

# MARITAL RAPE AND SEXUAL INCOMPATIBILITY AS PREDICTORS OF DIVORCE AMONG MARRIED COUPLES IN LAGOS MAINLAND LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF LAGOS STATE

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## **Abstract**

*This study investigated marital rape and sexual incompatibility as predictors of divorce among married couples in Lagos Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. The study utilized the descriptive survey design, and data were collected from 100 married people through a questionnaire that included items adapted from the Illinois Rape Myth Acceptance Scale. The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.69. Multiple regression and an independent t-test were used for data analysis. The findings showed that marital rape and sexual incompatibility jointly predicted predisposition to divorce, however, only sexual incompatibility accounted for significant variation in divorce. There was no significant gender difference in the predisposition of married couples to divorce due to sexual incompatibility. The findings suggest that marital stability is largely influenced by sexual satisfaction, and that accurate reporting and recognition of the impact of marital rape may be hampered by cultural silence surrounding the crime. The study recommended the legal recognition of marital rape, premarital counselling focused on sexual compatibility, and providing easy accessible post-marriage support services.*

**Key words:** *Divorce, gender difference, marital rape, marital stability, sexual incompatibility.*

## **Introduction**

Rape in marriage is one of the violent crimes that has not been given enough attention. Marital rape is defined as a situation in which married couples make love without the agreement of both partners or forcefully make love to their partner. Marital rape is a routine, systematic pattern of abuse, much like other domestic abuse. Whether or not marital rape is recognized as a crime depend on societal values, cultural values, and the government. Experiences of rape have tremendous impact on the victims; 81% of women and 35% of men in the US reported experiencing substantial short- or long-term impacts of rape by their spouse, such as post-

traumatic stress disorder (Smith, Chen, Basile, Gilbert, Merrick, Patel, Walling, Jain, 2017).

The unwillingness to define non-consensual sex between married couples as a crime that should be prosecuted stems from a variety of reasons, such as the general public's ignorance of marital rape, and the law's unwillingness to bring charges against the offenders. Other factors include cultural expectations of a wife's subordination to her husband, ideas regarding male and female sexuality, traditional views of marriage, and interpretations of religious doctrines. Apart from

the Nigerian constitution, many cultures and traditions around the world reject the existence of marital rape because wives automatically and unconditionally consent to any sexual relations their husbands may have with them after they are married (Choudhary, 2022; Archampong and Sampson, 2010; Khan, 2020).

Sexual assault may have a lasting major negative impact on marriages and sometimes leads to separation or divorce. These negative impacts may lead to severe mental distress that can last for years or even a lifetime, and this manifests in the form of worry, panic attacks, flashbacks, nightmares, and a general lack of trust. The intensity of rape puts an individual's ability to use healthy coping strategies to the test. This can in turn, affect the quality of life and the family structure of the spouses.

In addition to the issue of marital rape, sexual incompatibility is an increasing cause of marital instability and disconnection. Sexual incompatibility refers to the variations in sexual frequency, needs, desires, or emotional closeness during sex between partners. Left unaddressed, sexual incompatibility can lead to frustration, emotional detachment, and communication issues. Sexual incompatibility is one of the unspoken fundamental reasons destroying marital happiness and increasing the risk of divorce in the majority of marriages, especially those in cultures where open discussion about sex and experiences of sex is discouraged.

The family is a fundamental aspect of daily life in Africa, as it is in all other continents. It is the cornerstone of all nations and continents. The health of a country is reflected in the health of its families; broken families create a society that is chaotic, corrupt, and dysfunctional. The national level of sanity will never surpass that of

the family. Divorce is a life-changing experience that affects all parties involved for a long time. From the political system to the economic, marriage promotes advancement in all areas of society. While divorce is a warning indication of societal instability and insecurity, its growth and maintenance are symptomatic of social peace.

### **Statement of Problem**

Marital rape is often misunderstood and underreported. In many patriarchal societies where marriage is viewed as unlimited and unconditional access to sex, much attention is not paid to marital rape as a form of intimate partner violence. Forced sex in marriage is often not recognized as a crime by cultural, religious and legal norms, thereby perpetuating silence around the trauma of marital rape. Most of the victims would rather endure the suffering than open themselves to societal scrutiny or judgment. They would rather present other factors as the cause of the dissatisfaction in their marriage. The victims' bodily autonomy and dignity are violated by the normalization and silence around forced sex in marriage. This results in persistent conditions of psychological trauma, anxiety, resentment, emotional distress, and might tear down the marriage.

