsellors and marriage therapists should incorporate emotional intelligence training into marital counselling programmes.
2. Married civil servants should be encouraged to develop greater self-awareness and emotional regulation skills to improve their marital relationships.
3. Workplace wellness programmes should incorporate training on empathy, communication, interpersonal relationships, and emotional management.
4. Couples should be encouraged to develop effective social and communication skills for constructive conflict resolution and improved marital satisfaction.

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