
THE EVOLUTION OF MARITAL REALITIES MIDWAY INTO MARRIAGE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS ON TRUST LEVELS AMONG NIGERIAN COUPLES

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ABSTRACT

Marriage in Nigeria remains a deeply cultural and religious institution, yet midway into marital life, couples often encounter realities that diverge from initial expectations. These realities emanating from different marital stressors raging from economic pressures, parenting responsibilities, health, habits, religion and extended family obligations which could reshape the dynamics of intimacy and trust. Trust, as the bedrock of marital stability, becomes both tested and redefined in this phase. This paper explores the evolution of marital realities midway into marriage among Nigerian couples and critically examines their implications on trust levels. Drawing on contemporary Nigerian scholarship and sociological perspectives, the study argues that midway marital realities can either strengthen resilience and intimacy or erode trust through suspicion, secrecy, and unmet expectations. The paper highlights the need for culturally sensitive counseling, religious re-orientation, policy interventions, and renewed emphasis on communication and shared responsibility in Nigerian marriages.

KEYWORDS: Mid way into marriage, Marital realities, marriage, Nigerian couples, trust levels.

INTRODUCTION

Marriage in Nigeria is not merely a private contract between two individuals; it is a communal, cultural, and spiritual institution. Across Nigeria's major ethnic groups namely; Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, and Fulani. Marriage is culturally regarded as a sacred union, often

celebrated with elaborate traditional rites and reinforced by religious teachings. Marriage in Nigerian societies, often begin with a tapestry of dreams woven from cultural expectations, religious ideals, societal norms and personal hopes. The early year of marriage in Nigerian societies are always marked by positive expectations and positivity: partners are envisioning a life of great harmonious relationship, full of prosperity, build on mutual trust and understanding.

However, midway into marriage, couples frequently confront evolution of realities that challenge the idealized expectations formed during courtship and early marital years. Deepen responsibilities, mounting financial pressures and unmet expectations tossed the once romantic relationship with parenting, career, extended family obligations among others, thereby unveiling the realities of marriage reshaping the ideals. It is herein that trust becomes fragile, tenderly essential. Some couples could sail through with financial transparency, fidelity, and shared decision-making to strengthen the initial bond, while some couples would allow secrecy, unmet promises, religious and cultural interference and pressure to erode confidence in the relationship.

Globally, scholars emphasize trust as fostering happiness, intimacy, understanding, and mutual respect, enabling couples to navigate the complexities of demanding marital responsibilities. Trust serves as the cornerstone of marital stability. Without trust, relationships are vulnerable to suspicion, conflict, and eventual breakdown. Yet midway into marriage, trust is often tested by evolving realities: economic pressures, parenting responsibilities, health status, career trajectories, bad habits, religiosity and extended family systems which in turn would turn the marriage into conflicts leading to separation and eventual divorce (Josiah, G. A, & Nteh, O. K. 2022).

In Nigeria where marriage is not only a personal union, but a social institution tied to the honour of the families, the norms of the society and community values, the evolution of marital realities midway through the journey has a profound implication on different significant others beyond the couples, the children, family, and society. Recently in Nigeria, divorce rates have risen across bounds, principally due to evolution of marital realities midway into marriages with family pressure, financial pressure, poverty, unemployment and expectations from partners affecting many marriages in Nigeria today Oguamanam, and Obah (2023). This underscores the urgency of examining how evolution of marital realities midway marriage reshape trust.

On this note, instabilities and disharmonious experiences in marital life will not only affect the principal agents of marriage (the couple) as it also affects other parts it serves (Josiah, &

Nteah, 2022). To this extent, therefore this paper examined the evolution of marital realities mid-way into marriage and the implications of such realities on the trust levels among Nigerian couples.

Social Exchange Theory as basis of this paper

Social exchange theory stands out as the most suitable for this research work. This theory was introduced in 1958 by the sociologist George Homans. The social exchange theory is a psychosocial perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchange between parties. Social exchange theory posits that human relationships are formed using subjective cost-benefits analysis and the comparison of alternatives. Social exchange theory is relevant to this study because marriage is an institution that comes with expectations from the respective parties (husband, wife and society). Often, one enters a marriage because of numerous benefits attached, such as financial benefits, connections and the need to have children, and when those expectations are not met, apprehension sets in. For example, men could spend so much money on ladies, especially during dating, because of the probable reward attached (sexual favour), and often, when a man gets married, he might swiftly reduce the way he spends. On the other hand, a woman who got married to this type of man due to material and financial benefits might end up being disappointed due to initial unrealistic expectations. Succinctly, according to this theory, when partners feel that their expectations are not being met in marital relationships or when the rewards and satisfaction derived from the relationship diminish, it would lead to dissatisfaction, withdrawal and a potential crisis in the marriage.

