5-1-1997

An exploratory study to determine the impact of religiosity on marital satisfaction

Alicia A. Shank
Clark Atlanta University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.auctr.edu/dissertations

Part of the Social Work Commons

Recommended Citation
ABSTRACT

SHANK, ALICIA A. B.A. OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY, 1995

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY ON MARITAL SATISFACTION

Advisor: Dr. Gale Horton

Thesis dated May, 1997

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of religiosity on marital satisfaction. It was hypothesized that the level of religiosity had a statistically significant impact on marital satisfaction. The sample for this study consisted of forty married individuals, from four churches in Atlanta, Georgia, and sixteen married individuals from a church in Fort Worth, Texas.

One questionnaire consisting of eighteen items was administered to the respondents. The results were analyzed by using frequency distribution, chi-square, and gamma.

The study findings revealed that as the level of religiosity increased, the level of marital satisfaction increased, showing a meaningful relationship between the two variables. However, the relationship between the variables was not shown to be statistically significant and, therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted. Also of interest to the researcher was that 47.5 percent of participants felt religion influenced their daily lives and 70 percent of participants were very happy in their marriages.
AN EXPLORATORY STUDY TO DETERMINE THE IMPACT
OF RELIGIOSITY ON MARITAL SATISFACTION

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

BY
ALICIA A. SHANK

SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

ATLANTA, GEORGIA
MAY 1997
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my best friend and husband (Tom) for his support and encouragement throughout this journey. Also, I would like to thank my family and friends for their support and endless listening to my stories. Particular thanks goes to Dr. Gale Horton for his time, encouragement and continued belief that I could do this - thank you. A very special thank you goes to my sister, Arlene Chapin, for her assistance in collecting my data, her love, support and strength when I felt unsure of my abilities. Thank you dad (Jim Nutt ) and Lucy for our renewed love and commitment to each other and to my in-laws Clyde and Janice Shank for their continued love, nurturing and friendship over the years. This thesis is dedicated in loving memory to my mother Margarita F. Nutt (August 12, 1936 - January 14, 1984). Most of all, I would like to thank God for the wonderful life, love and support he has granted me.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</th>
<th>ii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Problem</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significance and Purpose of the Study</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Families</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Framework</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statement of the Hypothesis</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms and Definitions</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. METHODOLOGY</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design and Sample</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instrument</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Analysis</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. FINDINGS</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion of the Findings</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square Analysis of the Study Variables</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implications for Social Work Practice</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Implications</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations of the Study</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directions for Further Research</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Frequency Distribution of Religiosity Variables</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Frequency Distribution of Marital Variables</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Chi-Square Analysis of the Study Variables</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Undeniably, divorce rates are on the rise in the United States. The 1990 Census Bureau report shows 135,700 separations in Georgia for that year.\(^1\) It is estimated that “six out of ten marriages now end in separation or divorce.”\(^2\) “According to a recent University of Wisconsin study measuring divorce and separation, 60 percent of new marriages are failing.”\(^3\) “American marriages are failing at a rate of over one million each year.”\(^4\) Also, it is estimated that half of the recent first marriages are expected to end in divorce.\(^5\) Along with that, “...approximately five million couples, 10 percent of all currently married couples in the United States have experienced a separation and reconciliation in this marriage.”\(^6\)


\(^{3}\)Ibid., 50.


Cohabitation is also a major cause of divorce. People who live together before marriage are, "50 percent more likely to be disrupted by separation or divorce than marriages without premarital cohabitation." In a study done by the University of Wisconsin, using 100 cohabitating couples, of which 60 couples married. Of the 60 couples who married, only 15 marriages lasted, while 45 couples divorced. This translated into a 75 percent divorce rate. The remaining 40 couples broke up before marriage. Along with high divorce rates, more people are simply deciding not to marry. In 1992, there were 42 million adults who had never married, twice the number in 1970. Research states that one factor contributing to divorce may be interfaith unions or people who have no religious background or practices.