The damaging impact of marital rape, sexual incompatibility is a key contributing factor to divorce. Many people enter marriage without adequate knowledge of one another's sexual needs, expectations, or desires. These unresolved differences in sexual desires, preferences and frequency can lead to conflict and emotional disconnection. This eventually lowers the quality of communication and marital pleasure, thereby increasing the risk of divorce. Relationship dynamics become more complicated when

marital rape is infused into the couple's sex life, leading to bitterness, irritation, and resentment. In Nigeria, despite their relevance, sexual incompatibility and marital rape are not often discussed as joint predictors of divorce. This imbalance prevents policymakers, legal practitioners, and counsellors from having tangible evidence-based interventions that protect the victims and help them recover. Therefore, the current research aims to fill this research vacuum by empirically exploring the contribution of sexual incompatibility and marital rape in predicting the incidence of divorce among married couples.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study investigated marital rape and sexual incompatibility as predictors of divorce among married couples. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Investigate whether marital rape and sexual incompatibility can jointly predispose married couples to divorce.
2. Examine whether there is a gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility.

### **Research Questions**

1. To what extent do marital rape and sexual incompatibility jointly predispose married couples to divorce?
2. What is the gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility?

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant difference between marital rape, sexual incompatibility, and the predisposition of married couples to divorce.

2. There is no significant gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility between male and female spouses.

### **Literature Review**

In Nigeria, according to Adeniyi (2016), the concept of marital rape, also known as spousal rape, may appear to be a strange. Marital rape is a taboo subject in the criminal justice system of Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). The Penal Code makes it abundantly clear that "sexual relations between a man and his own wife are not rape if she has reached puberty" (Nigerian constitution, 1999), thereby clearly establishing the marital exception to the crime of rape. Under the Penal Code, a man cannot be charged with rape against his wife. Adeniyi (2016) argued that the criminalization of marital rape in Nigeria needs reevaluation in light of the country's expanding and troubling domestic violence statistics. This suggestion is timely, as there is a growing global movement to make marital rape a crime.

According to research conducted on the prevalence, causes, and coercive techniques about marital rape among women in Oyo State, Nigeria, Ogunwale and Afoabi (2022) noted that 15.3% of married women reported experiencing non-consensual sex throughout their marriage. This shows that some married couples experience this trauma of marital rape, although they may hardly speak out on the subject. This experience affects their well-being and that of the family.

Ajuwon, Olaleye, and Faromokuju (2006) examined sexual coercion and behavior among young women and adolescents in three northern Nigerian states and found that forced sex was associated with poor emotional health, despair, withdrawal, and fear of future relationships.

These psychological constructs are often associated with divorce. In another study, Jewkes et al. (2002) conducted a multi-country study under the World Health Organization. They discovered that separation or divorce was significantly predicted by an intimate partner's sexual violence. The research showed that due to the emotional stress, fear, and a lack of affection, women who had been raped in their marriage were more likely to indicate a desire or intention to leave the marriage. Reviewing the North American domestic sexual violence, DeKeseredy and Schwartz (2011) discovered that forced sex in marriage frequently results in retreat, less intimacy, and emotional detachment. According to them, sexual coercion lowers marital satisfaction and increases the likelihood of divorce or emotional separation.

In a multilevel analysis of married Nigerian women's sexual autonomy conducted by Solanke, Adetutu and Sunmola (2022), the results showed that even when they were uncomfortable or emotionally distraught; many women were unable to negotiate safer sex or decline sex in marriage. The results showed that religious and cultural traditions serve as significant barriers that keep women in violent marriages. Even when the situation becomes a threat to their peace and well-being, these barriers prevent them from seeking for divorce. In the Nigerian context, many women would prefer to suffer in marriage because they are concerned about society's views, especially when it has to do with marital rape.

Though marital rape is not recognized as a crime in Nigeria, rape remains the cause of many divorce cases in Nigeria. According to research conducted by Ojo and Adebayo (2019) on divorce applications in Lagos Family Court,

they discovered that forced sex and sexual unhappiness were frequently cited under the term "cruelty" or "lack of affection." The researchers suggested improved support for survivors throughout divorce processes and more explicit documentation of sexual abuse in marital records. On the other hand, sexual incompatibility is the disharmony between spouses due to their sexual libido, preferences, timing, values, expectations and the frequency of sexual activities. Many factors may be responsible for these discrepancies, such as upbringing, religious views, history of trauma, and previous sexual experiences (Khajehei, 2016). Studies have shown that sexual incapability is associated with marital dissatisfaction and divorce. For example, Yoo, Bartle-Haring, Day and Gangamma (2014), in their study, found that sexual incompatibility is primarily associated with emotional withdrawal and eventual separation.

