

Age, Emotional Intelligence, Awareness and Communication as Factors in Marital Satisfaction among Military Personnel in South-South, Nigeria

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Abstract

We adopted a cross-sectional research design and hierarchical multiple regression analysis to investigate whether age, emotional intelligence, awareness, and communication are correlated with experiencing marital satisfaction among military personnel. Participants were 399 volunteered military personnel purposively drawn from the South-South region of Nigerian military barracks. The participants were administered off-line self-reported and validated measures: Marital Satisfaction, Emotional Intelligence, Awareness, and Communication scales. Four objectives were stated and thereafter tested as hypotheses. According to the results, age negatively predicted marital satisfaction such that being older was associated with less marital satisfaction among the military. Emotional intelligence positively predicted marital satisfaction. Greater awareness was associated with increased marital satisfaction. While responsive communication positively predicted marital satisfaction, blocked communication negatively did. It was concluded that age, emotional intelligence, awareness, and communication (responsive) are keys to marital satisfaction amidst the seemingly martially dissatisfying kind of military deployment.

Keywords: Marital Satisfaction, Emotional Intelligence, Awareness, Communication, Military Personnel

Introduction

The diverse challenging nature of the military work, which includes repetitive movement, and separation from friends and family due to deployment is stressful (Allen et al., 2011) and in turn, might influence military lifestyles (Hall, 2012; Riviere & Merrill, 2011). Changes in behaviour,

problems with loved ones, addiction, poor mental health (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2012), and even suicide and suicidal attempts (Lavner, & Bradbury, 2010) are the likely aftermath of stress arising from work-related deployments that jeopardize marital satisfaction. In addition, most military personnel who are married or

cohabiting often are confronted with some type of family problems, and mental health disorders appear to further complicate family reintegration (Sayers et al., 2010). Thus, marriages involving military couples are thought to be more vulnerable to marital crises. Research shows that marital satisfaction is influenced by military life (Paley et al., 2013) and that military spouses are more likely to report marital discord than civilian spouses (Asbury & Martin, 2012).

Military deployments have been a major threat to marriages of military couples (Alvarez, 2006). For instance, Riviere et al. (2012) noted that the stresses of recent wars and the long and dangerous deployments have been shown to decrease marital quality while increasing infidelity and separation or divorce intent. Hence, to attain a certain level of marital satisfaction, there is a need to balance family demands with military work and deployments. Most extant works of literature have focused more on marital dissatisfaction and the inherent factors among military personnel (MacDermid et al., 2011). Therefore, our study not only bridges such a limited knowledge gap in marital satisfaction among the military but also extends military marital satisfaction studies beyond its usually known relationships with some variables like a marriage relationship, financial (mis)understanding, the satisfaction of sexual desires, physical violence, lack of love and moral commitment, etc (Najafi & Mirzajan, 2014).

Furthermore, we advocate that marital satisfaction is a function of

underestimated contemporary psychological terms like emotional intelligence, age, awareness, and communication; that has been well-examined in other domains of psychology (Heidari et al., 2019; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Brunell et al., 2010); and this undermines the objectives of the study. We hypothesized that age, awareness, emotional intelligence, and communication would be associated with marital satisfaction in the military. However, it should be noted that the daily important impact of emotional intelligence, awareness, and communication in marital satisfaction is not only limited to the military domain alone; as such, the implications of the findings of the study span through other domains. This is yet a unique aspect of the study as the findings could be used in future comparative studies.