When a marriage fails, a person's support system is often disrupted. Life as it was known, changes. Likewise, material possessions and emotional changes occur. Not only does a person lose a spouse, but also friends, pets and often material possessions. Nevertheless, with marriages being so unstable there is a sense of "permanent availability," meaning a person is not reconciled to the idea that the marriage is for a life-time. "Married persons remain tentatively on the marriage market, susceptible to being lured out

\[\text{7McManus, "Veil of Tears:" 2.}\]
\[\text{8Ibid., 2.}\]
\[\text{9Ibid., 2.}\]
\[\text{10Evelyn L. Lehrer and Carmel U. Chiswick, "Religion as a Determinant of Marital Stability," \textit{Demography} 30 (August 1993): 400.}\]
of their present marriages by opportunities for more favorable ones.\textsuperscript{12} It seems although traditional vows are being used (till death do us part or as long as we both shall live) the real message is as long as we both shall love. Based on divorce statistics, marriage permanence is becoming less fashionable.

A primary factor that contributes to divorce is a person's tendency to compare his/her marriage or his/her spouse with others, real or imagined.\textsuperscript{13} Likewise, married people tend to think the grass is greener for single people; while single people tend to think the grass is greener for those who are married. Statistics demonstrate the outlook for most marriages is bleak based on the fact that divorce is more easily accessible.

\textbf{Statement of the Problem}

With the divorce rate so high, searching for ways to keep marriages intact is important. Perhaps religion is one way to help decrease divorce rates. During the 1997 presidential campaigns, the belief was that the United States needs to go back to old-fashioned values. Repeatedly, candidates talked about the increase in one-parent families, the rise in divorce rates, and the idea that the government could in some way make a difference. The politicians promised to devise a way to keep families intact and parents involved. Yet, even after the election, there still isn't a plan for how the government proposes to make a difference in family values.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 269.

The family-values debate has been sterile because both liberals and conservatives point almost exclusively to the federal government to help strengthen families—in the form of tax deductions, better child-support enforcement, and Head Start programs for preschoolers. But the central reason for the dissolution of two-parent families is that couples no longer marry for life, and the federal government can do nothing to strengthen marriage commitment. Historically, that has been the job of organized religion.14

Some believe the answer to keeping a family together rests in religion. In the past, religion provided a structure and sense of stability for people who marry. Of those who marry, “three-fourths of all first marriages are blessed by pastors, priests, or rabbis.”15 However, once married by a religious leader, people tend to withdraw from the church and religious involvement. This study intends to show that those couples who do continue to be involved in religious activities have a higher rate of marriage satisfaction.

Another concern about failed marriages is the impact it has on the children. The children are the ones who pay the biggest price for divorce. Children from divorced families are usually bounced around from parent to parent. These children have little stability in their lives. Raising children with the idea that if a marriage doesn’t work, it can easily be left behind, only breeds the next generation to continue increasing divorce rates.

On the other hand, research shows that a couple’s religiosity does have an impact on marital satisfaction and honoring of a life-long commitment.16 Churches are trying to concentrate more on providing married couples with guidance and counseling, some call


15Ibid., 50.

them marriage savers. More often, clergy are being used as pre-marriage counselors, but they are also being asked to counsel existing marriages that are in trouble.

Significance and Purpose of the Study

In this study, the researcher hopes to find a relationship between a person's level of religiosity and marital satisfaction. Perhaps through this research, knowledge will be gained of how couples can realize a deeper commitment and happiness within their marriages. Studying the impact of religiosity on marital satisfaction is important because, "it has recently become considerably less likely that Americans who marry will attain and maintain marital success . . ." For this very reason, social workers should begin to search for ways to help marriages succeed.

Families provide a source of acceptance and nurturing to both adults and children. A child's "... development is deeply rooted in opportunities, skills and recognition that accrues through early interaction with family . . ." Dealing with children, social workers must look at a child's ecological system. "Ecological systems

17McManus, "Veil of Tears": 50.


theory posits that individuals are engaged in constant transactions with other human beings and with other systems in the environment and that these various persons and systems reciprocally influence each other."22 The system that has the largest influence on a child is the family.23

Marital satisfaction influences more than one parent’s relationship with the other. It affects the entire family. If religion is an area which promotes and provides marital satisfaction to couples, it is important that it be researched. The literature indicates that there is a positive relationship between religion, marriage stability, and life satisfaction. It is also stated in the literature that: “individuals with strong religious faith report higher levels of life satisfaction, greater personal happiness, and fewer negative psychosocial consequences of traumatic life events.”24

Social workers deal with an individual as well as his/her subsystems. Not only is it important for social workers to examine the family in general, but also to examine a person’s marriage and any group or system that may affect the marriage. Children from two-parent families generally have higher self-esteem than children from divorced families.


