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INFLUENCE OF IN-LAWS INTERFERENCE ON MARITAL STABILITY AS PERCEIVED BY COUPLES IN IFO LGA, OGUN STATE

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to investigate "Influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State." Specifically, the study examines the influence of moderating variables of age, religion, length of years in marriage and types of marriage. The study also examined the influence of selected demographic variables on respondents based on age, religion, length of years in marriage and types of marriage. The descriptive research method was used. To obtain the sample for this study, purposive sampling technique was used to select 200 respondents as the sample for the study. The questionnaire titled "In-law Interference and Marital Stability" (ILIMS) was used to collect data from the respondents. The t-test and ANOVA statistics were used to analyze the data collected. The findings of the study revealed that married couples' perceived in-laws' interference has positive influence on marital stability. There was a significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on age, religion, length of years in marriage and types of marriage. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that counsellors should encourage couples to view in-law relationships as opportunities for support rather than threats. Programmes that promote mutual respect and communication between couples and their in-laws should be introduced.

Keyword: Couple, Influence, In-laws, Interference and Marital stability

Introduction

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that binds two individuals together in a legally and socially recognized union. It is a significant life event that fosters companionship, emotional support, and economic cooperation (Kim, 2018). Marriage is a universal institution that exists across cultures, societies, and religions. It is often seen as a lifelong commitment, providing emotional and psychological support for couples (Lafortune & Low, 2017). Marriage is both a personal relationship and a social contract that carries responsibilities, and it serves multiple purposes, including reproduction, socialization, and companionship. However, for marriage to function effectively, various factors such as compatibility, communication, stability and external social influences must be managed effectively (Ogunrinde, 2020). The stability of a marriage depends on various factors, including communication, emotional intimacy, financial stability, and external influences, such as family involvement. Marital stability refers to the endurance and resilience of a marital relationship over time, characterized by mutual satisfaction, commitment, and low conflict levels (Adebayo, Michael, & Abisoye, 2024). Stability in marriage is determined by several factors, including emotional connection, financial security, conflict resolution strategies, and social support. According to Olafsson and Steingrimsdottir (2020), stable marriages tend to have lower rates of separation and divorce, as well as better psychological well-being for both partners. When external influences, such as family members' interference, disrupt the harmony of marriage, instability may emerge, leading to dissatisfaction and, in extreme cases, dissolution.

Married couples navigate their marital journey together, sharing responsibilities and making joint decisions. Unity in marriage is a crucial determinant of marital satisfaction and stability (Karney & Bradbury, 2020; McCall & Green, 2018). Married unity refers to the ability of a couple to function as a single entity, balancing their emotional and relational needs while managing external pressures. Disruptions to this unity often result from financial strain,

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communication breakdown, and interference from extended family members (Lafortune & Low, 2017). Family interference in marriage occurs when extended family members, such as parents, siblings, and other relatives, play an intrusive role in the affairs of a married couple (Bellani, Esping, Andersen, & Pessin, 2018). In many cultural settings, particularly in African societies, family ties are strong, and familial obligations extend into marital relationships (Haneef & Razak, 2017). While some levels of family support can be beneficial, excessive interference can be detrimental. Family interference often manifests in the form of unsolicited advice, financial expectations, or direct involvement in household decisions (Amoo, Adekola, Adesina, Adekeye, Onayemi, & Gberevbie, 2022). The relationship between family interference and marital stability has been a focus of numerous studies. Excessive interference from family members can result in increased marital stress, conflict, and, ultimately, instability (Lashari & Lashari, 2017).