Social exchange theory posits that relationships are sustained when the perceived rewards outweigh the costs. This implies that social exchange theory subsists significantly that marital relationships are dependent on the benefits accruable from the relationship. When the marriage is going pleasantly vis-a-vis the expectations of the parties with minimal skirmishes, social exchange theory posited that parties would wish to continue with the relationship. In Nigerian marriages, midway realities often shift this balance. Early marital years may be dominated by romantic ideals, but midway into marriage, couples are faced with the evolution of numerous realities such as economic pressures, childcare responsibilities, and extended family obligations, religious obligations amongst others that could shift the trust level in marriage.

In the same vein, the attachment theory emphasizes the role of early bonding patterns in shaping adult relationships. This implied that midway into marriage bonding is normally

expected between couples, but when bonding is yet consummated and consolidated and couples are being faced with realities not envisaged in the marriage. The marriage could be in disorder. Nigerian marriages midway into their course often reveal attachment dynamics that were less visible during courtship. Couples with secure attachment styles navigate evolution of midway realities with resilience, while those with insecure styles struggle with trust erosion. Nigerian marriages are embedded in cultural traditions that emphasize communal living, extended family obligations, and gendered expectations. These cultural realities shape trust uniquely.

Factors Influencing Marital Realities Midway into Marriage

Economic Pressures

Nigeria's economic climate in recent time has been marked by inflation, unemployment, and rising living costs. These pressures directly affect marital dynamics culminating into financial secrecy among couples in the country which has hitherto being responsible for significantly 40% of marital crisis associated with separation, divorce and depression cases in Nigeria, Josiah, & Nteh, (2022), and (Osaki, 2023). Josiah et.al (2022) posited that most marriages experience stressful emotional conflicts when there are situations within the family that give rise to a lot of pressure leading to disagreement and eventually resulting in deep hatred, grief and fear. Some marriages have been faced with numerous conflicts which have been occasioned by the economic recession, financial incapacities and various social ills. There is a shortfall in financial capacity to meet family needs, due to either unemployment, retrenchment, inflation, extended family financial responsibilities, poverty and pressure from acquaintances.

Parenting Responsibilities

Parenting midway into marriage introduces new challenges. Differing parenting styles and child-rearing costs often erode trust. High levels of stress that arises from the demands of parenthood has been shown to impact several areas of family life, including both the quality of parent-child relationship and child adjustment Östberg & Hagekull, (2013) in Camisasca, Miragoli, and Blasioa (2026). Parenting teenage mothers can be so worrisome and degenerate dissatisfaction in marriage. Yustia, Munjirin, Nurdin, Ni'matuzahroh, and Karmiyati (2024) affirmed that early marriages tend to reap polemics, because most teenagers who decide to marry early have very low physical, material and mental readiness. The lack of preparation for adolescents facing life after marriage can lead to marriage dissatisfaction and this is

proven by Oktaviana dan Piraini (2023) in his research which shows that teenagers who marry early feel dissatisfaction in marriage life.

Gender Role Negotiations

Gender theory is essential for understanding the evolving roles of men and women within marriage, especially in the African context. Kyalo (2012) in Mandodo et. al 2025 asserts that marriage in African societies has traditionally been seen primarily as a vehicle for procreation, with a childless marriage often regarded as lacking purpose. However, gender theory examines the power dynamics within marriage, particularly how these dynamics are shaped by cultural norms and, in turn, influence those norms. The roles of African women in marriage are undergoing significant changes as women gain increased access to education, political representation, and economic opportunities. The 21st century women are increasingly challenging patriarchal practices like polygamy and unequal gender roles, advocating for greater autonomy, equality, and respect within the marital relationship. The shifting power dynamics between men and women in African marriage are central to understanding contemporary conflicts between traditional marital norms and modern ideas of gender equality.

Gender theory also highlights the importance of recognising the influence of colonialism, globalisation, and foreign religions in reshaping gender roles within marriage (Odoom et al., 2024). As Baloyi (2022) points out, while culture is often compared to a fabric woven with many threads, it is crucial that these threads do not come at the expense of women's rights. Ndlovu and Naidoo (2023) suggest that as education and women's participation in the workforce increase, African households are moving away from the male-dominated model of marriage. This shift challenges traditional gender hierarchies, particularly the notion that the husband is the sole provider and head of the family

Traditional Nigerian marriages emphasize rigid gender roles. Midway into marriage, these roles are renegotiated. Women's economic participation and men's domestic involvement reshape trust dynamics.

