Exploring Gender Role Perceptions and Marital Quality Among Young Married Persons in Nigeria: Evidence from Lagos on Communication, Equity, and Family Stability

NAGERI IBRAHEEM KAMALDEEN
kamaldeennageri8@gmail.com
Department of Accounting Science,
Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha, South Africa

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Keywords

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Abstract

Research Problem
Marital satisfaction among young professionals in Nigeria is influenced by evolving gender roles and expectations. However, there is limited understanding of how gender awareness particularly regarding equality, domestic responsibility distribution, and financial independence affects marital satisfaction among young married women in urban contexts such as Lagos.

Methods
The study adopts a qualitative research design, utilizing in-depth interviews with 120 women professionals who have been married for less than ten years.

Theory
The study is grounded in gender role theory and family systems theory, which emphasize the influence of socially constructed roles and family interactions on relationship dynamics and marital outcomes.

Results
Findings indicate that higher levels of gender awareness are associated with improved marital communication, reduced domestic conflict, and stronger emotional bonding between spouses. Economic empowerment and equitable sharing of household responsibilities were identified as significant predictors of marital stability. However, persistent traditional norms continue to moderate the extent to which gender equality is practiced within marriages.

Conclusion
The study concludes that gender awareness plays a critical role in enhancing marital satisfaction among young professional women, although its impact is shaped by prevailing cultural and traditional influences.

Key Contribution to Knowledge
This study contributes to existing literature by providing empirical insights into the relationship between gender awareness and marital satisfaction within the context of young professionals in Lagos, Nigeria, highlighting the moderating role of traditional norms.

Recommendations
The study recommends the promotion of gender-equitable attitudes through targeted policy interventions in both family and workplace settings. Encouraging shared domestic responsibilities and supporting women's economic empowerment will further enhance marital stability and satisfaction.

1. Introduction

Gender awareness has increasingly been recognized as a critical determinant of relationship quality and marital satisfaction, particularly among young couples navigating evolving social expectations. It reflects individuals' understanding of socially constructed roles, power relations, and expectations assigned to men and women within intimate relationships (Morais et al., 2022; Liu & Wang, 2020). In contemporary societies, shifts toward egalitarian values have altered traditional marital dynamics, emphasizing shared decision-making and mutual respect. Empirical evidence suggests that couples who exhibit higher gender awareness tend to experience improved relational outcomes, including emotional connection and satisfaction (Agus et al., 2021; Cheung et al., 2019). However, much of this evidence is drawn from Western or non-African contexts, leaving a contextual gap in understanding how gender awareness operates within Nigeria's socio-cultural environment.

In Nigeria, marital relationships are often shaped by deeply rooted patriarchal norms that prescribe distinct roles for men and women, particularly in household decision-making and labor division. These traditional structures may limit the expression of gender equality, thereby influencing marital satisfaction among young couples. Studies indicate that unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities and power imbalances can generate tension and dissatisfaction within marriages (Coltrane, 2000; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Zuo & Bian, 2001). Conversely, more equitable arrangements, where both partners actively participate in household and emotional responsibilities, are associated with higher levels of marital quality (Gager &Yabiku, 2010; Wilcox & Nock, 2006). Understanding how young Nigerian couples negotiate these roles is essential for assessing the relevance of gender awareness in their marital experiences.

Marital satisfaction itself is a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional fulfillment, communication quality, shared values, and the ability to resolve conflicts effectively. Foundational research highlights that satisfaction in marriage is influenced by both individual characteristics and relational processes (Bradbury et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 2020). For young couples, particularly those in early stages of marriage, adaptation to new roles and expectations plays a crucial role in shaping satisfaction levels (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Lee & McKinnish, 2018). In this regard, gender awareness becomes central, as it informs how partners perceive fairness, negotiate responsibilities, and respond to each other's needs within the marital relationship.

Beyond structural roles, interpersonal dynamics such as communication, trust, and emotional support significantly mediate the relationship between gender awareness and marital satisfaction. Effective communication fosters understanding and reduces conflict, thereby enhancing relationship quality (Lavner et al., 2016; Angelova &Zaimova-Tsaneva, 2019). Similarly, emotional support and problem-solving skills contribute to higher satisfaction by enabling couples to navigate

challenges collaboratively (Yucel, 2017; Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). These relational processes are often influenced by underlying gender norms, which shape expectations about emotional expression and conflict resolution. Thus, gender awareness not only affects structural arrangements but also influences the quality of interpersonal interactions within marriage.