According to Malik, Pathania, and Rathaur (2019), constant intrusion by family members leads to role conflict, diminished autonomy, and emotional detachment in marriage. Conversely, family support that respects boundaries can contribute positively to marital quality and stability. The impact of in-laws' interference on marital stability varies across cultures and individual marriages. In-laws play a significant role in shaping marital relationships, particularly in societies where extended families are integral to social structures (Machette & Cionea, 2023). In-laws' interference can be direct, such as imposing their opinions on household decisions, or indirect, such as influencing one spouse against the other (Haneef & Razak, 2017). In some instances, conflicts arise when in-laws dictate financial contributions, child-rearing practices, or even cohabitation arrangements (Daly & Perry, 2021). In African and Asian societies, where family bonds are strong, such interference can place considerable strain on marital relationships (Ogunrinde, 2020). Family interference, particularly from in-laws, can disrupt marital harmony, leading to conflicts and tensions within the marriage.

Statement of the Problem

Marital stability is a crucial determinant of family cohesion and societal well-being. However, one of the recurring challenges faced by married couples is the interference of in-laws, which often disrupts harmony in marital relationships (Adebiyi, Olusakin, & Makinde, 2019). In many societies, including Nigeria, extended family involvement is deeply rooted in cultural traditions, sometimes leading to undue influence on marital decisions, conflict escalation, and even marital dissolution (Adebayo, Michael, & Abisoye, 2024; Ogunrinde, 2020). Studies have shown that in-law interference manifests in various forms, including financial dependency, decision-making intrusion, and direct involvement in conflicts between spouses (Adebayo, Michael, & Abisoye, 2024). In many societies, particularly in Nigeria, family structures are deeply rooted in collectivist values, which emphasize interdependence and extended family cohesion. In Ogun State, traditional expectations often require couples to maintain strong ties with extended family members, sometimes at the expense of marital autonomy (McCall & Green, 2018). This dynamic can place considerable pressure on couples, leading to tensions that may affect their relationship quality. The perception of such interference can influence marital satisfaction, trust, and overall stability, yet empirical evidence on this phenomenon remains limited. Despite extensive research on marital stability and in-law interference, there remains a significant gap in understanding how in-law interference specifically affects marital stability in Ifo Local Government Area (LGA) of Ogun State. In many African societies, including Nigeria, extended family ties play a crucial role in shaping marital relationships. However, the extent to which interference from in-laws influences the stability of marriages in this context remains underexplored. This study seeks to bridge this gap by conducting a comprehensive investigation into the nature, frequency, and perceived consequences of in-law interference on married couples. It will examine the perspectives of spouses on how external familial influences contribute to or hinder their marital stability. Additionally, the study will explore gender differences in experiencing and managing in-law interference, as well as the coping mechanisms employed by couples. By shedding light on these factors, the research aims to contribute valuable insights to marital Counselling practices and policy recommendations aimed at fostering healthier marital relationships in Ifo LGA.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State. The study also examines the influence of moderating variables of age, religion, length of years of marriage and types of marriage.

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Research Question

One research question was raised to guide the study.

1. What is the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were formulated to guide the conduct of this study:

1. There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on age.
2. There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on religion.
3. There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on length of marriage.
4. There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on types of marriage.

Methodology

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The population for the study comprised of all married couples in Ogun State, while the target population consisted of married couples drawn from Ifo LGA of Ogun State. Two hundred (200) married couples were conveniently selected in the areas of study convenient and purposive sampling technique. The main instrument that was used for data collection was titled "In-Law Interference and Marital Stability Questionnaire (ILIMSQ). The questionnaire was structured in two sections: Section A enquired about the demographic information of the respondents like age, religion, length of years of marriage and types/form of marriage, while Section B was designed to seek the opinion and perception of respondents in line with the research purpose and objectives. The data obtained from the instrument was analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and percentages. These simple statistical tools were suitable for the study as it gave clear and easy comprehensive results from the analysis of the responses collected from the instrument. The research hypotheses formulated in the study were tested using t-test and ANOVA analysis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Demographic Data

This section presents the results of data obtained from the respondents in frequency and percentages.