In a similar study, Khajehei (2016) found that poor communication about sexual needs and low sexual pleasure were strongly linked to consideration of divorce. The study concluded that sexual dissatisfaction, often due to sexual incompatibility, plays a vital role in the consideration of divorce. According to a different study by Rehman, Fallis and Byers (2011), in their study on Canadian couples' long-term marital happiness. They found that couples who had high sexual compatibility at the beginning of their marriage were far less likely to report considering divorce after 10 years of marriage. Sexual compatibility was seen to be the bedrock for a lasting marriage. It is against this backdrop that this study investigated marital rape and sexual incompatibility as predictors of divorce among married couples.

## **Methodology**

The research design for this study is a descriptive survey research design because it best serves to answer the questions and the purposes of the study. This design is appropriate because the research seeks to examine marital rape and sexual incompatibility as predictors of divorce among married couples without manipulating any of the variables. The study was carried out in Lagos Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State, Nigeria. All married couples within Lagos Mainland Local Government Area of Lagos State form the target population for this research because these are the married couples accessible to the researcher.

The cluster sampling method was used in this research study 100 married couples were randomly selected for this study. They consisted of 44 males and 56 females. This sample consisted of married individuals from three public schools and one tertiary institution in Lagos Mainland local government area of Lagos state.

## **Instrument for Data Collection**

A research instrument was developed in English language to assess marital rape, sexual incompatibility, and predisposition to divorce. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: Section A assessed the participant's biodata. Sections B, C, and D contained 10 items each which asked participants to provide their honest opinion about predisposition to divorce, marital rape, and sexual incompatibility, respectively. The 4-point scale ranged from "Strongly Agree" (SA), through "Agree" (A), "Disagree" (D) to "Strongly Disagree" (SD). Among the 10 items for marital rape, some were adapted from the Illinois rape myth acceptance scale (Payne, Lonsway and Fitzgerald, 1999), while items for

divorce and sexual incompatibility were self-developed by the researcher.

## **Validation and Reliability of the Instrument**

The questionnaire designed for the study was subjected to content validity. In the validation process of this questionnaire, a copy of the questionnaire was given to a seasoned researcher and a professor in the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Lagos, who carefully critiqued it to ascertain the appropriateness and adequacy of the instrument.

A pilot test was carried out on the instrument using 30 married individuals at the University of Lagos. The questionnaire was administered twice at a two weeks interval to the same set of respondents. The coefficient of reliability obtained was 0.69. The questionnaire was therefore considered usable for the study.

## **Method of Data Collection**

After the pilot testing and all necessary modifications done, the questionnaire was administered directly to the chosen sample for the study. One hundred copies of the questionnaire were given out.

## **Method of Data Analysis**

The data collected was analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the Regression Model and an independent t-test. Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for computing and analyzing the data generated from the study.

**Results**

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between marital rape, sexual incompatibility, and the predisposition of married couples to divorce.

**Table 1: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of Regression Model**

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	457.665	2	228.832	6.964	.001
Residual					
Total	3187.175	97	32.857		
	3644.840	99			

Figures in Table 1 above show that the F-ratio of 6.964 resulted from the overall regression model. The value of 6.964 is greater than the critical value of 3.09 given 2 and 97 degrees of difference at a 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implied that marital rape and sexual incompatibility are predictors of divorce among married couples.

**Table 2: Coefficients of Variables**

Model	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig. (p-value)
1 (Constant)	19.396	4.224		4.592	.000
Marital Rape	0.024	0.097	0.024	0.242	.809
Sexual Incompatibility	0.414	0.115	0.349	3.592	.001

Table 2 shows the individual contribution of marital rape and sexual incompatibility as predictors of divorce among married couples. Sexual incompatibility had a significant effect on the predisposition to divorce (B = 0.414, t = 3.592, p = .001). This implied that as sexual incompatibility increases, the likelihood of couples' disposition toward divorce increases as well.

However, marital rape did not have a significant effect on predisposition to divorce (B = 0.024, t = 0.24, p = .809). This suggests that within the context of this model, marital rape does not significantly predict the predisposition of couples to divorce when controlling for sexual incompatibility.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility between male and female spouses.