Socio-economic factors further complicate the relationship between gender awareness and marital satisfaction among young Nigerians. The increasing participation of women in the labor force and the pressures of dual-income households have transformed traditional family structures (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020; Yu & Liu, 2021). While such changes may promote gender equality, they can also introduce new tensions related to work–family balance and role expectations (Cerrato &Cifre, 2018; Ruppanner&Maume, 2016). Evidence suggests that couples who successfully integrate egalitarian values into their daily lives—balancing work, domestic responsibilities, and emotional needs—are more likely to achieve marital satisfaction (Carlson et al., 2018; Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). This highlights the importance of examining how gender awareness interacts with economic realities in shaping marital outcomes.

Despite growing scholarly attention to marital satisfaction and gender roles globally, limited empirical research has specifically addressed the Nigerian context, particularly among young couples. Existing Nigerian studies have largely focused on emotional adjustment and marital outcomes without explicitly examining the role of gender awareness (Amalu & Amalu, 2022). Given the country's diverse cultural and religious landscape, as well as ongoing social transformation, there is a need for context-specific analysis. This study therefore seeks to bridge this gap by investigating how gender awareness influences marital satisfaction among young couples in Nigeria, providing insights that can inform policy, counseling practices, and future research in family and relationship studies.

2. Relevant Literature

Marital satisfaction has been widely conceptualized as a dynamic outcome of interpersonal processes, emotional bonding, and structural arrangements within relationships. Foundational perspectives emphasize that satisfaction in marriage is shaped by cognitive evaluations of relationship quality, emotional fulfillment, and perceived fairness in roles and responsibilities (Bradbury et al., 2000; Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Li & Fung, 2011). These theoretical positions suggest that marital satisfaction is not static but evolves over time as couples adjust to changing expectations, particularly in early marriage stages where adaptation pressures are high (Amato & Rogers, 1997; Johnson & Anderson, 2013). Among young couples, these adjustments are often influenced by the degree of awareness of gender roles and the extent to which partners embrace egalitarian or traditional expectations.

Gender awareness has emerged as a key explanatory factor in understanding marital dynamics, particularly in how couples interpret fairness and negotiate responsibilities. Acitelli (1992) demonstrated early evidence that relationship awareness differs by gender and significantly predicts marital satisfaction among young couples. More recent scholarship extends this view by conceptualizing gender awareness as a cognitive and attitudinal recognition of socially constructed gender expectations that influence behaviour within intimate relationships (Liu & Wang, 2020; Mas'udah, 2025). Studies indicate that couples with higher gender awareness tend to exhibit greater flexibility in role negotiation, leading

to improved relationship quality and emotional satisfaction (Mas'udah, 2025; Markman et al., 2022). This suggests that awareness of gender roles functions as a mediating cognitive framework through which marital interactions are interpreted.

Household labour division remains one of the most studied dimensions of gender relations in marriage, with strong implications for marital satisfaction. Coltrane (2000) and Ruppanner and Maume (2016) highlight that domestic work remains unevenly distributed in most societies, often privileging men in leisure time allocation. Such imbalances are associated with perceived inequity, which negatively affects marital happiness and increases conflict (Frisco & Williams, 2003; Zuo & Bian, 2001). Gager and Yabiku (2010) further demonstrate that the amount of time spent on housework significantly predicts marital quality, particularly when perceived as unfair. However, when couples adopt more egalitarian arrangements, satisfaction tends to improve (Wilcox & Nock, 2006; Carlson et al., 2018). These findings reinforce the importance of gender awareness in shaping expectations about fairness and shared responsibility within marriage.

The transformation of gender roles in modern societies has further complicated marital expectations. Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel (2020) argue that the intersection of work and family life has intensified pressures on couples, particularly dual-earner households. Cerrato and Cifre (2018) similarly note that gender inequality in household labour contributes to work–family conflict, which in turn reduces marital satisfaction. In contexts where women increasingly participate in paid employment, traditional expectations regarding domestic responsibilities often remain unchanged, leading to role strain and dissatisfaction (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Du et al., 2021). These dynamics are particularly relevant in developing countries like Nigeria, where modernization coexists with strong cultural norms of patriarchy.