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Age

	Frequency	Percentage
Age at Marriage		
18-25 years	61	30.5
26-35 years	55	27.5
36-45 years	57	28.5
46 years and above	27	13.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Religion		
ATR	4	2.0
Christianity	119	59.5
Islam	77	38.5
Total	**200**	**100**
Year of Marriage		
0-5 years	24	12.0
6-10 years	99	49.5
11-15 years	31	15.5
16 years and above	46	23.0

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Total	**200**	**100**
Types of Marriage		
Customary	11	5.5
Religious	96	48.0
Statutory	87	43.5
Others	6	3.0
Total	**200**	**100**

Table 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on age. The table reveals that 61 (30.5%) of the respondents were between 18-25 years of age, 55 (27.5%) of the respondents were between 26-35 years of age, 57 (28.5%) of the respondents were between 36-45 years of age, while 27 (13.5%) of the respondents were 46 years of age and above. This implies that respondents who were between 18-25 years participated more in this study. The table also reveals that 4 (2.0%) of the respondents were practicing African Traditional Religion, 119 (59.5%) of the respondents were practicing Christianity while 77 (38.5%) of the respondents were practicing Islam. This indicates that respondents who were Christians participated more in this study. The table reveals that 24 (12.0%) of the respondents spent between 0-5 years in marriage, 99 (49.5%) spent between 6-10 years in marriage, 31 (15.5%) spent between 11-15 years in marriage, while 46 (23.0%) of the respondents spent 16 years in marriage and above. This indicates that respondents who spent between 6-10 years in marriage participated equally in this study. The table reveals that 11 (5.5%) of the respondents did customary marriage, 96 (48.0%) did religious marriage, 87 (43.5%) did statutory marriage, while 6 (3.0%) did group marriage. This indicates that respondents who participated in religious marriage participated equally in this study.

Research Question: *What is the Influence of In-Laws' Interference on Marital Stability as perceived by Married Couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State?*

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order Analysis of the Respondents' Influence of In-laws' Interference on Marital Stability

Item No.	As far as I am concerned:	Mean	Rank
1	My in-laws are overly involved in decisions concerning my marriage	2.57	1st
2	My spouse often takes sides with his/her parents during marital conflicts	2.42	2nd
8	I have considered separation/divorce due to conflicts triggered by in-laws	2.39	3rd
3	my in-laws interfere in matters concerning childbearing and child-rearing	2.38	4th
7	my relationship with my spouse would be more peaceful without in-law interference	2.37	5th
6	interference from in-laws has led to repeated quarrels between me and my spouse	2.36	6th
13	we have agreed on how to jointly manage in-law relationships	2.34	7th
14	religion has helped us manage and reduce the negative impact of in-law interference	2.31	8th
10	In-law support strengthens my marriage during difficult times	2.30	9th
15	the longer I stay in my marriage, the easier it becomes to deal with in-laws	2.29	10th
12	my spouse defends and prioritizes our marriage over family pressure	2.25	11th
9	In-law interference affects how much I trust and communicate with my spouse	2.19	12th
4	my in-laws frequently criticize and judge my	2.18	13th

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	lifestyle and family choices		
5	I feel pressured to meet expectations imposed by my in-laws	2.14	14th
11	I am able to set healthy boundaries with my in-laws without conflict	2.11	15th
	Grand mean	**2.31**	

Table 2 presents the mean and rank order of the respondents on the Influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability. The table showed an aggregate mean score of 2.31 which is less cut-off point of 2.50. Since grand mean has the mean score that ranked below 2.50, this implies that respondents' perceived in-laws' interference have positive influence on marital stability.

Hypotheses Testing: Four null hypotheses were postulated and tested for this study. The hypotheses were tested using t-test and ANOVA statistical methods at 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on Age*

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference on the Respondents' Perception on the Influence of In-laws' Interference on Marital Stability Based on Age

Source	SS	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	1341.637	3	447.212	9.80*	2.60	.000
Within Groups	8941.518	196	45.620			
Total	10283.155	199				

* Significant, p<0.05

Table 3 shows the calculated F-ratio of 9.80 is greater than the critical F-value of 2.60 with a corresponding p-value of .000, which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on age. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown on Table 3.