Marital satisfaction, according to Tamaren (2010) cited in Anyamene and Etele (2020), is the feeling of happiness, pleasure, and contentment by the wife or the husband or both; when considering all the aspects of conjugal life. Najafi and Mirzajan (2014) noted that determinant positive factors in marital satisfaction cut across directly or indirectly every sphere of life and such factors that aided it include the quality of relationship before marriage, marriage relationship, communication, couple's personality, age, presence of children, influence of in-laws, satisfaction of sexual desires, occupational differences (including deployments/shifts), financial (mis)understanding, authenticity,

physical violence, lack of love and moral commitment (Greeff & Bruyne, 2000; Johnson et al., 1999). Among these myriads of factors, age, emotional intelligence, awareness (authenticity), and communication which seemed uncommon and less researched, especially in the military domain were considered for this study. We considered our variables of study because we observed that almost all old and recent studies (Hajihassani & Sim, 2019; Du Plooy & de Beer, 2018; Omidi & Talighi, 2019) had focused on other professions than the military. Therefore, our study does not only make a huge contribution to knowledge in ensuring a wholesome scientific inquiry, but it also affirms our claim that our findings could be contemporary.

Meanwhile, age has been associated with marital satisfaction but the direction seems unclear.

Specifically, less evidence has either been documented or reported on the association of age and marital satisfaction in a normal population (Schmitt, et al., 2007; [Sorokowski](#) et al., 2017) let alone the military samples. Hence, there has been a shortage of empirical evidence which invariably has led to unclear conjecture regarding age-wise link or blueprint of research findings in extant literature (Lee & McKinnish, 2017; Lee & Shehan, 1989). It is germane that the role of age is evaluated in marital satisfaction, especially in the military sector. The evaluation of marital satisfaction in the military is important as the finding will help the military authority fashion out how best to leniently accommodate the

personnel in military deployments and other tasks; as evidence reveals that most of these military personnel suffer marital dissatisfaction (Lares et al., 2019; Westman et al., 2004). Besides, more studies are needed to make further clarification on this age-link pattern in marital satisfaction.

Aside from age, the researchers were interested in understanding the roles emotional intelligence plays in ensuring marital satisfaction in the military. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. No doubt that emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction have been extensively investigated using both local and western samples and contexts like the postmenopausal women in Borujen city, Iran (Heidari et al., 2019). Other areas that have witnessed extensive research involving emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction included Iranian women in early marriage (Hajihassani & Sim, 2019); other diverse married couples (Amazue et al., 2015; *Anhange et al.*, 2017; Arshad et al., 2015; Ilyas & Habib, 2014; Jahanian & Shamllo, 2017; Omidi & Talighi, 2019); workers in different professions (Arshad et al., 2015; Manjula et al., 2016 cited in Kalsoom & Kamal, 2018; O'Connor et al., 2018), and equally amid married couples in most Nigerian churches (Eze & Mba, 2018). Most uniquely, none of the studies (to the knowledge of the researchers) have addressed emotional intelligence as it relates to marital

satisfaction in the military contexts. The results of this study will bring to the front burners of knowledge the military kind of experience as far as emotional intelligence versus marital satisfaction. Our findings will moreover, affirm the fact that emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction seem to be fundamental to the optimal wellbeing and functionality of individuals given the extant vast and increasing empirical evidence and research interests.

Communication in marital satisfaction, like emotional intelligence, is indispensable. Communication is the process of passing information and understanding from one person to another. Gottman (1982) identified communication skills as the “key” to successful, satisfying marital relationships. With effective communication skills, couples spend more time sharing their emotions and less time in conflict (Kirchler, 1989). According to studies, the main factors associated with positive communication include active listening, self-disclosure and conflict resolution (Pfeiffer, 1998). Onyeizugbo (2005) distinguished three dimensions of communication, namely, responsive communication, blocked communication and self-disclosure. Responsive communication is a positive pattern of communication whereby the individuals feel validated. Blocked communication is a negative pattern of communication which is often ineffective for both parties and none of the parties feels understood. Self-disclosure as discussed earlier is the expression of one’s thoughts,

