

# Psychosocio-Spiritual Factors of Marital Satisfaction among Couples in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya

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## ABSTRACT

Marital satisfaction is a crucial condition for providing a secure environment for the family, emotional health, and overall functioning of family relationships. In religious groups, the marital relationship is usually influenced by psychological, social, and spiritual factors. This research attempted to study the psychosocial-spiritual factors that influence marital satisfaction in the parish families in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The specific psychosocial-spiritual factors studied in marital satisfaction included communication, emotional support, family support, socioeconomic problems, conflict resolution, and spiritual exercises. The research used a qualitative descriptive design and was held in selected parishes in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The respondents were Catholic married couples. The samples were obtained using purposive sampling, and a total of twenty couples (forty individual respondents) participated. Open-ended questionnaires were used to collect data. The results revealed that effective communication, emotional support, and effective solutions to conflicts were vital in ensuring marital satisfaction, providing trust, intimacy, and interdependence in social relationships. The respondents experienced inefficient communications at times due to stronger emotional reactions, more financial than time resources, and more burdens of emotional strain. The findings further revealed that the family members of the couples became a pillar of emotional and financial support, especially in times of economic distress, experienced a lot of interference most of the time, and were not seen as very beneficial most of the time. The general spiritual aspect found to be relevant in marital satisfaction was the shared spiritual exercises like prayer and participation in church activities, as they enhanced marital bonding, aided in overcoming difficulties, and strengthened commitment. Based on the findings, marital satisfaction appeared to be a result of the interaction of psychological competence, social environment, and spiritual resources.

**Keywords:** Marital satisfaction, psychosocial factors, spirituality, communication, family support, Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

Marital satisfaction, as a core indicator of the quality and stability of intimate relationships, plays a critical role in individual psychological well-being, family harmony, and broader social cohesion (Bijani et al., 2023; Hakimi Dezfouli & Ebrahimpour, 2024).

Research conducted in Western countries such as the United States, Canada, and Australia has increasingly emphasized the multidimensional nature of marital satisfaction within individualistic societies that prioritize personal emotional fulfillment. Across these contexts, marital satisfaction is consistently associated with psychological health, life satisfaction, and overall well-being (Grau et al., 2025; Ndayambaje et al., 2020). Empirical studies in the United States identify emotional regulation, stress management, and interpersonal dynamics—particularly intimacy, communication, and empathy—as central predictors of relational quality (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022; Remes et al., 2021). Critically, however, much of this literature reflects individualistic cultural assumptions that may not fully translate to collectivist or faith-centered contexts, limiting the generalizability of these findings across diverse settings.

In Canada, longitudinal studies similarly indicate that marital satisfaction is shaped by both psychological dynamics and broader social structures, including family support systems and socio-economic conditions (Raymond & Poulin, 2023; Machette & Cionea, 2023). These findings reinforce the view that relational

satisfaction is not reducible to individual attributes alone but is co-constituted by the social environments in which couples are embedded. Extending this integrative perspective, research from Australia and other Western multicultural contexts has begun to recognize the contribution of spirituality and shared belief systems to marital quality, noting that values such as commitment, forgiveness, and emotional resilience are positively associated with long-term relationship stability (Lomotey, 2025; Mahoney & Boyatzis, 2008). Taken together, the Western literature converges on the view that psychological, social, and spiritual factors are not discrete determinants but operate interactively, necessitating holistic analytical frameworks for understanding marital satisfaction (Grau et al., 2025; Zhai et al., 2024).