Table 4: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Age

Year	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
36-45 years	57	32.75	
26-35 years	55	33.31	
46 years and above	27	33.97	
18-25 years	61		38.26
Sig.		.985	1.000

Table 4 shows that respondents who were between 36-45 years, 26-35 years and those who were 45 years and above have the mean scores of 32.75, 33.31 and 33.97 (in subset 1), while those who were between 18.25 years of age have a highest mean score of 38.26 (in subset 2), and thus contributed to the significant difference.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on Religion*

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference on the Respondents' Perception on the Influence of In-laws' Interference on Marital Stability based on Religion

Source	SS	Df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	3845.693	2	1922.846	58.84*	3.00	.000
Within Groups	6437.462	197	32.677			
Total	10283.155	199				

* Significant, p<0.05

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Table 5 shows the calculated F-ratio of 58.84 is greater than the critical F-value of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on religion. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown on Table 5.

Table 6: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Religion

Religion	**N**	**Subset for alpha = 0.05**	
		1	**2**
ATR	4	30.00	
Islam	77	30.31	
Christianity	119		38.93
Sig.		1.000	1.000

Table 6 shows that respondents who were practicing African traditional religion and Islam have the mean scores of 30.00 and 30.31 (in subset 1), while those who were practicing Christianity have a highest mean score of 38.93 (in subset 2), and thus contributed to the significant difference.

Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on length of years in marriage*

Table 7: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference on the Respondents' Perception on the Influence of In-laws' Interference on Marital Stability based on Length of Years in Marriage

Source	**SS**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**Cal. F-ratio**	**Crit. F-ratio**	**p-value**
Between Groups	5939.575	3	1979.858	89.33*	2.60	.000
Within Groups	4343.580	196	22.161			
Total	10283.155	199				

* Significant, p<0.05

Table 7 shows the calculated F-ratio of 89.33 is greater than the critical F-value of 2.60 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on length of years in marriage. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown on Table 8.

Table 8: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Length of Years In Marriage

Year	**N**	**Sub set for Alpha = 0.05**		
		1	2	3
6-10 years	99	31.07		
0-5 years	24	31.25		
11-15 years	31		40.48	
16 years and above	46			44.35
Sig.		.999	1.000	1.000

Table 8 shows that respondents who spent between 6-10 years and 0-5 years in marriage have the mean scores of 31.07 and 31.25 (in subset 1) respectively, those who spent between 11-15 years in marriage have a mean score of 40.48 (in subset 2) while those who spent 16 years and above have a highest mean score of 44.35 (in subset 3), and thus contributed to the significant difference.

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Hypothesis Four: *There is no significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on types of marriage*

Table 9: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing difference on the Respondents' Perception on the Influence of In-laws' Interference on Marital Stability Based on Type of Marriage

Source	SS	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	p-value
Between Groups	978.713	3	326.238	6.87*	2.60	.000
Within Groups	9304.442	196	47.472			
Total	10283.155	199				

* Significant, p<0.05

Table 9 shows the calculated F-ratio of 6.87 is greater than the critical F-value of 2.60 with a corresponding p-value of .000 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on types of marriage. In order to ascertain where the significant difference lies, Scheffe Post-Hoc was carried out and the output is shown on Table 10.

Table 10: Scheffe post-hoc where the significant difference lies based on Type of Marriage

Types of Marriage	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
Customary	11	32.82	
Religious	96	33.99	
Statutory	87	36.38	
Others	6		45.67
Sig.		.592	1.000

Table 10 shows that respondents who did customary, religious and statutory marriages have the mean scores of 32.82, 33.99 and 36.38 (in subset 1), while those who did other type of marriage (group marriage) have a highest mean score of 45.67 (in subset 2), and thus contributed to the significant difference.