feelings, strengths and weaknesses to the other party. Irrespective of the dimension, communication is very important in marital satisfaction as it has generated a lot of research interest worldwide. This has been examined in various dimensions (Christensen & Sullaway, 1984; Ledermann et al., 2010; Nina, 1991), contexts/sample/populations (Bravo & Martínez, 2016; Haris & Aneesh, 2018; Madahi et al., 2013; Shebib, 2016; Tan et al., 2017), professions (Amazue et al., 2015; Massod & Mazahir, 2015; Wilmarth et al., 2014) and with the deployment of various research apparatus (Bravo & Martínez, 2016; Hou et al., 2018). The military professions are rarely delved in. The reasons for this scarcity of information from the military domain may not have fallen within the scope of this study. But it is interesting to know that such a knowledge barrier in that profession is gradually being broken and more rigorous research efforts from interested scholars will help the military overcome most of their challenges. Most military personnel likely seem to suffer from accumulated marital challenges that would have been solved/avoided if their kind of profession provided a communicating opportunity, therefore, our study is crucial both for the military profession and the development of the body of knowledge.

Awareness that latently relates to marital satisfaction seems to have attracted less global research interest unlike emotional intelligence and communication. We operationalized awareness in line with Kernis and

Goldman's (2004) proposition as the perception of trust and knowledge of one's motives, feelings, desires, and self-relevant cognitions. In other words, being able to genuinely understand, accept, and adjust one's feelings, motives and desires to the current real-life situations. It is one of the four dimensions of authenticity, which has scarcely been evaluated. Therefore, considering awareness in the military context is yet a laudable research feat that has ever been documented in the body of knowledge. To the knowledge of the authors, authenticity has scarcely been examined with marital satisfaction; leading to a dearth of empirical documentation in this aspect. However, most of the research evidence that existed was directly unrelated to awareness and marital satisfaction. For instance, self-esteem has been correlated with authenticity (Wang, 2015; Wang & Ziyi, 2018); authenticity as a potential mediator of the negative effects of attachment on relationship satisfaction (Rasco & Warner, 2016); authenticity, subjective happiness, and life satisfaction (Sarika, 2015). Findings from our study will be expository and may perhaps lead to this novel research trajectory.

Ultimately, our research is relevant as its impacts are not only limited to military situations but to every other marital environment requiring a balance between family demands and work shifts (and/or deployments) with the view to ensuring marital satisfaction. Whatever reason(s), we believe that marital dissatisfaction among military couples (especially) are

indices of untold hardship, infidelity, separation, psycho-social instability, lack of concentration at work, and high cases of anti-social behaviours of most children of the affected couple. Therefore, the explanatory research solutions (if utilized properly) are not only essential to the military and for academic utilization but also to the larger society as the future occurrence of the above-mentioned negotiations would likely be averted or reduced for a better discharge of military duties, safer lives and property as well as saner society.

Objectives of the study: Specifically, the sought to investigate whether:

1. age is a factor in marital satisfaction among the military personnel,
2. emotional intelligence predicts marital satisfaction among military personnel,
3. awareness predicts marital satisfaction among military personnel, and
4. communication is associated with marital satisfaction among military personnel.

Hypotheses

The hypothetical relationship of our study is explained by the Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction (DGTMS) proposed by Li and Fung (2011). The theory contends that people have multiple goals to achieve in marriage and that these marital goals can be classified into three categories: personal growth goals, companionship goals, and instrumental goals. The priority of the three types underscores the dynamism. Earlier, Mills and Clark

(1994) noted that the main concern of couples in marriage is to meet each other's needs and satisfaction usually follows when these needs are met.

In line with the study objectives, we hypothesize the following:

H1: Age is a significant factor in marital satisfaction among military personnel.

H2: Emotional intelligence significantly predicted marital satisfaction among military personnel.

H3: Awareness significantly predicted marital satisfaction among the military personnel, and

H4: Communication is significantly associated with marital satisfaction among military personnel.

Methodology

Study Design: The study adopted a cross-sectional design.

Study Population: The population of the study consists of all the military personnel in four military establishments located in five States of the South-South region of Nigeria (Edo, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, and the Rivers States). Such military establishments in the Nigerian Armed Forces were the Army, Navy, and Air Force.