Despite the growing Western literature, research on marital satisfaction within Sub-Saharan Africa remains comparatively limited, even as the social and relational context of marriage differs markedly from Western individualistic assumptions. In Ghana, South Africa, and related contexts, marriage is embedded within extended family systems and communal frameworks that significantly shape relational dynamics and expectations (Amoah et al., 2021; Mokoena & Sekgobela, 2022). While psychological factors such as communication, emotional support, and conflict resolution remain relevant, they are often mediated by socio-cultural expectations including gender roles, bride wealth practices, and family involvement in ways that Western models do not adequately account for (Oppong Asante & Oti-Boadi, 2020; Mosoetsa & Schmidt, 2021). Spirituality and religiosity also assume a more prominent role in these contexts, with shared faith practices and spiritual coping mechanisms shown to enhance marital commitment and resilience (Gyimah et al., 2022; Banda & Mudzanani, 2023). A key limitation of the African literature, however, is the tendency to examine psychosocial and spiritual dimensions in isolation, without integrative frameworks that adequately capture their combined influence on marital outcomes (Amoah et al., 2021). This gap is particularly pronounced in Kenyan contexts, where marriage is shaped by communal, cultural, and religious frameworks that call for context-specific, holistic inquiry (Owino et al., 2022; Mutiso et al., 2023). Recent Kenyan studies confirm that communication, financial stability, and family involvement are central to marital satisfaction, yet spiritual commitment and participation in faith-based activities are equally salient dimensions that have rarely been integrated within a unified analytical framework (Kimani & Ochieng, 2022; Wambua & Ngari, 2021). The present study addresses this gap by adopting a holistic psychosocio-spiritual perspective within a Catholic faith community in Nairobi.

Two theoretical frameworks guide this study. Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959) proposes that individuals evaluate their relationships through cost-benefit analyses, and that perceived relational rewards such as emotional support, intimacy, and shared responsibilities must outweigh perceived costs for satisfaction to be sustained. In the marital context, this framework helps explain why factors such as effective communication, financial stability, and mutual support are strongly associated with higher levels of marital satisfaction, while stressors such as financial insecurity and unresolved conflict may erode it. The Spirituality and Religious Coping Theory (Pargament, 2001) complements this perspective by illuminating how individuals draw upon religious beliefs, prayer, and faith communities as resources for managing adversity and maintaining relational commitment. Applied to marriage, this theory suggests that shared spiritual practices function as protective factors, providing couples with moral guidance, emotional regulation, and a transcendent sense of purpose that reinforces marital bonds. Together, these frameworks offer an integrative lens through which the psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of marital satisfaction can be examined holistically.

Among the Catholics, marriage is seen as a birthright, a gift from God (Dobie, 1999). Catholics also see marriage as a sacred act, a sacrament. So marriage is not viewed only as a contract but as an act of a special kind of covenant, based on love and faithfulness, and love expressed through self-giving. It is understood to be a partnership in a spiritual as well as social or civil sense. Marriage is also described as a struggle, a spiritual journey, based on communication, commitment, forgiveness, and an appreciation of the spiritual life together (Ghioto, 2024). Catholics emphasize positive use of communication and active participation in church life.

In Kenya, the Catholic Church has been instrumental in advancing the ideals of family life and the stability of marriages. The Archdiocese of Nairobi is just one Catholic diocese that has sought to cater for the needs of its large and diverse Catholic population by promoting family and marriage-strengthening activities like marriage preparation courses, family ministry activities, provision of counselling services, and pastoral care for those facing marriage challenges.

Marital satisfaction has been examined from a psychological and social perspective, but only relatively few studies have investigated the prominent role that these perspectives may play, along with the spiritual perspective, in a religious community in Kenya. It is therefore critical to examine a holistic perspective of the interwoven three dimensions in order to inform pastoral care, counseling, and family life education strategies and interventions. This study, therefore, seeks to explore the lived experiences of married couples within the Archdiocese of Nairobi in order to understand how psychological, social, and spiritual factors influence marital satisfaction. By examining these psychosocio-spiritual dimensions, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of marital relationships within faith-based communities and provide insights that may inform pastoral care, counseling practice, and family ministry initiatives.

### Research Questions

1. What psychosocial factors do couples in the Archdiocese of Nairobi describe as contributing to their marital satisfaction?
2. How do spiritual practices influence the marital experiences of couples in the Archdiocese of Nairobi?

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the psychosocio-spiritual factors contributing to marital satisfaction among couples in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya. The qualitative descriptive approach was appropriate for this study because it allows for rich, contextually grounded descriptions of participants' perceptions and lived experiences within their natural settings (Tenny & Brannan, 2022).