23Fraser, “Aggressive Behavior in Childhood and Early Adolescence.”: 34.

Likewise, there is a "relatively high probability of divorce among the children of divorce." Therefore, if there is a subsystem, such as religion, which may help decrease the divorce rate or increase marital satisfaction, it should be researched.

---

Families are systems of paramount significance. Families are the primary "social service agencies in meeting the social, educational, and health care needs" of its members.¹ To a large extent, the family determines proper dating practices, marital arrangements, and religious beliefs.² It is through family interactions and activities that children begin to form value systems, morals, and character. Beavers, "points out that optimally functioning families have a permeating atmosphere of optimism, empathy, warmth and affect, goodwill and positive emotional tone, based on the expectation that human encounters produce satisfaction and that responsiveness to others and clear expressions of feelings will be rewarded."³ Therefore, people who come from supportive, loving, and nurturing families experience a sense of fulfillment.⁴


⁴Ibid., 172.
Learning occurs throughout the life cycle. Different life events and beliefs form a foundation for important activities and milestones. Also, the family influences ideas of a perfect mate as well as behaviors and obligations in a marriage. Likewise, families affect socialization.5 Parents and children have a reciprocal socialization pattern, meaning that each party socializes the other.6 As children get older, they tend to look to parents for guidance and advice.

When a family is separated due to divorce, it greatly effects the children. During the first year after divorce, the children usually receive poor quality parenting.7 Often the child will experience adjustment problems such as not getting along with or withdrawing from other people. Children of divorce become noncompliant, they have low self-esteem and have more problems in heterosexual relationships.8 With intact families, these reactions occur less often. After divorce, a child’s subsystems become even more important due to the absence of one parent. If the remaining parent works outside the home the importance of subsystems increases exponentially.9

5Beavers, Psychotherapy and Growth: Family Systems Perspective, 170.


7Ibid., 404.

8Santrock, Child Development, 433.

9Ibid., 433.
Religion

“Artifacts have been found indicating that Neanderthals engaged in religious practices 60,000 years ago, and since then humans have produced about 100,000 religions.” 10 According to sociology, religion is part of human nature and the predisposition to religious beliefs are complex and powerful forces in the human mind.11 Wilson stated, “Religion is above all the process by which individuals are persuaded to subordinate their immediate self-interest to the interests of the group.” 12 Religion is defined as “The expression of man’s belief in and reverence for a superhuman power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe.”13 People who belong to the same religion generally form kinships among people who have the same beliefs. They do this through the process of religiosity, which means the practice of religion and the level of a person’s behavior relating to religious activities.

A person’s religion is a fundamental basis for building a life and raising children, it provides a base that discourages anti-family behavior.14 “For centuries humans have used religion to make the events in their lives more understandable, therefore less


11B.R. Hergenhahn, An Introduction to Theories of Personality, 420.


threatening.”15 Without religion, according to Erickson, the “lives of millions of persons would be filled with uncertainty.”16 A person’s religiosity provides a sense of meaning in life and helps form a place in society and in marriage. 17 For example: “In Judaism the rule is to love your neighbor as yourself; a rule which Jesus elevated to the status of one of the two great commandments.” 18 Parents use religion to help instill hope in children. Religion directs the course of a person’s life and development. 19

Religion helps set parameters for behaviors and expectations, for example, religion is a gauge of how to treat others. Religion is also a gauge of how people should treat us; likewise, it helps define how people interact in the context of society. It supplies order to individuals and interactions.20

Research shows that religiosity affects several areas of a person’s life, which includes life satisfaction, education, marital satisfaction, child rearing, morals, and values. It is no surprise then, that individuals with a stronger religious faith report higher life satisfaction.

________________________________________

15Thomas, “Religion and Family the 1980’s: Discovery and Development:” 985.


17Hergenhahn, An Introduction to Theories of Personality, 221.

18Ibid., 420.

19Ibid., 422.