Sample Size Selection Procedure: We conveniently sampled 399 married military personnel. The military establishment had 5 units in each of the South-South States of Nigeria. Through the balloting technique, two units were picked in each State for the study. We consider our sample size appropriate since the military has the same customary bureaucratic operating system nationwide; as such any small

sample could make a true representation. Besides, the military has a bureaucratic manner of information reservation, coupled with problems of availability. Thus, penetrating through the military is almost always impossible.

Instruments for Data Collection

Age: participants were asked to indicate their age in the column provided in the questionnaire.

Emotional intelligence: Married military couple completed the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale (BEIS-10) (Davies, Lane, Davenport & Scott, 2010), a 10-item that measures the capacity of individuals to perceive, control, and evaluate emotions. Each item response is on a scale of 1 to 5, with a total score reflecting the average of responses on the 10 items. BEIS-10 demonstrates excellent internal consistency, test-retest reliability, and convergent and discriminant validity (e.g., Schutte, Malouff, Hall, Haggerty, Cooper, Golden & Dornheim, 1998; Heidari, et. al., 2019). Our sample also demonstrated an excellent internal consistency of .85.

Awareness: Participants filled the 12-item (1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 14, 20, 21, 29, 34, 36, and 38) Awareness subscale of the Authenticity Scale by Kernis and Goldman (2006). While authenticity measures one's genuine behaviour and expression of what one is like, awareness measures one's processing ability and knowledge of internal experiences in one's present situation. Kernis and Goldman (2006) reported an alpha coefficient of .90 and .80 for the authenticity scale and awareness subscale respectively; and a .79 test-

retest reliability index for the awareness subscale. Participants were rated on a five-point scale with total higher scores indicating higher dispositional authenticity/awareness. Items were directly and reverse-scored. The direct-scored items include (3, 4, 6, 9, 20, 21, 29, 34, and 38) while the reverse-scored items include (1, 14, and 36). We obtained an internal consistency of .77.

Communication: Participants also completed the 16-item Dyadic Communication Assessment Scale (DCAS) (Onyeizugbo, 2005). DCAS assesses the quality of communication among dyads – married persons as well as partners who are involved in close relationships with the view to facilitating self-understanding and psychological intervention in distressed relationships. DCAS has five response options. Items (like 1, 2, 3, 6, 11, and 13) that suggest ineffective communication are reverse scored while others are scored directly. Higher scores suggest higher dyadic communication in the relationship. The DCAS has the following psychometric properties: $\alpha = .90$; and split-half reliability = .89. Exploratory factor analysis (Maximum likelihood; oblique rotation) with DCAS, gave rise to Responsive Communication (with items 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 15) and α of .82; Blocked Communication (with items 1, 2, 3, 11 and 13) and α of .74; and Self-disclosure (with items 5, 12, 14, and 16) and α of .74. The DCAS had concurrent validity of $r = .55$ ($p < .001$) with the Assertive Behaviour Assessment Scale (Onyeizugbo, 2008). Confirmatory Factors Analysis (CFA)

using SPSS AMOS version 25 of our sample revealed α of .80, .78, and .82 for Responsive communication, Blocked communication, and Self-disclosure respectively.

Marital satisfaction: Participants finally completed the 25-item Index of Marital Satisfaction (IMS) (Hudson, 1982) designed to measure the degree of satisfaction within the context of one's marital relationship. Items are rated on a five-point scale with Cronbach's alpha of .96 and 2-hour test-retest at .96. Items (1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, and 23) are direct scored while (2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16, 18, 22, 24, and 25) are reverse scored. The final score is obtained by adding together the result of the direct and reverse scores and subtracting 25 to obtain the participant's raw score, such that higher scores indicate adequate marital satisfaction, whereas lower scores indicate either problematic marital satisfaction or marital dissatisfaction. Previous studies (e.g., Amazue, Amazue & Onu, 2015; Onyishi, Sorokowski, Sorokowska, & Pipitone, 2012) in Nigerian samples have reported adequate reliability and validity for the IMS. Our CFA showed a one-dimensional structure of IMS with an internal consistency reliability of .83.