The area of study, the Archdiocese of Nairobi, is considered a wide representation of Catholics, and as an archdiocese, actively endeavors to promote the institution of marriage and family life through various parish programs. The respondents were married couples who were an active part of their local parish community. Married couples, having been married for a period of at least a year, were involved in this study to ensure that respondents had accumulated enough marital experience to be able to rate and reflect on their own marital satisfaction.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, which is the most frequently used method in qualitative research to identify participants with the appropriate and relevant experiences related to the phenomenon being studied (Bisht, 2024). Twenty married couples participated, resulting in 40 total respondents.

Data were gathered through open-ended questionnaires using the participants' own words. The questionnaire addressed significant topics related to marital satisfaction, including marital communication, marital support among couples, extended family support and social support, financial and social disorder, and spiritual practices.

The collected data were analyzed thematically following the six-phase procedure described by Ayre and McCaffery (2022), which involves familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. Each participant's responses were read through carefully multiple times to attain a thorough understanding of the data. Initial open codes were then assigned to meaningful units of data—words, phrases, or sentences—that reflected participants' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes related to psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions of their marriages. These codes were subsequently grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarity. Candidate themes were then reviewed against the coded data to ensure coherence and relevance to the research questions, and themes were refined iteratively until a stable thematic structure was achieved. The final themes were named to reflect both the content of the data and the broader theoretical framework guiding the study. Data saturation was attained when further participant responses yielded no new codes or themes (Ahmed, 2024).

Ethical considerations were adhered to. The study was voluntary, and each respondent gave informed consent before filling out the questionnaires. The confidentiality and anonymity of participants were assured and they were informed of the right to withdraw from the study at any stage.

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## FINDINGS

The demographic profile of the study participants revealed that the majority were female, accounting for 57.1% of respondents. Most participants were aged between 40 and 49 years (57.1%), indicating that the sample comprised predominantly mature adults. A significant proportion of respondents had been married for over 20 years (42.9%), suggesting that many participants had substantial experience in marital relationships. In terms of family size, most respondents reported having 3–4 children (66.7%), reflecting common family structures. Regarding educational attainment, over half of the participants (52.4%) had completed university-level education, indicating a relatively well-educated sample. Employment status showed that the majority were employed (57.1%), and most respondents resided in urban areas (76.2%), highlighting the urban-centered nature of the study population.

### **Psychological Factors in Marriage: Summary of Thematic Findings**

#### **Communication between Spouses**

Results indicated that communication is a fundamental relational process that shapes marital dynamics. Participants generally described open, honest, and respectful communication as central to emotional intimacy. Many couples reported that effective communication enables them to articulate their needs, resolve conflicts, and sustain their relationship. As one participant noted, “Communication is key for us. We say everything to each other and that keeps us close”. However, communication was experienced as fluid and context-dependent, sometimes compromised by emotional stress, financial pressure, or the severity of the issue at hand.

#### **Emotional Support between Spouses**

Emotional support was also characterized as a basic aspect of the marriage, by which the spouses provided love and reassurance through words, attitudes, and actions. Participants discussed behaviors such as listening attentively and trying to understand each other’s thoughts and feelings, in times of hardship, as central ways in which spouses supported each other’s emotions. As one participant noted, “We listen to each other and try to be there when one of us is going through something difficult.”

#### **Conflict Resolution and Management of Disagreements**

The results showed that couples use several tools to cope with conflict that vary from adaptive to maladaptive. Several participants explained how they would talk openly to their partner and work through problems fairly, thus implying that they were trying to resolve the problems humanely. An example of this is: “We sit down and talk until we come to an understanding”. Furthermore, a few individuals employed ‘time outs’ with the intent of emotionally settling themselves.

#### **Challenges Affecting Communication and Understanding**

A number of problems affecting communication and understanding within the marriage were detected, the most notable of which being those related to money. During the discussion, participants revealed that money can often be a source of marital strife and division. As one participant expressed, “We have problems with money because it always creates tension and causes us to disagree”.

#### **Social Factors Affecting Marriage**

##### **Extended Family Support**

Results suggest that the extended family is an important, varied, and complex influence on marriage. Many participants discussed extended family members as providers of emotional, financial, and advisory support during times of hardship or transition. This support was sometimes seen as positive because it reinforced marital security and was helpful during difficult times: ‘When we have challenges, our families help us out, and this keeps us going.’ Thus, marriage was not viewed as an individual system but instead as part of a relational and community system.