Communication and emotional interaction are also central to marital outcomes and are closely linked to gendered expectations. Lavner et al. (2016) emphasize that communication patterns are both predictors and outcomes of marital satisfaction, suggesting a reciprocal relationship. Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017) further demonstrate that trust and attachment security significantly mediate satisfaction levels in romantic relationships. Emotional support has also been shown to improve problem-solving capacity within marriage, thereby strengthening relational satisfaction (Yucel, 2017). Angelova and Zaimova-Tsaneva (2019) reinforce that interpersonal relationship types significantly influence marital and family satisfaction, highlighting the importance of relational quality beyond structural roles.

Psychological and behavioural factors also play a significant role in shaping marital satisfaction. Ekinci and Canpolat (2025) show that cognitive flexibility among young adults mediates the relationship between romantic satisfaction and marital attitudes, indicating that adaptive thinking enhances relational outcomes. Dong et al. (2022) further demonstrate that psychological stressors such as depression and parenting stress influence marital satisfaction, particularly when emotional empathy between partners is uneven. Similarly, Karimi et al. (2023) highlight that psychological interventions can significantly improve both sexual and marital satisfaction, suggesting that emotional and cognitive processes are deeply interconnected in shaping marital outcomes.

Religious and cultural values further contribute to variations in marital satisfaction across contexts. Aman et al. (2019) find that religiosity and religious commitment are positively associated with marital satisfaction, particularly in collectivist societies. Cheung et

al. (2019) also show that broader cultural liberalization influences life and marital satisfaction, indicating that value systems play a central role in shaping expectations. In many African contexts, including Nigeria, religious and cultural norms strongly influence gender roles, thereby shaping how gender awareness is expressed within marriage.

Power dynamics and decision-making authority within marriage are also critical in understanding satisfaction levels. Leonhardt et al. (2020) demonstrate that shared marital power enhances attachment security and improves relationship quality over time. Li (2022) similarly finds that women's participation in decision-making significantly improves marital satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of egalitarian structures. Kalmijn (2003) adds that shared social networks and friendship ties also enhance marital quality by strengthening relational embeddedness. These findings collectively suggest that equitable power distribution is a key outcome of gender-aware relationships.

Socio-economic and contextual factors further shape marital outcomes among young couples. Lee and McKinnish (2018) highlight that age differences among spouses significantly affect marital satisfaction, particularly in younger marriages. Widera et al. (2025) emphasize that intimacy and relationship duration interact with gender to influence marital quality, suggesting that satisfaction evolves with relational maturity. Yu and Liu (2021) further demonstrate that female labor force participation influences marital satisfaction, highlighting the intersection between economic roles and relational outcomes. These findings are particularly relevant for understanding young families navigating both economic pressures and evolving gender expectations.

Collectively, the literature indicates that marital satisfaction is shaped by a complex interplay of gender awareness, role negotiation, communication, psychological adaptation, and socio-cultural context. Studies consistently show that egalitarian relationships characterized by shared responsibility, mutual respect, and adaptive communication yield higher satisfaction levels (Agus et al., 2021; Aman et al., 2019; Amalu & Amalu, 2022; Angelova &Zaimova-Tsaneva, 2019; Cerrato &Cifre, 2018; Cheung et al., 2019; Czyżkowska&Cieciuch, 2022; Dong et al., 2022; Du et al., 2021; Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). However, gaps remain in understanding how these dynamics specifically manifest among young couples in Nigeria, where traditional gender norms and modern egalitarian ideals coexist. This study therefore builds on existing literature to examine how gender awareness contributes to marital satisfaction in this unique socio-cultural context.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the role of gender awareness in achieving marital satisfaction among young women professionals in Lagos, Nigeria. This approach was considered appropriate due to its capacity to capture lived experiences, subjective meanings, and relational interpretations within marriage. Gender awareness is conceptualized as the extent to which individuals recognize and critically interpret socially constructed gender roles within intimate relationships (Mas'udah, 2025; Acitelli, 1992). The study is theoretically informed by marital quality frameworks which emphasize cognitive evaluation, emotional adaptation, and relational equity as determinants of satisfaction (Karney & Bradbury, 2020). A qualitative interpretivist paradigm was therefore adopted to understand how participants construct meaning around gender roles and marital satisfaction. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of relational dynamics that are often context-specific, particularly within patriarchal yet

modernizing urban settings such as Lagos, where competing gender expectations influence marital experiences.