Validation and Reliability: A pilot study was conducted with 149 military personnel drawn from military establishments in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (men = 126, women = 23, age range = 23-56 years, mean age = 38.31, $SD = 8.24$ years) to validate and establish the reliability indexes of the instruments. For emotional

intelligence, Confirmatory Factors Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the 10 items of the BEIS using SPSS AMOS version 25. Fit indices considered from the CFA were the normed chi-square (χ^2/df), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI) and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). The normed chi-square (χ^2/df) below the cut-off value of 3.0 (Kline, 2005) or 5.0 (Bentler, 1990) is recommended. The CFI, TLI, IFI and GFI values of .80 are marginal fits, those greater than .90 are acceptable fits, while values greater than .95 are most preferred. RMSEA values lower than .10 indicates an acceptable fit, while values lower than .05 indicates a good fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2010). Results of the pilot study showed that CFA marginally confirmed the one-dimensional structure of the Brief Emotional Intelligence Scale with the following fit indices; CFI=.85; IFI=.85; TLI=.80; GFI=.88 and RMSEA = .11. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) of the items was .81.

For awareness, the Confirmatory Factors Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the 45 items of the AI using SPSS AMOS version 25. CFA results for the four-factor structure of the Authenticity Inventory returned the following fit indices; CFI=.57; IFI=.58; TLI=.53; GFI= .69 and RMSEA = .12. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) of the items for the four subscales were .71 (awareness), .68 (unbiased processing), .74 (behavioural) and relational orientation (.74).

For communication, the Confirmatory Factors Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the 10 items of the DCAS using SPSS AMOS version 25. CFA results for the three-factor structure of the DCAS returned the following fit indices; CFI=.47; IFI=.50; TLI=.40; GFI= .78 and RMSEA = .11. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) of the items for the three dimensions were .79 (Responsive communication), .77 (Blocked communication), and .74 (Self-Disclosure).

For marital satisfaction, the Confirmatory Factors Analysis (CFA) was conducted for the 10 items of the BEIS using SPSS AMOS version 25. CFA results for the one-dimensional structure of the Index of Marital Satisfaction Scale returned the following fit indices; CFI=.41; IFI=.43; TLI=.37; GFI= .70 and RMSEA = .06. Internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's α) of the items was .83.

Ethical approval and informed consent: With a letter of introduction from the Department of Psychology, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, we met the Commander of each unit, explained the purpose of the research, and requested approval for the conduction of our study with their military personnel. Our procedures met relevant ethical guidelines and legal requirements in Nigeria to have warranted the ethical approval obtained from the Institutional Review Board, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (D.PSY: UNN.002107020) and that of the military approval. The participants

gave their written consent after explaining the purpose of the research.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria: To preserve the homogeneity of the sample, all participants were required to be married and active in service. That equally accounted for the inclusion criterion. Those single/unmarried and non-active duty service personnel were excluded though the single/unmarried personnel would have been deployed severally. Their exclusion was based on the rationale that they may not feel (or have felt) well the impact of their deployments unlike the married couple.

Method of Data Collection: With the permission of the Heads of the military units, we recruited and trained five research assistants (serving personnel from each unit), who assisted in administering and collating the questionnaires. With the recruited research assistants, participants were approached in their offices and residences. Those who volunteered were administered the paper-and-pencil self-report inventory. Questionnaires were administered by hand and took each participant an average of 15-20 minutes to complete. The participants were not compelled to give immediate attention to the questionnaires. The administration and collection of data lasted for a total of seven weeks and five days. Out of 409 questionnaires administered, 406 copies were completed and collected/returned giving a 99.2% return rate. Seven questionnaires out of

the 406 questionnaires collected/returned were discarded for improper fillings such as the omission of (or double response to) an item (or more) items of the questionnaire, leaving a total of 399 that were used for data analysis. The research assistants were each paid little stipends. Participants were equally verbally appreciated.