20Ibid., 422.
However, the level of a person’s religious commitment may vary depending on what is happening in his/her life. For example, a person who is under a great deal of stress may have an increase in religiosity.\textsuperscript{21} People with strong religious faith often redefine potentially negative life events in religious terms, as opportunities for spiritual growth or as part of a broader divine plane.\textsuperscript{22} Religion also provides a sense of comfort and retreat for those experiencing stress. “Firm religious beliefs enhance significantly both cognitive and affective perceptions of life quality.”\textsuperscript{23} Religious symbols and beliefs provide an interpretive framework in which individuals can make sense of everyday realities.\textsuperscript{24} It stands to reason that people often view religious leaders as helpful in solving problems or providing guidance when times are tough. The stronger a person’s belief, the more likely he/she is to use religion as a guide to handling life in general or stressful events.

\textbf{Marriage}

Some research shows that a marriage has a positive effect on a person’s health and life span.\textsuperscript{25} A study was conducted by D. Umberson which “suggested that family

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{22}Ellison, “Religious Involvement and Subjective Well-Being”: 90.
  \item\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 83.
  \item\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 83.
  \item\textsuperscript{25}Kathleen Ell and Helen Northern, \textit{Families and Health Care: Psychosocial Practice}, (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), 28.
\end{itemize}
roles may promote social control of health behaviors which in turn affect subsequent member mortality and health.  

Similarly, Durkheim found individuals who were married had a lower rate of suicide. 

Other research reports that there is a great deal of support for the idea that married people are healthier and live longer lives. 

Durkheim’s belief is that religion and marriage work independently to reduce a person’s self-destructive tendency. Likewise, other studies show a positive impact on an individual’s quality of life and the choices he/she makes when in a satisfying marriage. 

One of the leading factors of marital satisfaction is maintaining a couple’s religion after marriage. Although some couples marry in the church, they do not continue to practice their religion. It is the continued commitment and practice of religion which enhances marital satisfaction. The church also plays a role in marriage stability through pre-marriage counseling. Most research indicates that “homogeneous marriages are more satisfying” than interfaith marriages.  

For example, a study conducted by M. Wilson and


E. Filsinger suggests that ritualism, experience, and belief are related to various dimensions of marital satisfaction.31

Not only does religion provide comfort for intact marriages, but it also provides comfort to those who may separate or divorce. Research suggests that a couple who separates is more likely to reunite because of religious beliefs or practices.32 Religion furnishes a common bond between a couple who seems to have few areas in common at that particular time. The chance of reconciliation increases especially if religion plays a role in the couple’s everyday life, including the rearing and educating of children, the choosing of where to live and whom to socialize with, and the allocating of time and resources.33

Married couples in trouble may increase involvement in the church to strengthen their relationships.34 In worship, the traditions, values, and sense of community the couple shares help to keep reconciliations intact. The stronger a person’s beliefs, the more likely he/she is to use religion as a guide to handling life or stressful events. “The time a couple can spend together by participating jointly in religious observances both at home and in the


33Ibid., 80.

church may strengthen the marital bonds."35 Couples experiencing marital trouble who also withdraw from religious activities, church attendance and prayer, may do so to separate themselves from the reminder that divorce is considered immoral and not encouraged.36

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used for this study is the ecological systems theory. This theory is based on the "person-in-environment"37 perspective. According to this perspective, a person's environment and social systems have an impact on his/her behaviors and beliefs. When a person is exposed to rich resources required for growth and development he/she tends to thrive. One such resource a person has is family.38 In conjunction with family, religion is also a valuable resource. Not only does religion serve as a tool for individuals, but families as well. Religion in general stresses the value of family and keeping the family unit together.39 In a book written by Judith Stacey, it was reported that the increase in religious participation seem to increase both male's and

---

36Ibid., 85.
38Ibid., 15.
female’s ability to maintain a steady job, drink less and be less abusive.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, religion impacts several systems in a person’s life.

The ecological system perspective examines various subsystems such as a person’s church, family, school, and community. Individuals are engaged in constant transactions with other subsystems in the environment and these subsystems reciprocally influence each other. Using this theory, it is believed that a person’s level of religious activity influences marital satisfaction. An example includes couples being more likely to reconcile after separation if there is religion in common.\textsuperscript{41} Religion plays a role in a couple’s choice of rearing and educating children; choice of where to live and who to socialize with; and choice of how to allocate time and resources.\textsuperscript{42}

The ecological system perspective looks at a person’s church, family, school, and community, for example how these impact a person’s marriage. In each subsystem a person belongs to, he/she plays a particular role. It may be a role as father, teacher, friend, or clergy. Each of these roles influence behaviors, beliefs and actions. This perspective also presents the idea that the people we come in contact with or surround ourselves with will have an impact on us as individuals.