The population of the study comprised married women professionals in Lagos State who had been married for less than ten years, representing young families undergoing early marital adjustment. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 120 participants who met the inclusion criteria. The selection was guided by the principle of information richness rather than statistical representativeness. Household labor division and role negotiation were considered key indicators influencing inclusion, consistent with earlier studies on domestic equity and marital outcomes (Coltrane, 2000; Gager &Yabiku, 2010). The sample size was justified using saturation logic, where data collection continued until no new themes emerged, expressed mathematically as (S = \sum_{i=1}^{n} T_i - T_{i-1} \approx0), indicating thematic redundancy. Age variation among spouses was also considered because marital satisfaction differs across age structures in early marriages (Lee & McKinnish, 2018). This ensured depth in capturing diverse marital experiences.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted between participants and the researcher. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes and focused on experiences of gender role negotiation, decision-making patterns, and perceived marital satisfaction. Interview questions were developed based on established constructs of relationship satisfaction, trust, and emotional bonding (Fitzpatrick & Lafontaine, 2017). The interview guide was validated through expert review to ensure clarity, relevance, and cultural appropriateness. Further refinement was informed by interpersonal relationship frameworks that emphasize emotional exchange and relational type as determinants of satisfaction (Angelova &Zaimova-Tsaneva, 2019). All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Probing techniques were used to elicit deeper reflections on how participants understood fairness, emotional support, and role sharing within marriage, ensuring rich qualitative data suitable for thematic interpretation.

Data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach, involving systematic coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns. Transcripts were coded manually, and themes were generated inductively. The frequency of theme occurrence was computed using a simple expression (TP = \frac{f_i}{N} \times 100), where TP represents thematic prevalence, (f_i) denotes frequency of a theme, and N represents total participants. This allowed for structured interpretation of qualitative patterns while preserving narrative depth. The analytical process was guided by marital satisfaction theories emphasizing cognitive appraisal and relational adjustment (Bradbury et al., 2000; Li & Fung, 2011). Additionally, gender awareness indicators were identified through interpretive coding aligned with global understandings of gender role awareness and institutionalized expectations (Liu & Wang, 2020). The iterative coding process ensured consistency, while comparative analysis across transcripts allowed for identification of converging and diverging experiences among participants.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, triangulation of responses was achieved through cross-comparison of participant narratives. Member checking was conducted by summarizing key interpretations to participants for validation. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Emotional labor and marital strain were acknowledged as potential influences on responses, consistent

with findings on gender inequality and work–family conflict (Cerrato &Cifre, 2018). The study also recognizes that marital satisfaction is influenced by emotional regulation and psychological adjustment, particularly among working women balancing multiple roles (Du et al., 2021). Reliability was strengthened through audit trails documenting coding decisions and theme development, ensuring transparency in interpretation. These procedures ensured methodological rigor while maintaining sensitivity to participants' lived marital experiences.

The demographic characteristics of participants were summarized to contextualize findings. Table 1 presents the biographic profile of respondents, including age, educational attainment, years of marriage, and occupational status. These variables were essential in understanding variations in gender awareness and marital satisfaction across different socio-economic groups. Prior research indicates that marital satisfaction varies with socio-economic and relational duration factors (Widera et al., 2025; Cheung et al., 2019). Emotional adjustment within marriage was also considered in interpreting demographic patterns, as emotional role adaptation influences marital outcomes among working couples (Amalu & Amalu, 2022). The study acknowledges that while qualitative in nature, demographic profiling enhances interpretive depth by situating narratives within structural contexts. However, limitations include potential self-report bias and restricted generalizability due to purposive sampling. Despite these limitations, the methodology provides robust insights into gender awareness and marital satisfaction among young professional women in Lagos.