Data and Statistical Analysis: Pearson's Correlation (r) and hierarchical multiple regression analysis were conducted to examine the relationships among the study variables at $p < 0.05$. All analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

Results

Demographic characteristics of the respondents

The respondents consist of 345 (86.5%) men and 54 (13.5%) women. Participants were drawn from all three military forces - Army ($n = 141$, 35.3%), Navy ($n = 132$, 33.2%) and Air Force ($n = 126$, 31.5%). There were 297(74.4%) recruits and 102(25.6%) commissioned officers; with a mean age of 37.6 years ($SD = 8.56$ years). In terms of religion, 309 (77.4%) were Christians while 90(22.6%) were Muslims. Participants' average number of children was 2.44 ($SD = 1.57$), while the average duration of marriage was 1.63 years (0.87 years).

Relationship of demographic factors, age, emotional intelligence, awareness, communication and marital satisfaction

In Table 1, older age was associated with lower marital satisfaction ($r = -.12$,

$p < .05$). Emotional intelligence correlated positively with responsive communications ($r = .17, p < .01$), and marital satisfaction ($r = .15, p < .01$); but there was a negative relationship between emotional intelligence and blocked communication ($r = -.15, p < .01$). Responsive communication positively associated with marital

satisfaction ($r = .29, p < .001$) but was not associated with blocked communication and awareness. Blocked communication was associated with less marital satisfaction ($r = -.14, p < .01$) but no with awareness. Greater awareness was related to marital satisfaction ($r = .16, p < .01$).

Table 1: Correlations of Demographic factors, age, emotional intelligence, awareness, communication and marital satisfaction.

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Age	-					
2 Emotional Intelligence	.00	-				
3 Responsive Communication	-.14**	.17**	-			
4 Blocked Communication	.00	-.15**	-.05	-		
5 Awareness	.05	.20**	-.02	-.06	-	
6 Marital Satisfaction	-.12*	.15**	.29***	-.14**	.16**	-

Note: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Table 2 of step 1 above showed that age negatively predicted marital satisfaction, $\beta = -.17, t(399) = -2.89, p < .01$, indicating that being older was associated with less marital satisfaction. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) showed that for each one-unit rise in age, marital satisfaction decreases by $-.19$ units. All the other demographic factors were controlled. The contribution of age in explaining the variance in marital satisfaction was 4% ($R^2 = .04$), and the model was significant, $F(5, 387) = 3.27$

In step 2, emotional intelligence positively predicted marital satisfaction, $\beta = .13, t(399) = 2.56, p < .05$. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) showed that for each one unit rise in emotional intelligence, marital satisfaction increases by $.21$ units. The contribution of emotional

intelligence in explaining the variance in marital satisfaction was 2% ($\Delta R^2 = .02$), and the model was significant, $F\Delta(1, 386) = 6.56, p < .05, R^2 = .06$.

Awareness was added to the regression model in (Step 3) and it positively predicted marital satisfaction, $\beta = .15, t(399) = 2.84, p < .01$. The unstandardized regression coefficient (B) showed that for each one-unit rise in awareness, marital satisfaction increases by $.31$ units. The contribution of awareness in explaining the variance in marital satisfaction was 4% ($\Delta R^2 = .04$), and the model was significant, $F\Delta(7, 385) = 4.29, R^2 = .18$.

In the final step (Step 4), the two dimensions of dyadic communication were added and Responsive communication positively predicted marital satisfaction, $\beta = .25, t(399) = 4.73, p < .001$. The unstandardized

regression coefficient (*B*) showed that for each one-unit rise in responsive communication, marital satisfaction increases by .60 units. Blocked communication negatively predicted marital satisfaction, $\beta = -.10$, $t(399) = -1.98$, $p < .05$. The unstandardized regression coefficient (*B*) showed that for each unit rise in blocked communication, marital satisfaction decreases by -.27 units. The contribution of communication in explaining the variance in marital satisfaction was 9% ($\Delta R^2 = .09$), and the model was significant, $F(3, 383) = 12.66$, $R^2 = .14$. Of all the variables that predicted marital satisfaction, responsive communication was the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction ($\beta = .25$).