**Table 3: t-t table showing the gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility**

Variables	N	X	SD	t-cal	t-crit	Level of significance	df
Male	44	31.30	6.490	-1.718	1.984	0.05	98
female	56	33.38	5.604				

The figures in Table 3 above show the result of the independent sample t-test testing the data on the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility between male and female couples. The calculated t-value was -1.718, while the critical t-value was 1.984 at 98 degrees of freedom and a 0.05 significance level. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is no statistically significant difference between male and female spouses about their predisposition to divorce as a result of sexual incompatibility.

### Discussion of Findings

The purpose of the study was to examine marital rape and sexual incompatibility as predictors of divorce among married couples. For hypothesis one, the multiple regression analysis was used as the statistical tool for analysis, and it showed that the model as a whole was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors collectively accounted for a sizable amount of the variance in the divorce propensity. However, when examined separately, only sexual incompatibility was found to be a significant predictor. Despite being part of the model, marital rape did not significantly predispose married couples to divorce.

The significant effect of sexual incompatibility confirms earlier findings showing that sexual harmony is essential to marriage stability and satisfaction. Marital satisfaction, trust, and intimacy are all facilitated by sexual compatibility and are important to the continuity

of marriage. According to some studies, the presence of sexual dissatisfaction increases conflict, emotional detachment, and makes people consider divorce (Yacel & Gassanov, 2010; Lorenz, Ullman & Kirkner, 2006). In the current study, sexual incompatibility was found to have a moderate positive association with predisposition to divorce, indicating that married couples are more likely to consider divorce when they are experiencing greater sexual dissatisfaction.

Conversely, marital rape did not show a significant individual contribution to the model. Given the wealth of research connecting sexual violence to psychological trauma, relationship disintegration, and divorce, this finding might seem contradictory. One reason for this might be related to cultural and societal perceptions of marital rape. Marital rape is frequently underreported, misinterpreted and not accepted as a legitimate form of violence (Dixon, 2009). Victims may see such experiences as part of their marital obligation or may fear humiliation and condemnation, thereby minimizing their impact in self-report. As a result, quantitative models may underestimate their predictive potential.

For hypothesis two, the independent sample t-test was used, and it showed that there is no significant gender difference in the predisposition to divorce due to sexual incompatibility. This implies that both male and female participants have similar experiences and respond to sexual incompatibility when it comes to how it affects marital stability. This result is consistent with a finding by Mark, Janssen and

Milhausen (2014), which revealed that sexual dissatisfaction is a mutual problem for both genders and this leads to emotional detachment and eventual dissolution of the marriage union.

Despite cultural narratives that frequently portray men as being more concerned with sexual fulfilment, in recent times, studies have revealed that women equally prioritize it as well (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2015). Given this lack of a significant difference in the current study, it can be concluded that the association between sexual incompatibility and predisposition to divorce is not moderated by gender.

### Conclusion

The study examined the relationship between marital rape, sexual incompatibility and incidence of divorce among married couples. It was noted from the findings that while both marital rape and sexual incompatibility significantly predisposition to divorce, only sexual incompatibility taken singly significantly predicted divorce. This affirmed the significant role sexual satisfaction play in maintaining the stability of marriage. Though commonly acknowledged to be damaging to relationships, marital rape was not a robust predictor of divorce in this study. This could be due to underreporting or to cultural denial of its existence. Also, there was no significant gender difference in predisposition towards divorce on the basis of sexual incompatibility. This suggests that sexual dissatisfaction impacts both female and male spouses to the same degree and that its influence on marital stability is not qualified by gender.

The counselling implication of this study is that therapists and counsellors have to recognize that sexual dissatisfaction is not a gender-specific phenomenon. Therefore, interventions aimed at improving marriage have to be equally directed towards both genders. By means of the application of programs facilitating awareness of each other's sexual expectations, needs, and preferences, marital breakup on the grounds of sexual incompatibility can be prevented.

To gain a more profound understanding of the complex experiences of marital rape survivors and to transcend the constraints of self-reporting in culturally conservative settings, qualitative methods must be part of future studies.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations were given:

1. Comprehensive premarital counselling that includes discussions on sexual expectations, preferences, and compatibility should be made available for intending couples. This may improve marital stability and reduce marital dissatisfaction.
2. There is a need for legal recognition of marital rape as a legitimate issue in Nigeria. This will make victims feel more comfortable reporting it and get needed assistance, and enhance precise data for future research.
3. Courses on post-marriage support services such as couple therapy and marriage enrichment workshops should be promoted. These services can improve communication and resolve sexual issues.
4. The concerns of married couples should be addressed without bias or assumptions about gender roles since sexual incompatibility affects both genders equally.

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