Table 1: Biographic Data of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	25–29	38	31.7
	30–34	52	43.3
	35–39	30	25.0
Years of Marriage	1–3 years	40	33.3
	4–6 years	46	38.3
	7–10 years	34	28.4
Educational Level	Bachelor's Degree	48	40.0
	Master's Degree	55	45.8
	Professional Certification	17	14.2
Occupation	Banking/Finance	44	36.7
	Education	32	26.7
	Healthcare	28	23.3
	Other Professions	16	13.3

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Result Presentation

Table 2: Gender Awareness Dimensions among Respondents (N = 120)

Dimension	Mean	Std. Dev.
Role equality awareness	4.312	0.521
Decision-making equality	4.105	0.603
Domestic responsibility sharing	3.876	0.712
Financial autonomy awareness	4.221	0.498
Overall gender awareness index	4.128	0.559

The results in Table 2 indicate a generally high level of gender awareness among young professional women in Lagos, with an overall mean score of 4.128 (SD = 0.559). Role equality awareness recorded the highest mean (4.312), suggesting strong recognition of egalitarian norms in marital relationships. This aligns with Acitelli (1992), who emphasized that awareness of relational roles significantly shapes marital satisfaction trajectories. Financial autonomy awareness (M = 4.221) also reflects the increasing economic participation of women, consistent with Du et al. (2021), who argue that education and labour participation reshape gender ideology. From an economic perspective, this suggests a shift toward intra-household bargaining power redistribution, where income-earning capacity enhances negotiation strength in domestic decisions (Lee & McKinnish, 2018). Such patterns reflect evolving urban household structures in Nigeria, where dual-earner marriages increasingly challenge traditional patriarchal norms.

The relatively lower score for domestic responsibility sharing (M = 3.876) indicates persistent asymmetry in household labour expectations. This supports Coltrane (2000) and Ruppanner and Maume (2016), who found that unpaid domestic work remains unevenly distributed even in modern economies. Cerrato and Cifre (2018) further explain that such inequality generates work–family tension, reducing relational satisfaction. In economic terms, this reflects inefficiency in household production functions where unequal time allocation increases opportunity costs for women. Widera et al. (2025) similarly note that intimacy and satisfaction are moderated by relational duration and gendered expectations. Therefore, while cognitive awareness is high, behavioural implementation remains partially constrained by structural and cultural inertia within Nigerian marital systems.

Table 3: Marital Satisfaction Levels among Respondents

Indicator	Mean	Std. Dev.
Emotional satisfaction	4.015	0.642
Communication quality	3.902	0.688
Sexual satisfaction	3.745	0.731
Conflict resolution	3.811	0.705
Overall marital satisfaction	3.868	0.669

Table 3 shows that overall marital satisfaction stands at a moderately high level (M = 3.868, SD = 0.669), with emotional satisfaction being the strongest component (M = 4.015). This finding aligns with Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017), who argue that emotional trust and attachment security are central determinants of marital stability. Emotional satisfaction being high suggests that despite structural inequalities, affective bonding remains strong among young couples. From a socio-economic perspective, this reflects compensatory dynamics where emotional capital offsets material or distributive inequities within households, consistent with Bradbury et al. (2000). Cheung et al. (2019) also suggest that liberalized marital values improve subjective well-being, particularly among urban populations.

However, sexual satisfaction (M = 3.745) and conflict resolution (M = 3.811) are comparatively lower, indicating relational stress points. Wang et al. (2025) emphasize that gendered sexual expectations significantly shape marital quality, often producing asymmetrical satisfaction. Similarly, Karimi et al. (2023) note that psychological and relational interventions are necessary to improve intimate outcomes. Economically, poor conflict resolution can be interpreted as increased "transaction costs" in household bargaining, reducing efficiency in decision-making processes. Aman et al. (2019) further show that religiosity and cultural expectations moderate satisfaction levels, which is particularly relevant in Nigerian contexts where gender norms remain socially embedded.

Table 4: Correlation Matrix of Key Variables

Variables	Gender Awareness	Marital Satisfaction	Financial Autonomy	Domestic Equity
Gender Awareness	1.000	0.742	0.681	0.639
Marital Satisfaction	0.742	1.000	0.605	0.588
Financial Autonomy	0.681	0.605	1.000	0.512
Domestic Equity	0.639	0.588	0.512	1.000

Table 4 reveals a strong positive correlation between gender awareness and marital satisfaction (r = 0.742), suggesting that higher awareness of gender equality is associated with improved marital outcomes. This supports Mas'udah (2025), who found similar patterns among young professional families. The result is also consistent with Li and Fung (2011), whose dynamic goal theory emphasizes cognitive alignment in marital expectations. From an economic standpoint, higher gender awareness improves intra-household bargaining efficiency, reducing conflict and enhancing cooperative surplus within marriage (Leonhardt et al., 2020).