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression predicting marital satisfaction by age, emotional intelligence, awareness, and communication

Predictors	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3			Step 4		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
Age												
	-0.19		2.89**									
Emotional Intelligence												
				.21	.13	2.56*						
Awareness												
							.31	.15	2.84**			
Responsive Communication										.60	.25	4.73***
Blocked Communication										-.27	-.10	-1.98*
R ²			.04			.06			.18			.14
ΔR^2			.04			.02			.04			.09
F			3.27(5, 387)**			3.86(6, 386)**			6.35(7, 385)**			7.02(9, 383)**
ΔF			3.27(5, 387)**			6.56(6, 386)**			4.29(7, 385)**			12.66(9, 383)**

Note: *** $p < .001$; ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$; ΔR^2 = Change in R^2 ; ΔF = Change in F

Discussion

Balancing family demands in ensuring marital satisfaction has been a major concern not necessarily to military personnel alone but also to every married working-class person whose nature of work requires deployment/shifts. Our study, using 399 military personnel explored how the military and those concerned could leverage the impact of emotional intelligence, awareness, and communication to ensure marital satisfaction. Specifically, the age of the military personnel was found to negatively predict marital satisfaction, indicating that being older was associated with less marital satisfaction. This could be explained by the negative impact of the military longer deployment cycle that usually has no age consideration (Sahlstein et al. 2009; SteelFisher et al 2008) where the military is periodically deployed to various stations. This abrupt separation of the soldier at perhaps older age when he/she has harmonized and bonded with family, relations and close friends, leaves the military personnel with lots of uncertainty and worry about how the physical separation will impact the state of their marriage unity, joy and happiness in the future. Thus, leading to marital dissatisfaction.

Ordinarily, the news of deployments and its associated premeditated effects, trigger a lot of anxiety, fear of the unknown, heightened emotional stress, and all of which threaten marital satisfaction (Allen, et. al., 2011). We found that emotional intelligence positively predicted marital satisfaction, indicating that greater emotional intelligence was associated with increased marital satisfaction. This implies that for a military couple to be maritally satisfied amidst long dangerous deployments and military tasks, they

should exhibit a high sense of emotional self-regulation, flexibility, and self-competence, not allowing the anxiety and fear of the unknown attached to deployment (Karney et al 2012) overwhelm them. That is, subjecting the deployment situation to critical examinations while consciously seeing only optimism before taking a decision and action rather than acting on impulse due to unbridled deployment emotions. Our finding is, however, consistent with most previous studies (Heidari, et. al., 2019; Hajihassani & Sim, 2019) done in various populations and across countries; confirming and indicating the powerful cross-sectional impact of emotional intelligence (Arshad et al 2015).

We also found that awareness, an aspect of authenticity, was positively associated with marital satisfaction, indicating that greater awareness was associated with increased marital satisfaction. This means that those high in the cognitive examination, positive perception, and appreciation of the reality of deployment are more likely to be flexible, have their self-trust, self-reliance, and knowledge of one's motives, feelings, desires (Kernis & Goldman, 2004) enhanced; which in turn, are necessary to cope and adapt with marital demands and pre-post deployments. Therefore, being authentic with marital affairs enhances trust; which invariably paves the smooth way to acquiring marital satisfaction

In addition to early studies (like Pfeiffer's, 1998), the observation that the main factors associated with positive communication include active listening, self-disclosure, and conflict resolution; and that poor communication skills have been linked with unhappy couples who are most likely to suffer from marital dissatisfaction and distress (Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). We

found that responsive communication positively predicted marital satisfaction, showing that greater responsive communication was associated with increased marital satisfaction and that blocked communication negatively predicted marital satisfaction, such that greater blocked communication was associated with a reduction in marital satisfaction. It follows that military couples who can adequately share more closely with their partner the challenges of their family and deployments; agreeing together on how to overcome them, may likely have more marital satisfaction. A similar result is obtained when communication is unblocked among military couples. Our finding is consistent with other studies such as Bravo and Martínez's (2016) study on communication style, and Schrodtt et al (2014) study on communication patterns.