\textsuperscript{40}Judith Stacey, \textit{Brave New Families: Stories of Domestic Upheaval in Late Twentieth Century America} (New York: Basic Books, 1990), 201.

\textsuperscript{41}Howard Wineberg, “Marital Reconciliation in the United States: Which Couples are Successful?,” \textit{Journal of Marriage} 56 (February 1994): 11.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 11.
Statement of the Hypothesis

Does the level of religiosity affect marital satisfaction?

H1: The level of religiosity has a statistically significant impact on marital satisfaction.

Variables

For the purpose of this study, religiosity is the independent variable.

The dependent variable is marital satisfaction.
Terms and Definitions

Church “The company of all Christians regarded as a mystic spiritual body.”
Also, a place of public worship.

Divorce “The dissolving of a marriage by law.”

Family “The most instinctive, fundamental social or mating group in man and animal, especially the union of man and woman through marriage and their offspring; parents and their children.”

Marriage “The legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife. The act of marrying or the ceremony of being married; a wedding.”

Marital satisfaction The pleasure derived from the gratification of the marital relationship.

Religion “The expression of man’s belief in and reverence for a superhuman power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe. The spiritual or emotional attitude of one who recognizes the existence of a superhuman power or powers.”

Religious “Adhering to or manifesting religion; pious; Godly.”

Religiosity The practice of religion and the level of behavior relating to religious activity.

Satisfaction “The fulfillment or gratification of a desire, need or appetite. Pleasure derived from the gratification of a desire or appetite.”

46Ibid., 801.
47Ibid., 1099.
48Ibid., 1099.
49Ibid., 1154.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Design and Sample

The mode of observation used to collect the data was survey research. The sample consisted of forty people who had been married in a church or by a justice of the peace. Twenty-four subjects were from four churches in Atlanta, Georgia, and sixteen subjects were from one church in Fort Worth, Texas. Data was collected by administering a questionnaire by the researcher and one volunteer. The methods of sampling were Purposive/Judgmental (nonprobability). This method was used because all subjects participate in religious activities.

Instrument

The questionnaire used in this study was created in August 1995 by Alan Booth (Pennsylvania State University), David R. Johnson (University of Nebraska-Lincoln), Ann Branaman (Pennsylvania State University), and Alan Sica (Pennsylvania State University). The questionnaire was divided into three sections: demographics, religiosity, and marital satisfaction. The variables being tested in the religiosity section were attending church, praying, reading the Bible, socializing within the church, and believing religion influences daily lives. Marital satisfaction was measured based on the respondents’ feelings of the
spouse with regard to: the level of understanding; the feeling of love and affection; the extent of agreement on everyday situations; the sexual relationship; the willingness to take care of things around the house; the ability to do things together; and the level of faithfulness to the marriage.

The questionnaire has been proven reliable and valid. The marital satisfaction portion of the questionnaire has a .86 reliability. "The religiosity items were found to be generally quite reliable (for single-item measures), with social participation the least reliable." The range of reliability was between .84 for religious attendance and .70 for social participation.

Data Analysis

The information obtained from the questionnaires was entered into a computer program, Statistical Package for The Social Sciences (SPSS). The data was analyzed by use of descriptive statistics, mean, median and mode. The nonprobability test of chi-square was run to determine if there was a relationship between the variables (religiosity, marital satisfaction). The gamma statistical test was utilized to test the strength of the relationship between the variables.


CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Discussion of the Findings

This chapter summarizes the data collected from study participants. Table 1 represents frequencies and percentages of the data from the religiosity items. Table 2 represents the frequencies and percentages of the data from the marital satisfaction questions. Table 3 represents bivariate correlations of the study's variables. The confidence interval was set at .05 to determine whether to reject or accept the study hypotheses.

There were a total of forty respondents in this study. All the participants were married, 52.5 percent were male and 47.5 percent were female. Of those who participated, 50 percent had been married ten years or less, 22.5 percent had been married 11-20 years, 17.5 percent had been married 21-30 years and 10 percent had been married 31 years or more. The ages of the participants were: 20 percent - 20-30 years old, 35 percent - 31-40 years old, 17.5 percent - 41-50 years old, and 27.5 percent - 51 years old or over. As far as education, 17.5 percent completed high school, 12.5 percent had an associates degree, 42.5 percent had a bachelors degree, while 10 percent had various other degrees.
Findings from the frequency distribution indicate respondents religious participation was a mean of 1.87, which correlates to participation in religious activities between daily and weekly frequency. The standard deviation for this variable was .718. Sixty percent of the participants were Catholic while 40 percent were Lutheran. The frequency distribution indicates a mean score of 1.625 for the amount a person believes religion affects his/her daily life. The standard deviation is .677.

