Gender Differences in Preferences in Marriage Partner's Selection among University Undergraduates in South-South Zone of Nigeria

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KEYWORDS Undergraduates. Partner Selection. Male. Female. Preferences. South-South Zone

ABSTRACT The study sought to examine gender differences in preferences in marriage partner selection among university undergraduates in south-south zone of Nigeria. The study population was made up of 135 231 university undergraduates in south- south zone of Nigeria. The sample was made up of 1420 university undergraduates randomly selected from 7 universities out of 11 universities in the zone. Independent t- test was used to test the hypothesis at.05 level of significance. The result of the findings indicated that gender differences do not exist in preferences in marriage partner's selection in terms of personality traits, marriage partner's socio-economic status and physical attractiveness. Counseling implications were derived from the findings which include that counselors should create awareness by organizing awareness campaign programmes in the universities on the process of selecting a marriage partner.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage partner selection can be seen as a special instance of inter-personal attraction. Youngsters develop intimacy with others particularly when they are undergraduates. Intimacy here is more than sexual intimacy; it is about the essential ability to relate one's deepest hopes and fears to another person and to accept in turn another person's need for intimacy. Each individual is entirely alone in the sense that no one else can experience life exactly the way another does. Individuals' are imprisoned in their own bodies and can never be certain that their senses experience the same event in the same way as another person's senses. Only if one becomes intimate with another is one able to understand and have confidence in oneself. During this time of life, people's identity may be fulfilled through the living validation of the person with whom one has dared to be intimate. Marriage is the socially recognized union of two people; it is an effective method of regulating heterosexual intercourse. Marriage establishes social relationships that are the foundation for families and households. Single young people are capable of getting married for the wrong reasons. A young person might enter marriage on the basis of romantic feelings alone. It is assumed that youngsters in the universities may not have a firm sense of identity; they are in the process of identity seeking and may experience identity crisis. Identity confusion causes self-doubt. Various qualities attract an individual to a romantic partner in the process of marriage partner's selection among undergraduates. As the relationship progress, they come to realize that these qualities that form the basis of attraction are not what they desire resulting to break up of the relationship.

Daily counselling observation of university undergraduates reveals that undergraduates largely make choices of their partners on their immaturity. As the relationship progresses they become mature, their perception change, and their values also change, creating a sense of dissatisfaction in their relationships and resulting in break-ups. Since undergraduates are predominately in the stage of young adulthood, which marks the typical phase when love relationship, alliances and marriage partnerships are initiated or formed, this study therefore, set out to examine gender differences in preferences in marriage partner's selection among university undergraduates in south-south zone of Nigeria.

The aim of this study is to find out if there are differences in the gender of the university undergraduates' preferences in marriage partner selection in terms of personality traits, socio-economic status and physical attractiveness. Therefore, the research question guiding this study is what differences do gender differences have on university undergraduates' preferences in mar-

riage partner selection in terms of personality traits, socio- economic status and physical attractiveness?

The hypothesis directing this study states that there is no significant difference between male and female university undergraduates in their preferences in marriage partner's selection in terms of personality traits, socio-economic status and physical attractiveness.

Literature Review

Human gender differences reflect the pressure of differences in physical and social environments between females and males. These differences, to a large extent, affect their preferences in marriage partner selection.

Evolutionary psychologists have noted that men and women seek different traits when looking for a marriage partner (Cate Bassett and Dabbs 2003). Nelson and Morrison (2002) found that women value physical characteristics in men such as height, masculinity, and broad shoulders (Barber 1995) and personality characteristics such as power, ascendance and dominance (Botwin Buss and Shackelford 1997). It has been argued that such traits are desirable because they signal the ability to provide resources. However, such traits could also signal the ability to provide protection from a variety of threats, including sexual predators. They went further to reveal that because of physical sex differences in size and strength, ancestral women were at a risk for predation than were ancestral men. A further disadvantage of women's smaller stature was the potential for injury caused by male attempts to limit women's sexual access to other males through violence or intimidation. As a result, women should have evolved preferences for stronger marriage partners who could provide protection from predators and other males.