Discussion of the Findings

The finding of the study showed that married couples perceived in-laws' interference have positive influence on marital stability. This suggests that, contrary to common assumptions, interference from in-laws may strengthen rather than weaken marital bonds. This implies that some couples may interpret in-laws' involvement as a form of support or engagement that reinforces their commitment to the marriage, rather than as intrusive behaviour. The finding relates to the study of Birditt, Hartnett, Fingerman, Zarit and Antonucci (2020) who observed that some couples strengthened their relationship by setting boundaries against in-law interference, thereby enhancing mutual understanding.

Hypothesis one revealed that there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on age. This suggests that younger and older couples may experience or interpret in-law interference differently, leading to varying impacts on their marital satisfaction and stability. The result of Scheffe's post-hoc revealed that respondents who were between 18.25 years of age contributed more to the significant difference. This could be that older couples may have more experience in managing family conflicts and may prioritize marital harmony over external opinions. The finding relates to the study of Adeyemo and Oladipo (2023) who found that younger Nigerian couples reported higher marital stress due to in-law interference compared to older couples, attributing this to less established marital cohesion.

Hypothesis two revealed that there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on religion. This suggests that religious beliefs, practices, and cultural norms associated with different faiths shape couples' attitudes toward external family involvement in their marriages. The result of Scheffe post-hoc revealed that respondents who were

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practicing Christianity contributed more to the significant difference. This could be that religious doctrines often prescribe specific family structures and expectations, which can either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of in-laws' involvement. The finding relates to the study of Adebayo, Michael and Abisoye (2024) found that Muslim couples in Northern Nigeria reported higher tolerance for in-laws' involvement compared to their Christian counterparts, attributing this to Islamic teachings on family solidarity.

Hypothesis three revealed that was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on length of years in marriage. This suggests that the duration of a marriage plays a crucial role in how couples perceive and manage external familial influences. Scheffe post-hoc revealed that respondents who spent 16 years and above contributed more to the significant difference. One possible reason for this finding is that couples in the early years of marriage often experience greater vulnerability to external pressures, including interference from in-laws. During this period, couples are still in the process of establishing their marital identity and learning how to navigate family boundaries. The outcome of this study relates to the study of Oni, Alabi and Fakoya (2019) who reported that younger marriages are more susceptible to in-law-related conflicts, which often decline as couples become more experienced in conflict resolution and boundary-setting.

Hypothesis four revealed there was significant difference in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on type of marriage. This suggests that couples in different marital structures perceive and experience in-law interference differently, which in turn impacts the stability of their marriages. Scheffe post-hoc revealed that respondents who did other type of marriage such as group marriage contributed more to the significant difference. One reason for this finding may be that certain marriage types naturally involve closer ties with extended families. The outcome of this study relate to the study of Osarenren and Asemota (2020) reported that couples in customary marriages often face greater in-law interference due to deeply rooted traditional expectations, which can contribute to conflict and dissatisfaction.

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that married couples' perceived in-laws' interference have positive influence on marital stability. The result of the hypotheses tested revealed that there were significant differences in the influence of in-laws' interference on marital stability as perceived by married couples in Ifo LGA of Ogun State based on age, religion, length of years in marriage and type of marriage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

1. Counsellors should encourage couples to view in-law relationships as opportunities for support rather than threats. Programmes that promote mutual respect and communication between couples and their in-laws should be introduced.
2. Counsellors should consider the religious backgrounds of couples in therapy and align their guidance with the couple's beliefs and values about marriage and family roles. Interfaith dialogue on family matters should be encouraged.
3. Counsellors should differentiate between newlyweds and long-term couples when designing support programmes. Newer couples may need more support in managing early-stage in-law dynamics, while longer-term couples may benefit from refreshers on evolving family boundaries.

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