Findings from the frequency distribution indicate a mean score of 1.46 for marital satisfaction. This signifies that participants were between very happy and pretty happy with their marriage. The standard deviation is 1.303. The overall evaluation of a person’s marriage showed a mean of 1.3 and standard deviation of .464. When considered in all, 70 percent of participants were very happy in their marriage while 30 percent of participants were pretty happy in their marriage.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading the bible</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage in prayer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>65.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>27.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend religious services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>90.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participate in church social activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>15.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than monthly</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion influencing their daily life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very much</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quite a bit</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### TABLE 2: FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF MARITAL VARIABLES
(N=40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLES</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amount of understand from spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>42.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>57.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love and affection received</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>55.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too happy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extent to which spouses agree about things</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too happy</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual relationship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too happy</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse taking care of things around house</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>50.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>45.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not too happy</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse as someone to do things with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>77.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spouse's faithfulness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of marriage overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very happy</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>70.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pretty happy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>30.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chi-Square Analysis of the Study Variables

Hypothesis I stated that religiosity would have a statistically significant impact on marital satisfaction. The analysis of this relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction revealed no statistical significance existed between the variables. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.
### TABLE 3: CHI-SQUARE ANALYSIS OF THE STUDY VARIABLES  
(N=40)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variable</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Gamma</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How often do you read the bible or other religious material?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>44.77</td>
<td>-.1586</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often in the last few months did you engage in prayer?</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>38.30</td>
<td>-.0447</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>During the past 6 months, how often did you attend religious services?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>17.72</td>
<td>.2030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How often did you participate in a church social activity?</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>36.24</td>
<td>-.1324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In general would you say your religious beliefs influence your daily life?</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>25.20</td>
<td>.1019</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(p=.05)
CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

In summation, this study found that there was no statistically significant relationship between religiosity and martial satisfaction. However, as the level of religiosity increased, the level of marital satisfaction increased, showing there was a meaningful relationship between the two variables. The sample size being restricted to forty respondents could have affected this finding. While the variables had a meaningful relationship, perhaps the outcome would have been different with a larger sample size.

These findings were similar to the findings in the research conducted by Alan Booth.\(^1\) In his research the same instrument was used. Booth found that an “increase in religiosity slightly decreased the probability of considering divorce, they neither enhance marital happiness or interaction nor decreased conflict and problems commonly thought to cause divorce.”\(^2\)

Other research suggests that, “religiosity, however, does have a positive effect on marital happiness. . . .”\(^3\) This research was conducted with a much larger sample size over


\(^{2}\)Ibid., 661.

\(^{3}\)Constance L. Shehan, E. Wilbur Bock, and Gary R. Lee, “Religious Heterogamy, Religiosity, and Marital Happiness: The Case of Catholics”: 733.
a longer period of time, which may have been a contributing factor to the results. More variables were studied and more variables were controlled in determining happiness.

In conclusion, the variables were found to have a meaningful relationship although the variables were not statistically significant. More research and a larger sample size may change the results of this study.

**Implications for Social Work Practice**

Divorce rates and cohabitation rates continue to increase, the results of either of these choices have dramatic impacts on children. Social workers concerned with the ecological perspective should investigate any factor related to keeping families together. This research shows there is a meaningful relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction. Although, more in-depth studies should be done to see if religiosity impacts marital satisfaction.

Social workers should continue to look for ways to keep marriages and families intact. Practitioners should look for different beliefs between spouses and different means to resolve conflicts. Religion may prove a means for comforting and calming tempers as well as finding solutions to problems.

Social workers are often in need of resources for client and the church can provide such a resource. Families would be able to use religion as a foundation for their marriage and raising their children. Families benefit from religion because it furnishes social
activities with people who have the same fundamental morals and values. It is important for people who are married and wanting to maintain a good relationship to surround themselves with people of the same beliefs.