Khallad (2005) findings confirmed the existence of commonly reported gender differences. In that, sample of Jordanian male college students show greater interest in potential marriage partners' good looks and youthfulness compared to female students, who display greater preference for marriage partners exhibiting economic ability and commitment. The findings further indicated that women's differential preferences for resources-and commitment- related attributes were mainly determine by gender rather than socio-economic status. Also, the study as cor-

robarted by Sadalla (2004) indicated that gender differences were apparent. Specifically hypothetical partner's physical attractiveness and chastity were more important to male students while female students indicated socio- economic status as the important reason for choice.

In another study, Kenrick (1990) revealed that when college students were asked about the minimum intelligence they would require in a partner; men, but not women, were prepared to have partners of much lower intelligence than women. Moreover, men rated the following features as attractive in a woman: symmetrical face and body, a waist to hip ratio (WHR) of about 0.7. The features are associated with a strong immune system, high estrogen level, developmental stability and youthfulness. All these signal youth and high fertility. When women were presented with diagrams of males with waist to hip ratios between 0.7 and 1.0 they chose the figure with a WHR of 0.9 (Singh 1995). In the same vein, Kenrick and Keefe (1992) observed that men were looking for youthfulness in their partners, whereas women seek marriage partners who are good providers of resources.

In another development, Todosijevic et al. (2003) examined predictions from evolutionary and socio-structural perspectives on sex differences in marriage partner's selection criteria on a sample of 127 respondents from Serbia. The respondents, mainly college students, were asked to assess the degree of undesirability of sixty behavioural and personality traits in a potential marriage partner, on 7 point Likert type scale. The sexes strongly agree in general ranking of the traits' desirability. The obtained statistically significant differences tend to favour evolutionary interpretation. The largest differences are in the perceived desirability of thinness, strength, fearfulness, self-pity, fragility, aggressiveness and beauty. Males perceive all these traits as more desirable than females except that females value strength more positively. Male respondents are less troubled by negative character traits of potential partners, while females are less concerned with partner's physical appearance. The higher status of women correlated positively with their concern with a marriage partner's potential socio-economic status contrary to the prediction of the socio-structural model.

Socio-structural perspectives view sex differences in marriage partner selection criteria as the outcome of the interaction of class and inequali-

ties, sexual power relation and patriarchal ideology (Eagly and Wood 1999; Jackson 1992). Eagly and Wood (1999) attributed the decisive causal influence to the different social roles men and women are routinely assigned. Since typical male social roles are accompanied with greater power and prestige, women, lead by the desire to maximize their outcomes within the constraint that society establishes for people of their sex, seek to exchange their appearance and nurturance for characteristics associated with male roles. In favour of the socio-structural interpretation for example, the finding that in recent decades, with increased social and economic equality, sexes have become more alike in their marriage partner preferences, although the convergence seems to be mostly due to men approaching women's standards (Buss et al. 2001).

Denisiuk (2005) positioned that physical appearance played a big part in marriage partner selection. Women prefer men with more symmetrical features, clear, unblemished skin; and white sclera of the eye, because these features indicate good health, which also mean good genes. Women also prefer that men have masculine features such as: strong jaw, facial hair, broader shoulders, narrower hips, and a muscular build, because these indicate sufficient testosterone for fertility. Men have their own preferences in physical appearance of their marriage partners. Men tend to seek for women with full lips, hips and a smaller waist, because these indicate sufficient estrogen levels to successfully give birth to a child. Men also look for facial symmetry, shiny hair, clear skin and white sclera. Men are less concerned about social status of their chosen marriage partners.

Women are often limited in social power, so they would seek advancement through their marriage partners. They will look for a marriage partner who has characteristics of power, good earning capacity, and higher education, because these will boost a woman's social standing. Men are judged as being good providers, so when women are in a search for a mate they tend to look for someone who can provide what they lack. Men will seek a marriage partner who has qualities of being nurturing, a good cook and ability to perform domestic tasks (Howard et al. 1987).

Accordingly, Canning (2005) posited that emotional characteristics, personality traits and supportiveness are the qualities that females seek in a marriage partner. He continues that these qualities outweigh more notable characteristics such as physical attractiveness which is superficial and holds no bearing whatsoever. Also, Nevid (2004) posited that subjects were asked to rate various physical features, demographic characteristics and personal qualities in terms of their degree of importance in determining choice of partners in both sexual and long- term relationships. Consistent with the sex- role stereotype, males place relatively greater emphasis than females on the physical characteristics of their prospective partners. Females emphasize the personal qualities of their prospective partners than did males.