Extended Family Obligations

In Nigeria, marriage is not only between two individuals but also between families. Extended family interference often undermines marital autonomy. Extended Family Affairs/Issues have often young couples had their marriages rocked for their inability to properly manage extended family issues. In most cases, spouses find it difficult to accommodate relations of

their partners (especially mothers and sisters - in-law), a situation most marriage partners may find difficult to accommodate. Some men/women often quarrel with spouses whose interests are only on the betterment of their own relations as against functionalism's views of marriage as an indispensable institution for the continuity of society (Milton, 2007). The phenomenon of parental interference has been identified as a contributing factor to marital discord and subsequent divorces Sharma, Agarwal (2015) in Singh, Shanbhag (2025).

Marriage is a system of social relationships involving economic arrangements, political procedures, and cultural categories that work to preserve social order (Smita and Ranjan, 2022). The erosion of traditional gender roles, family dynamics, and financial stability in marriage represents a significant challenge to the institution's role in social cohesion. As Odoom et al. (2024) note, for marriage to remain a valid institution, it must meet the standards set by societal norms, religious values, and civil laws. Functionalism, therefore, addresses how society maintains stability through its constituent elements, such as norms, customs, traditions, and institutions (Chisaka, 2024).

Cultural and Religious Influences

Globally, scholars have affirmed that cultural and religious mismatches in marital expectations (*e.g.*, differing views on gender roles) can reduce satisfaction, highlighting the need for culturally adaptive marital therapies. Cultural beliefs are shared value systems, norms, and traditions that shape individuals' perceptions of marriage, gender roles, and family obligations. These beliefs influence marital expectations-such as communication styles, conflict resolution, and emotional expression-based on cultural scripts. The collectivist cultures may prioritize familial harmony over individual desires, while the individualist cultures may emphasize personal fulfillment in marriage. Religious teachings further reinforce cultural and spiritual beliefs by prescribing marital roles (*e.g.*, spousal duties in Islamic, Christian, or Hindu traditions), thereby significantly affecting marital satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Raesi et. al (2025)

Spiritual beliefs encompass an individual's or collective's universal, unchanging principles such as love, justice, truth, and human dignity that exist beyond individual ego, culture, or time. That seeks meaning, purpose, and connection with the sacred, whether within formal religious traditions or through secular spirituality. Religious teachings reinforce trust but can also complicate gender negotiations and when not moderately handled it could lead to threat in marital trust.

Social Incompatibility

Some marriages have absolutely no foundation or basis for being contracted at the first instance. This is so because the pair is socially incompatible and may only manage to get along for a short while before signs of incompatibility would start to manifest. It would then be discovered that the couple are strange bed fellows socially, religiously and ideologically. Crises are bound to ensue in a situation where a marriage partner sets high and unrealistic standards in the home. The fallibility of man is unquestionable and as such it is not possible that such idealistic standards are realized. This would degenerate into crisis in the home. Many married people become disillusioned when they discover that their union is not all they had expected and that their spouse is not quite what they had envisioned him/her to be. Additionally, some couples unrealistically expect to get more out of marriage than they put into it. Some others see marriage as give and take where you put one into it you get one out of it. Wamboldt. (2020)

Poor Sexual/Intimacy Orientation and Spousal level of Respect

Sexual Incompatibility and poor sexual dissatisfaction on the part of a marital partner may spice up crisis in the union much as extreme sexual orientation of one of a marriage partner is equally capable of endangering a marital union. Such orientations like homosexuality, lesbianism, bestiality, sodomy, oral sex, excessive sexual appetite especially when the other partner is at the other extreme of the scale can generate crisis in the homes. Most of the time, such extreme sexual behaviours or orientations are discovered rather too late or midway into the marriage that it becomes very difficult to pull out of the engagement. And when once a partner cannot get along crisis ensues Idakwo, (2002) in Wamboldt (2020), Oguamanam and Obah (2025). Further, mutual respect for one's spouse and spouse's family is critical for marital union sustenance, and a lack of it is a crisis factor capable of rocking even the strongest marital foundation of hitherto blissful homes. Respect and love are reciprocal variables in every marital union, and as such, a spouse has an obligation to respect and love his or her marriage partner and their family.