## **Financial and Economic Issues**

One of the most prominent factors affecting marital satisfaction for all participants was financial and economic circumstances. Financial issues appeared to have a significant impact on both the emotional and communicative dimensions of the marital relationship. Participants consistently described how financial security alleviates anxiety and facilitates perceived marital harmony, enabling couples to provide for their families. As one participant articulated, “If dollars are right, there is right house.”

## **Cultural Expectations and Family Traditions**

The study of the influence of culture and tradition revealed that cultural expectations and family norms have a powerful effect on the roles, behaviors, and expectations of marriage. Participants explained how one’s culture dictated how one makes decisions, what gender-roles were appropriate, and the way couples resolves conflicts. Family traditions often contributed a sense of framework, steadiness and tradition to the couple marriage. A participant noted that “Our traditions direct our living and relationships as a couple,” highlighting the influence of cultural expectations such as defined gender roles, respect for elders, and adherence to communal norms. These traditions were reported to guide marital behavior, promote harmony, and strengthen commitment, demonstrating how cultural values interact with psychological and spiritual factors to enhance marital satisfaction.

## **Shared Family Responsibilities**

The equitable sharing of responsibilities emerged as another contributor to marital satisfaction and relational fairness. Participants described sharing roles related to childcare, finances, and household tasks. This division of responsibilities was reported to foster a sense of equality and companionship, as illustrated by one participant’s remark: “We try to share responsibility so that no one feels deprived.”

## **Social Pressures and Challenges Affecting Marriage**

Participants identified various external social pressures that affect their marriages, relating to the broader social environment in which their relationships are situated. These pressures included family expectations, societal standards for a successful married life, and unfavorable comparisons with other couples. Such pressures were frequently experienced as stressors, particularly when they imposed unattainable standards. As one participant stated, “Society has expectations, and this puts pressure on marriage”.

## **Spiritual and Religious Factors**

**Faith and religion were reported to bring joy and purpose to marriage.**

### **Joint Religious or Spiritual Practices**

Often couples engage in individual or joint religious activities prayer, meditation, church attendance, and reading religious materials with each other. Findings showed that participating in these practices creates a bonding experience, provides reassurance and support, and allows for some reflection. One participant said, “Praying together reminds us of what we are working towards.”

### **Faith in Coping with Marital Challenges**

For some participants, faith was a pivotal source of coping with stress, conflict, and life changes. Respondents described how having confidence in a higher entity or God gave them hope and patience, which they utilized to forgive. For example, one person said, “When we face difficulties, our faith reminds us to be patient and support each other.”

### **Church or Community Participation**

Involvement in church or spiritual programs and participation in religious communities were found to have positive effects on marriage. Couples received social support, mentorship, and a calling to serve each other from

participating in religious activities. One participant said, “Our priest’s encouragement to serve our community brought us closer.”

### **Spirituality and Marital Satisfaction**

Most aspects of participants’ spirituality were reported to have a positive influence on their marital relationships. Spirituality was cited as a motivating factor for marriage and was perceived as strengthening the marital bond. Participants indicated that their spiritual beliefs contributed to marital harmony, provided moral guidance, and supported emotional stability. A strong sense of faith was associated with increased respect and patience toward partners, as well as a reduction in tension within the marriage, ultimately fostering closer emotional connections between spouses. One respondent said “Our spirituality makes our marriage stronger and more satisfying.”