Supporting Nevid (2004) assertion, Regan Medina and Joshi (2001) revealed that men desire honesty and trustworthiness from a potential partner more than women and women value a long- term romantic partner's family orientation more than men. Contrary to this, Cere (2001) revealed that males and females have radically divergent sexual psychologies. Women value and select men on the basis of their ability to provide nourishment, protection, security, and social status for themselves and their offspring. Females seek dominant males, status symbols such as: power, money, social position, intelligence, education, skills and the ability to further raise the social profile of women. Males, on the other hand, are hardwired to seek sexual liaisons with women who show signs of reproductive viability, such as health, youth and physical attractiveness.

On his part Kruger (1998) posited that marriage partner selection was determined by variables such as survival, health, material wealth and social status. This is supported by the study of Fisher (2002). According to him, females select males with higher social status and access to resources, ones who could successfully provide for them and their offspring.

METHODOLOGY

Design: The research design used in this study was the descriptive survey design.

Population of the Study: The population of the study consisted of all the university undergraduates in south-south zone of Nigeria. The number of these students was one hundred and thirty-five thousand and two hundred and thirty-one (135231).

Sample of the Study: The sample of this study

consisted of one thousand four hundred and twenty (1420) undergraduates from seven universities randomly selected for this study. These universities include: University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State; University of Calabar, Cross River State; Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State; Delta State University, Delta State; Ambrose Alli University, Edo State; University of Port – Harcourt, Rivers State; and Igbinedion University, Edo State.

Instrumentation: The research instrument used for data collection in this study is a questionnaire titled "Preferences in Marriage partners' Selection" designed by the researcher for university undergraduates. The questionnaire was divided into two sections: section A of the questionnaire was designed to elicit personal information about the respondents. Such information includes: sex, age, year of study, and socio- economic class. Section B focused on items designed to elicit responses that were used to achieve the objective of this study and answer to research question. It was designed to obtain data on such variables as: personality traits, socio-economic status and physical attractiveness.

Validation of the Instrument: To ensure that the instrument "P.I.M.P.S" measures what it was expected to measure, copies were sent to experts in Measurement and Evaluation, Psychologists and Guidance and Counselling. These experts were used to ensure content validity. They ascertain that the questions raised were unambiguous, clear and relevant. These experts certified the content validity of the instrument.

Reliability of the Instrument: To determine the reliability of the instrument "P.I.M.P.S." a pilot testing was done using one hundred (100) undergraduates randomly selected from Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State. The reason for the choice of these respondents was that they do not constitute part of the population for the final study. This is to ensure that respondents for the final study do not have privileged infor-

mation about the questionnaire, which could cause biased response. Cronbach Co-efficient Alpha reliability estimates of the various sub scales of the research instrument are .78 for physical attractiveness, .79 for personality traits and .93 for socio- economic status.

Data Collection Procedure: The data for this study was obtained from the use of the questionnaire, which was administered in each of the universities. An arrangement was made with some lecturers and students in these universities in assisting the researcher in the administration and collection of the questionnaire in each of the universities of the study.

RESULTS

The hypothesis stated: there is no significant difference between male and female university undergraduates in their preferences in marriage partners' selection in terms of personality traits, socio-economic status and physical attractiveness. Statistical analysis technique used to test this hypothesis was Independent t-test as shown in the Table 1.

Table 1 shows an independent t-test analysis of the comparison of male and female university undergraduate's preferences in terms of personality traits, marriage partner's socio-economic status and physical attractiveness. The result of data analysis shows that the respondents are not significantly different in their marriage partner's preferences in terms of personality traits (male t= -14.94, female t = - 14.66), marriage partner's socio- economic status (male t = .351, female t = .349). A critical examination of the mean scores in the table reveals that in terms of personality traits males mean = 35.98 are less than that of their females mean =41.91 indicating that female undergraduates preference in term of personality traits are higher than the male undergraduates, also indicating that personality traits is a higher preference to females than males; same

Table1: Independent t- test comparison of males and females in terms of preferences