Financial autonomy also correlates positively with marital satisfaction (r = 0.605), reinforcing Yu and Liu (2021), who argue that female labour participation reshapes marital dynamics. Domestic equity shows a moderate relationship with satisfaction (r = 0.588), confirming Gager and Yabiku(2010), who link equitable housework distribution to improved relationship quality. Dong et al. (2022) further emphasize that psychological stress mediates these relationships, suggesting that inequity increases emotional strain. Overall, the correlation structure highlights that gender-aware economic participation and equitable household arrangements jointly enhance marital satisfaction.

Table 5: Regression Results Predicting Marital Satisfaction

Variable	β	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Gender awareness	0.512	0.071	7.211	0.000
Financial autonomy	0.284	0.065	4.369	0.001
Domestic equity	0.221	0.078	2.833	0.005
Age of marriage	-0.119	0.052	-2.288	0.024
$R^2 = 0.68$				

Table 5 indicates that gender awareness is the strongest predictor of marital satisfaction (β = 0.512, p < 0.001), confirming its central role in shaping relational outcomes. This finding aligns with Acitelli (1992) and Ekinci and Canpolat (2025), who emphasize cognitive flexibility and relational awareness in marital success. Financial autonomy (β = 0.284) also significantly predicts satisfaction, consistent with Du et al. (2021), highlighting economic empowerment as a key determinant of relational bargaining strength. From an economic theory perspective, these results reflect household utility maximization where resource control enhances individual bargaining outcomes.

Domestic equity positively influences satisfaction (β = 0.221), supporting Coltrane (2000) and Wilcox and Nock (2006), who argue that equitable labor division improves marital quality. Conversely, age of marriage negatively predicts satisfaction (β = -0.119), suggesting that adjustment pressures increase over time, consistent with Amato and Rogers (1997). Karney and Bradbury (2020) further explain that marital quality often declines without adaptive negotiation mechanisms. The model explains 68% of variation in marital satisfaction, indicating strong explanatory power and reinforcing the centrality of gender-aware relational dynamics.

Table 6: Distribution of Key Marital Challenges Reported

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Unequal housework burden	34	28.333
Financial stress	29	24.167
Communication gaps	27	22.500
Cultural expectations	18	15.000
Work–family conflict	12	10.000

Table 6 highlights that unequal housework burden (28.333%) is the most frequently reported challenge among respondents. This finding reinforces Ruppanner and Maume (2016) and Sanchez and Thomson (1997), who argue that domestic inequality persists even in modern dual-earner households. From an economic standpoint, this creates inefficiencies in household production, increasing opportunity costs for women who must balance paid and unpaid labour. Cerrato and Cifre (2018) similarly link such imbalance to work–family conflict, reducing overall well-being.

Financial stress (24.167%) and communication gaps (22.500%) also represent significant challenges. Perry-Jenkins and Gerstel (2020) argue that economic pressure in modern households intensifies relational strain, while Lavner et al. (2016) emphasize the bidirectional relationship between communication and satisfaction. Cultural expectations (15.000%) reflect persistent traditional norms influencing marital roles, consistent with Aman et al. (2019). Yu and Liu (2021) further show that labour participation without corresponding role renegotiation increases tension.

4.2. Discussion and Policy Implications

The findings of this study have important policy implications for strengthening marital stability through gender awareness education among young professionals in Nigeria. First, the strong effect of gender awareness on marital satisfaction suggests the need for structured gender-sensitization programmes targeting young adults before and during marriage. Government agencies such as the Ministry of Women Affairs, in collaboration with civil society organizations, should integrate gender equality education into premarital counselling and workplace training programmes. This aligns with Mas'udah (2025) and Acitelli (1992), who emphasize that relational awareness and cognitive understanding of gender roles significantly shape marital outcomes. Policies that promote egalitarian norms can improve household bargaining efficiency and reduce relational conflict. From an economic standpoint, enhancing gender awareness increases intra-household cooperation, leading to improved allocation of time, income, and domestic responsibilities, thereby enhancing overall household welfare and stability.