Bad habits and anti-social behaviour

Antisocial behaviour is assumed to occur from antisocial personality disorder (van Dam, Rijckmans, & Bosch, 2022) and it is believed that it stems from a pervasive pattern of total disregard to the feelings of others leading to violation of people's right either by negligence or overt behaviour. This is prevalent among youths who display maladaptive behaviour by

evoking strong aversive emotions towards others without recourse to their fundamental human rights (Van Dam et al, 2022). Unwholesome social behaviour; bickering, unnecessary criticisms, gossip, or what may simply be tagged nagging, has rocked some good families. It is not an overstatement that most women take to nagging instead of politely confronting their husbands with issues. Most men, in turn, do not take kindly to such unpleasant behaviours and would go a long way to resist such tendencies. Most young men would result to some unacceptable behaviours in defense of such ill manners from their spouse and that could activate unwholesome behaviours in marriage. When situations of this nature prevail in marriage spouses tend to be defensive because of loss of confidence and trust breakdown. This could degenerate into attack and counterattack if not understandably resolved, as no reasonable man would want his authority as the family head to be usurped (Amadi & Amadi, 2014).

Trust in Marriage: Conceptual and Practical Dimensions

Empirical authorities have affirmed that trust can stem from evidence or data collected from past experiences about an individual and/or faith or conviction taken as truth without any supporting evidence about an individual or system. In romantic relationships, the components of trust that concern evidence include perceptions of the partner's predictability and dependability. Predictability refers to the perceived likelihood of successfully foretelling the future actions of the partner. Perceptions concerning a partner's predictability are thought to be based on observations of the nature and consistency of the partner's behaviours. Dependability refers to the degree to which the partner is perceived to embody a set of qualities approximating a "dependable archetype". Specifically, people would be more likely to regard their partner as dependable when their partner has proven themselves over a period in relationship as for example, been honest, cooperative, and benevolent, Camanto, Campbell (2025). Studies further affirmed that dependability, much like predictability, bears on the behavioural outputs of the partner, dependability is slightly more nuanced in that it involves the abstraction of underlying narratives and trait attributions from the partner's outputted behaviours (Holmes [HYPERLINK "https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12316384/"](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12316384/) & [HYPERLINK "https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12316384/"](https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12316384/) Rempel, 1989; Simpson, 2007 in Camanto et.al (2025).

Conversely, 'faith' represents the highest level of trust, a feeling of confidence in the future responsiveness and care of the partner, even in the face of uncertainty. It functions as a "secure base" that allows couples to navigate major life transitions and conflict. Faith

captures a sense of conviction untethered to evidence, enabling one to dismiss doubts concerning the unknown future. With faith in their partner and the future of the relationship, partners can transcend the need for supportive evidence and act *as if* the future will unfold as desired (Camanto, et .al (2025).

Implicatively, predictability, dependability and faith would yield commitment that is widely recognized as foundational components of successful marriages. Boateng and Agyapong (2021) reported that Christian couples in Ghana who demonstrated higher levels of mutual trust and commitment experienced significantly greater marital satisfaction. Trust promotes a sense of security and predictability, reducing relational anxiety and fostering cooperation, while commitment ensures resilience in the face of conflicts or external pressures Yeboah, & Ofori, (2021). When partners trust themselves, it would acts as a mediator and could build resilience which would moderate their marital relationships. Studies have shown that trust is a foundation for preserving emotional connection and vindicating the negative effects of physical separation in the case of long-distance relationships. High levels of trust can make partners gain confidence in their relationship. It also reduces feelings of insecurity and jealousy (Sadia, Hussain, Lak, Mobeen, & Ghaffa, 2025).

Trust is a foundational aspect of intimacy, it reflects the belief in a partner's reliability, honesty, and integrity. High levels of trust have been shown to reduce relational uncertainty and facilitate cooperative behaviours, while low trust often leads to suspicion, conflict, and emotional withdrawal (Rempel, Holmes, & Zanna, 2020). Empirical studies affirm trust is particularly crucial in navigating external stressors, such as financial strain or societal pressures, because it allows partners to rely on each other and work collaboratively through challenges (Simpson, 2018). Trust also underpins forgiveness and reconciliation processes, enabling couples to recover from relational breaches without resorting to long-term resentment. In African marital contexts, trust is intertwined with cultural norms, including loyalty, fidelity, and extended family interactions, which influence how couples negotiate boundaries and expectations within the marital union (Jemima [HYPERLINK "https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jemima-](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Jemima-Lomotey?_sg%5B0%5D=kfuIPzfDmOEBNdkzI0iA5BO4XGppPym2uWm23EY2ea9HdADdt04p819yPGkza1PVIGI0_QM.w7DIOpMifmmL23EvmVaGdDhTuQ4WKV44e7R6Ktb_VkNJQQ75EDZS6xWoNFk_SFly_rcVXpxYvmdqQM0ykXrXhA&_sg%5B1%5D=yCfRMEF_G448VR18Xeu82S9CbWJmXs3bq8Syr1mpJ7pkpfUG3x32hPz-z6IquZUtS9yr1DE.Uc-d4oIrAXrX-pXiTc-kVW2RBFMMYpCcEUTU-F2Kcyc7gAUyEN7N4SaNRwoRBJ0ge1okWLjRx9KuurN9h-)