When looking at the ecological perspective, involving all the systems a person belongs to is important. This perspective helps a person define his self/herself and form a sense of self-worth. It is these ecological systems that social workers use as tools and resources.

**Theoretical Implications**

This study consisted of self-reported survey research of married individuals using an ecological perspective. The ecological perspective deals with environmental factors and understanding ways in which people interact with their environment. This theory examined the respondents’ views of encounters concerning the “person-in-environment.”

**Limitations of the Study**

The findings of this study are limited to twenty-four people from four churches in the Atlanta area and sixteen people from a church in Fort Worth, Texas. The results of this study cannot be generalized to the entire population of married people due to the sample size. The small sample size may have been a contributing factor in finding no statistically significant relationship between the variables.
Directions For Further Research

While it appears that there is a meaningful relationship between marital satisfaction and religiosity, additional items still need further research: 1) What is it about religiosity that lends itself to marital satisfaction, 2) Does age, gender, education, socioeconomic status and the number of times a person has been married affect marital satisfaction, and; 3) Is marital satisfaction impacted if the individuals in a couple are from different religions?

Also, a larger sample size should be used to determine if there is statistical significance between religion and marital satisfaction. Likewise, perhaps conducting a longitudinal study would account for a person’s moods or events surrounding his/her life at the time the survey is completed. The variables should be conceptualized to account for faithfulness in addition to religiosity.
APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: The following questions are broken down into categories, demographic information, religiosity and marital satisfaction. Circle the lettered item which corresponds closest to your answer. Only one item should be circled for each question. Where appropriate, there are blanks for answers which may not be reflected in the provided chooses; then and only then should the respondent provide an answer other than those provided. Please answer all questions. There are no right or wrong answers.

SECTION I

1. How long have you been married?
   A. 0-10 years
   B. 11-20 years
   C. 21-30 years
   D. Over 31 years

2. What is your age?
   A. 20-30 years old
   B. 31-40 years old
   C. 41-50 years old
   D. Less than 20
   E. Over 51

3. What is the highest grade you completed in school?
   A. High School
   B. Associates Degree
   C. Bachelors Degree
   D. Masters Degree
   E. Ph.D.
   F. Other:____________

4. A. Male
   B. Female
SECTION II
Directions: This section refers to religiosity. Please circle the letter that best indicates your religious activities.

1. What is your religious affiliation?
   A. Catholic
   B. Baptist
   C. Protestant
   D. Lutheran
   E. Methodist
   F. Jewish
   G. Other: ________________

2. How often do you read the Bible or other religious material?
   A. Daily
   B. Weekly
   C. Monthly
   D. Less than monthly
   E. Never

3. How often in the last few months did you engage in prayer?
   A. Daily
   B. Weekly
   C. Monthly
   D. Less than monthly
   E. Never

4. During the past 6 months, how often did you attend religious services?
   A. Daily
   B. Weekly
   C. Monthly
   D. Less than monthly
   E. Never

5. How often did you participate in a church social activity?
   A. Daily
   B. Weekly
   C. Monthly
   D. Less than monthly
   E. Never
6. In general would you say your religious beliefs influence your daily life
   A. Very much
   B. Quite a bit
   C. Some
   D. Little
   E. Not at all

SECTION III: This section pertains to marital satisfaction. Please circle the letter which best indicates the level of satisfaction you receive in each area. Answer all the questions without leaving any items blank. If you are not sure, please circle the answer, which most closely relates to your feelings.

1. Amount of understanding you receive from your spouse
   A. Very happy
   B. Pretty happy
   C. Not too happy

2. Amount of love and affection you receive from your spouse
   A. Very happy
   B. Pretty happy
   C. Not too happy

3. The extent to which you and your spouse agree about things
   A. Very happy
   B. Pretty happy
   C. Not too happy

4. With your sexual relationship
   A. Very happy
   B. Pretty happy
   C. Not too happy

5. With your spouse as someone who takes care of things around the home
   A. Very happy
   B. Pretty happy
   C. Not too happy

6. With your spouse as someone to do things with
   A. Very happy
   B. Pretty happy
   C. Not too happy
7. With your spouse’s faithfulness  
   A. Very happy  
   B. Pretty happy  
   C. Not too happy

8. How would you evaluate your marriage overall?  
   A. Very happy  
   B. Pretty happy  
   C. Not too happy
BIBLIOGRAPHY


U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population