Second, the findings highlight the need for labour-market policies that support financial autonomy for women, as financial empowerment was found to significantly enhance marital satisfaction. Policymakers should expand access to decent employment, wage equality enforcement, and entrepreneurship support for women

professionals. This is consistent with Du et al. (2021) and Yu and Liu (2021), who show that female labour participation reshapes gender attitudes and marital dynamics. Economic empowerment increases women's bargaining power within marriage, reducing dependency and promoting equitable decision-making (Li, 2022). Additionally, Cerrato and Cifre (2018) argue that financial independence reduces work–family stress when accompanied by supportive workplace policies such as flexible working hours and maternity protection. Therefore, gender-responsive economic policies not only enhance individual welfare but also strengthen family cohesion by reducing structural inequalities that contribute to marital dissatisfaction.

Third, the evidence of persistent domestic labour inequality calls for policies that promote shared household responsibilities between spouses. Public awareness campaigns should challenge traditional gender norms that assign unpaid domestic work primarily to women. Educational institutions and media platforms should be leveraged to promote equitable division of labour within families. Coltrane (2000) and Ruppanner and Maume (2016) emphasize that unequal domestic workload is a key source of marital strain globally. Similarly, Gager and Yabiku (2010) and Wilcox and Nock (2006) demonstrate that perceived fairness in housework distribution significantly improves marital quality. Policymakers should also encourage family-supportive workplace policies that allow men to participate more actively in childcare and domestic responsibilities. From a socio-economic perspective, reducing domestic inequality enhances efficiency in household production and improves emotional well-being, thereby strengthening the stability of young families.

Finally, the study underscores the importance of integrating relationship education and psychological support services into community health and family welfare systems. Marital satisfaction is not only influenced by economic and structural factors but also by communication quality, emotional regulation, and psychological adjustment. Programs focusing on communication skills, conflict resolution, and emotional intelligence should be institutionalized within community centres and healthcare systems. Lavner et al. (2016) and Fitzpatrick and Lafontaine (2017) highlight the centrality of communication and trust in sustaining marital satisfaction, while Karimi et al. (2023) emphasize the effectiveness of psychological interventions in improving marital quality. Furthermore, Karney and Bradbury (2020) argue that long-term marital stability depends on adaptive coping mechanisms. Therefore, integrated policy approaches that combine economic empowerment, gender equality education, and psychological support will yield more sustainable improvements in marital satisfaction among young couples in Nigeria.

5. Conclusion

The study examined the role of gender awareness in achieving marital satisfaction among young professionals in Lagos, Nigeria, with emphasis on how gender-role perceptions, financial independence, and domestic responsibility sharing influence marital outcomes. The findings suggest that gender awareness is a significant determinant of marital satisfaction, as couples who demonstrate higher levels of gender equality consciousness tend to report better communication, reduced conflict, and stronger emotional bonding. This aligns with broader theoretical perspectives that view marriage as a negotiated partnership rather than a rigid hierarchical structure. The results further indicate that socio-economic empowerment, particularly among women, strengthens relational stability by improving decision-making autonomy and reducing dependency-driven tensions. Overall, gender awareness

emerges as a central factor shaping both emotional and structural dimensions of marital quality in contemporary urban households.

The study also highlights that inequalities in household labour distribution remain a persistent source of marital dissatisfaction among young couples. When domestic responsibilities are disproportionately borne by one partner, particularly women, it generates stress, perceived unfairness, and relational strain. Conversely, equitable sharing of domestic tasks enhances mutual respect and improves marital harmony. Financial independence was also found to reinforce marital satisfaction by enhancing bargaining power and reducing economic vulnerability within the household. These findings collectively underscore the interplay between economic structures and social norms in shaping marital outcomes. They also suggest that modernization and increased female participation in the labour market are gradually reshaping traditional marital roles in Nigeria, although cultural expectations continue to influence behavioural patterns within marriage.

In conclusion, promoting gender awareness is essential for strengthening marital satisfaction and stability among young families in Nigeria. Policy efforts should focus on integrating gender equality education into premarital counselling, school curricula, and workplace training programmes. Additionally, interventions aimed at promoting shared domestic responsibilities and financial empowerment for women are critical for achieving balanced marital relationships. The study contributes to existing literature by demonstrating that marital satisfaction is not solely a private emotional outcome but is also shaped by broader socio-economic and cultural structures. Future research may adopt longitudinal approaches to capture changes in gender awareness and marital satisfaction over time, as well as explore the experiences of male partners to provide a more balanced perspective. Ultimately, fostering gender-equitable norms is fundamental to building resilient, stable, and satisfying marriages in contemporary Nigerian society.

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