We anchor the explanation of our findings on the Dynamic Goal Theory of Marital Satisfaction (DGTMS) proposed by Li and Fung (2011) as explained earlier. Thus, when people sense that a certain goal is desirable; they may not only seek the goal for themselves but also provide opportunities for the spouse to fulfill that goal. Hence, helping their spouse fulfil such a goal influences their marital satisfaction as they feel fulfilled and successful. So, to maintain a balance between family demands and deployments in ensuring marital satisfaction, according to DGTMS, requires an emotional understanding of the family goals, being knowledgeable of the understood family goals, properly prioritising marital goals as well as the corresponding challenges and amicably expressing couples' mutually desired marital goals. This assertion corresponds with extant empirical proof suggesting that providing support to one's couple is as

important as receiving support from the other for mutual maintenance of marital satisfaction (Brown et al 2003; De Jong Gierveld & Dykstra, 2008; Thomas, 2010).

Limitations of the study

In the course of this study, we encountered some limitations. For instance, for cross-cultural generalization of findings that require considerably large participants, our small sample size may not have been large enough. Similarly, we did not consider in the sampling procedures those individual differences, interests and choices in terms of what actually will make one's marriage satisfied as this definitely would have ensured a more homogenous population. Further research may consider such differences and possibly incorporate other differences that might play a role in marital satisfaction among the military. Furthermore, our study cannot make complete inferences about cause-effect directionality as it is cross-sectional in nature. The reliability and validity of our instruments may have been threatened by the self-reported measurement we used and this may have paved the way for response biases as respondents could either have made socially acceptable answers rather than being truthful or be unable to accurately assess themselves. Likewise, such scales as the emotional intelligence, awareness, communication and marital satisfaction we employed were simply screening tests to categorize participants of groups who may have been predisposed to marital satisfaction but were not necessarily diagnostic. Consequently, the results arising from these scales may simply indicate how (and what) the military personnel make out of marital satisfaction but may not themselves have concerns regarding marital satisfaction. Hence, future studies should

perhaps attempt to make more causal suppositions, possibly from a more controlled experimental investigation. Our study could not also consider the several ways and yardstick people used to access and understand marital satisfaction as marital satisfaction seems to be relative and subjective. This area should further be examined. Finally, selection bias could have confounded the internal validity of the study. However, the use of this approach might not have a significant impact on the outcome of our study. Nonetheless, this can be best established in subsequent research while taking into consideration the issues raised. We, therefore, recognize and acknowledge this as a flaw of the sampling technique we adopted and advise the exercise of caution in making generalizations from our findings. As a result of these limitations stated above, we recommend that future studies should ensure adequate representativeness, increased homogeneity, etc. to foster generalizations of the findings.

Conclusion

Balancing family demands and deployments in ensuring marital satisfaction requires flexibility, assertiveness, awareness, expression, management, and control of emotions, self-esteem, low impulsiveness, communication skills, self-motivation, stress management, social competence, trait empathy, trait happiness, and trait optimism. Age

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correlated with marital satisfaction such that older military personnel experienced less marital satisfaction. Emotional intelligence predicted marital satisfaction as those higher in emotional intelligence were associated with increased marital satisfaction, and awareness (an aspect of authenticity) was positively associated with marital satisfaction, indicating that those high in the cognitive examination, positive perception, and appreciation of the reality of deployment are more likely to be flexible and be satisfied with their marriage. Finally, communication is an important factor in marital satisfaction among the military indicating that military couples who share more closely with their partner the challenges of their family and deployments; agreeing together on how to overcome them, may likely have more marital satisfaction. Thus, age, emotional intelligence, awareness, and communication are important factors in marital satisfaction among the military.

Recommendation

Our findings, therefore, highlight the need for a solid guideline for policies and programs that may support military families facing deployment challenges; especially, programs that promote or facilitate effective stress coping experienced during and after deployment as this may have beneficial ripple effects on the military personnel and the families.

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