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Implications of Midway Marital Realities on Trust Levels

Positive Implications

Trust is built over a period of relationship. When partners are in marital relationship they are expected to observe, experience and draw conclusions and form impressions on their partners during their relationship. Jemima et.al (2025) affirmed that intimacy significantly predicted marital satisfaction, followed closely by trust, while commitment provided additional explanatory power. In the study conducted on Ghanaian couples the author emphasized the interdependence of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components in maintaining healthy marriages as resilience and shared responsibility would enhance formation of higher trust and achievement of marital satisfaction that could make marital partners wish to live together in trust optimistic of great future.

A very significant factor of trust building in marriage amidst the evolution of marital realities is the cultural reinforcement and religious values that stabilize trust. The belief in the sanctity of marriage and the quality of communication between spouses have been identified as the most significant in marital trust building towards satisfaction in marriage. Spiritual and cultural beliefs significantly enhance marital satisfaction and strengthen family relationships within religious communities, promoting improved mental health and resilience through effective coping mechanisms and religious education Raesi, Gooshki, Khoshi, Saadat, Daneshi, & Hushmandi, (2025).

The belief in the sacred and divine nature of marriage directly and indirectly predicts marital happiness, whereas irrational relational beliefs negatively affect it. Empirical findings revealed the vital roles of spiritual and religious influence play in enhancing marital satisfaction, indicating that strengthening these aspects can improve the quality of marital relationships Camanto, & Campbell, (2025).

Negative Implications

Challenges to trust commonly referred to as "trust issues", often arise from past negative relational experiences, such as betrayal, emotional neglect, or broken expectations. These experiences can result in individuals forming pessimistic beliefs about others' intentions, which may hinder the development of secure and healthy connections. As marital realities unfold midway into marriage, it simultaneously constitutes significant stressor on marriage, resilient partners would stay together forming trust in each other to forge ahead. When trust is degenerated in marriage it can precipitate negative outcomes such as increased deception, a diminished perception of relationship quality, and heightened attachment anxiety, all of which adversely affect the relationship Deepthi, Madhuri, (2025).

However, some partners would form negative impressions on themselves, building suspicion and secrecy. These are unhealthy in marital relationships, as such relationships would end up in crisis that could snowball into separation, poor mental wellbeing, single parenting and divorce. When trust is lost in marriage it degenerates to financial secrecy among others.

CONCLUSION

Midway into marriage, Nigerian couples often face realities that test their union. Trust prevents suspicion, dependability provides support, reliability ensures consistency, intimacy sustains emotional connection, and resilience enables adaptation. Together, these values act as stabilizers, helping couples navigate evolving marital realities. By consciously cultivating them, Nigerian marriages can withstand pressures and flourish despite challenges, transforming midway struggles into opportunities for deeper partnership and enduring love.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the exploration above, this study recommends the following for couples, among others, practical marital cultural and religious counseling, policymakers should timely and promptly be engage to reorientate couples on marital realities evolution, policymakers should address economic pressures on young couples, strategies to foster emotional closeness should always be taught in schools, churches, mosques and during antenatal visitations at health

facilities, couples should learn to build relational trust, and reinforce long-term commitment and enduring transparency and communication. The study underscores the importance of holistic interventions that integrate intimacy, trust, and commitment to promote marital stability, satisfaction, and broader family well-being within the Nigerian socio-cultural context. Underage marriage should be discouraged as a matter of policy.

Midway into marriage is a critical juncture for Nigerian couples. Trust is either strengthened through resilience and shared responsibility or eroded through secrecy and unmet expectations. Ultimately, trust remains the cornerstone of marital stability, and its preservation midway into marriage is vital for the resilience of Nigerian families and society.

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