Preferences	Sex	N	X	SD	t-Value	df
Personality traits	Male	907	35.98	6.99	-14.94	1417
	Female	512	41.91	7.49	-14.66	1417
Marriage partner	Male	907	35.57	12.11	-14.25	1417
Socio-economic status	Female	512	44.77	10.87	-14.68	1417
Physical attractiveness	Male	907	35.58	8.93	.351	1417
	Female	512	35.40	9.13	.349	1417

*Significant at .05,   t-critical   = 1.96;   N=1419; df =1417

also for marriage partner's socio-economic status where the mean for males is 35.57 and that of females is 44.77, indicating that in terms of marriage partner's socio-economic status females prefer males with higher socio-economic status than themselves, while it is not too important to the males. Also, in terms of physical attractiveness the mean for males is 35.58 while that of females is 35.40, this shows a little higher mean for males than the females an indication that male undergraduates take physical attractiveness as an important factor than the female undergraduates. With these result, the hypothesis, which states that male and female university undergraduates are not significantly different in preferences in marriage partner's selection in terms of personality traits, marriage partner's socio- economic status and physical attractiveness was retained. It is thus concluded that male and female university undergraduates do not significantly differ in preferences in marriage partner's selection in terms of personality traits, socio- economic status and physical attractiveness.

DISCUSSION

A critical examination of mean score in the table revealed that female university undergraduate's preferences in terms of personality traits and socio- economic status are higher than that of the male university undergraduates. On the other hand, male university means score in terms of physical attractiveness is slightly higher. This is not too surprising because female undergraduates do prefer marriage partners with good character, emotionally stable, industrious, warm, dependable, and ambitious and all these components of personality traits while a marriage partner with good looks, good physique without the above mentioned components of personality traits will not be preferred. Similarly, in terms of socio- economic status it is equally not surprising in that female university undergraduates prefer a marriage partner with high socio-economic status. In that, one's husband should be able to take care of one's needs as the head of the home. It is thus concluded that male and female university undergraduates do not significantly differ in preferences in marriage partner's selection in terms of personality traits, marriage partner's socio-economic status and physical attractiveness as shown by the result of the independent

t- test. This finding is in agreement with the results of earlier studies of Buss et al. (2001) and Booster (1999).

However, in terms of personality traits there is a significant difference in male mean of 35.98 and female mean of 41.91. The mean result shows that mean for female is higher than male mean. This result is supported by some earlier studies. Canning (2005) posited that emotional characteristics, personality traits and supportiveness are the qualities that females seek in a marriage partner, and these qualities outweigh more notable characteristics such as physical attractiveness as being superficial and holds no bearing whatsoever.

Furthermore, the result in terms of socio- economic status indicates that the mean 44.77 for female undergraduates is higher than the mean 35.52 for male undergraduates, indicating a difference in marriage partner's selection in terms of socio-economic status. This is supported by the finding of Eagly and Wood (1999), Sadalla (2004) and Khallad (2005), confirming the existence of commonly reported sex differences.

The result in terms of physical attractiveness indicated that male mean of 35.58 is higher than female mean of 35.40 showing differences in their preferences in marriage partner's selection. This is supported by the findings of Buss (1989) who posited that men place a greater emphasis on physical attractiveness or good looks. This is also supported by the studies of Berscheid and Walster (1990) that revealed that physical attractiveness is more important for men than women.

IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

The heaviest responsibility for the selection of a great marriage partner rests with the two people who are considering one another. The findings of this study have been found to have counseling implications for counsellors.

The implication of this finding is that there is a great need for undergraduates' awareness that making a wrong choice of life partner could result in divorce and family dysfunctions and unhappiness in marriage. It is the responsibility of the counselor to create this awareness and this can be done through individual counselling, group counselling and family counselling.

Counselors should also counsel undergraduate on the area of hasty choice of marriage partner's, undergraduates should be encourag-

ed to be patient and at the same time take their time to know the person properly. This can be done through group counselling and giving out of hand bill to undergraduates.

Also, counselors should encourage undergraduates to watch especially for signs of internal qualities in themselves or the other tend to become obvious when the initial excitement has worn off a little. This can be carried out during workshops, seminars and symposia.

Conclusively, counselors should encourage undergraduates to seek counselling from professional counselors on matters concerning marriage and marriage partner's selection.

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