## **DISCUSSIONS**

The findings of this study illuminate the multidimensional nature of marital satisfaction among Catholic couples in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, revealing that psychological, social, and spiritual factors do not operate in isolation but interact dynamically to shape relational quality. Interpreted through the lens of Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959), the centrality of communication, emotional support, and conflict resolution in participants’ accounts reflects the relational calculus central to the theory: couples who perceived mutual responsiveness, equitable sharing of responsibilities, and emotional reciprocity reported stronger marital satisfaction. When communication broke down under financial pressure or emotional strain, the relational costs were perceived to outweigh the benefits, diminishing satisfaction. This underscores that the exchange dynamic in marriage is not merely economic but fundamentally relational and emotional, consistent with prior research identifying communication as a primary predictor of marital quality (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Markman et al., 2020). The role of extended family as a source of both support and interference is also interpretable within this framework: family involvement constituted a relational resource when it provided emotional and material support, but became a cost when it generated conflict or undermined couple autonomy. Spirituality and Religious Coping Theory (Pargament, 2001) provides a particularly illuminating framework for understanding the spiritual dimension of the findings. Participants’ descriptions of shared prayer, church participation, and faith-based coping as sources of marital strength align closely with Pargament’s conceptualization of religion as a meaning-making and coping resource. Faith functioned not merely as an abstract belief system but as an active relational practice—providing couples with shared values, moral orientation, patience in adversity, and a sense of transcendent purpose that sustained commitment during difficult periods. This finding extends existing evidence (Mahoney & Boyatzis, 2008) by demonstrating that within a devout Catholic context, spirituality operates as both a foundational motivator for marriage and an ongoing relational resource that reinforces marital bonding. The integration of psychological, social, and spiritual dimensions observed in this study also resonates with the communal and faith-centered character of Kenyan Catholic marriages, where relational satisfaction is co-constructed within broader familial, cultural, and religious structures rather than located solely in individual or dyadic processes (Kimani & Ochieng, 2022; Wambua & Ngari, 2021). Collectively, the findings affirm that sustainable marital satisfaction within this context is best understood as a dynamic outcome of the interplay among psychological competencies, social resources, and spiritual commitments a conclusion with important implications for pastoral care, marriage counseling, and family ministry.

## **CONCLUSION**

Overall, this study underscores the complex interplay of psychological, social, and spiritual factors in shaping marital satisfaction. Effective communication and emotional management of difficult issues were integral to strengthening the bond between spouses, fostering intimacy, trust, and relational resilience. Social variables including the influence of extended family members, financial stability or insecurity, and societal roles and expectations were found to exert both strengthening and stressful effects on the marital relationship.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the above, the following recommendations are suggested to enhance marital satisfaction and stability. Couples need to learn to communicate openly, honestly, and respectfully. Communication training programs can be useful in addressing barriers such as emotional withdrawal and miscommunication.

Spouses are expected to actively offer both emotional and practical support. Acknowledging and appreciating each other's efforts is essential for building relational resilience and strengthening the marital bond.

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**Section A: Demographic Information**

1. Age: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Gender:

Male  Female

3. Highest Level of Education:

Secondary  Diploma  Bachelor's Degree  Postgraduate

4. Number of years married:

1-5 years  5-10 years  11-15 years  16-20 years

Over 20 years

5. Number of children (if any): \_\_\_\_\_

**Section B: Psychological Factors in Marriage**

6. How would you describe communication between you and your spouse?

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7. In what ways do you and your spouse support each other emotionally?

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8. When disagreements occur in your marriage, how are they usually handled?

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9. What factors do you think contribute most to happiness and satisfaction in your marriage?

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10. What challenges, if any, affect communication or understanding between you and your spouse?

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**Section C: Social Factors Affecting Marriage**

11. How does support from extended family members influence your marriage?

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12. In what ways do financial or economic issues affect your marital relationship?

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13. What role do cultural expectations or family traditions play in your marriage?

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14. How do you and your spouse share responsibilities in the family (e.g., childcare, finances, household tasks)?

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15. Are there any social pressures or challenges that affect your marriage? Please explain.

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**Section D: Spiritual and Religious Factors**

16. How important is faith or spirituality in your marriage?

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17. What religious or spiritual practices do you and your spouse engage in together (e.g., prayer, church attendance)?

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18. In what ways does your faith help you deal with challenges in your marriage?

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19. How has participation in church activities or programs influenced your relationship as a couple?

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20. In your view, how does spirituality contribute to marital satisfaction?

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**Section E: Overall Marital Satisfaction**

21. How would you describe the overall level of satisfaction in your marriage?

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22. What factors have helped strengthen your marriage over the years?

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23. What challenges have you experienced in your marriage, and how have you addressed them?

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24. What advice would you give to other couples seeking to maintain a happy and satisfying marriage?.....

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