journals.unizik.edu.ng/jgcs ISSN: 1596-1141

JOURNAL OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING STUDIES

IN-LAW INTERFERENCE AND EMOTIONAL STABILITY OF MARRIED WOMEN IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Emotional stability of married women is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, is influenced by numerous factors, including domestic violence. This research investigated In-law interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria. At 0.05 level of significance, one research question was postulated and three null hypotheses were tested. The study employed a descriptive survey of correlational type. A total of 403 married women were selected from nine out of sixteen local government in Kwara State took part in the study. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "In-law Interference and Emotional Stability Questionnaire (IIES)" was the instrument used to collect data from the respondents. The data collected was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Demographic factors such as years in marriage, education, religion, and number of children influenced both interference and stability. The findings show that in-law interference could lead to stress, marital dissatifaction, and emotional instability in a marriage. Counselling interventions were recommended to help couples set healthy boundaries and improve communication in order to achieve effectiveness and a wholesome marriage.

Keywords: In-law Interference, Emotional Stability, Married Women

Introduction and Problem Statement

In-law interference refers to the involvement, influence, or intrusion of extended family members, particularly in-laws, in the affairs of the married couple. In-law interference is a serious problem that have a significant negative impact on married women. This is because women are often expected to be more submissive to their in-laws than men. As a result, women may feel more pressure to comply with their in-laws' demands, even when they are

unreasonable or harmful. Strong relationships with supportive in-laws can provide valuable emotional and practical support. However, conflicts with in-laws can create stress and strain among married women, particularly when in-laws interfere in the couple's decision-making or criticize them. (Smith, 2022).

In-law interference spans across behaviours ranging from well-meaning advice and support to more intrusive actions that may undermine the autonomy and stability of the marital relationship. One of the most common areas where in-law interference occurs is in the realm of parenting. Parents, especially, may feel a strong desire to be involved in their children's lives, which can sometimes lead to conflicts with the parents. They may offer advice on how to play authoritative husband or smart wife, they also pry into their sources of income and other family affairs such as how to raise their children, criticize their parenting decisions, or even attempt to override the parenting authority. In-law interference can also extend to other aspects of married life, such as finances, household management, and personal relationships. For example, in-laws may offer unsolicited opinions on how money should be spent, how the house should be run, or even how the couple should interact with each other. All these could cumulate into feelings of powerlessness and loss of control to eroding the woman's sense of autonomy and agency.

The importance of familial bonds is rooted across Nigeria's diverse ethnic group, each ethnic groups with its own unique customs and traditions; family ties serve as a common thread, which go beyond these cultures. Unlike the Western concept of family, which often revolves around nuclear units, Nigerian familial structures extend far beyond, encompassing network of extended family members. Within this framework, in-laws assume a significant role, becoming integral participants in the marital journey. Extended involvement of in-laws can sometimes pose unimaginable threat to the happiness of the married women within the union. Cultural and societal norms further exacerbate this phenomenon, as the society place a high value on the extended family's exertive place to pressure married women to conform to the expectations of their in-laws (Ukpo, 2022). In congruent, Afolayan and Ogunsemi (2014) assert that in-law interference can lead to loss of autonomy on the part of the married women which makes them disempowered; with limited control over their own lives and decisions.

Adepoju and Iwelunmor, (2021) postulated that in-law interference has the tendency to create stress and mental health issues for married women. The pressure to conform to in-laws'

expectations can result in stress and mental health challenges. As a result, it is not uncommon for married women to experience feelings of anxiety, depression and stress as a result of unwanted interference from in-laws.

Okechukwu and Nwogu (2022) found that in-law interference is a common source of marital conflict and stress among Nigerian women. The research indicated that the expectations and demands from in-laws often create a hostile environment for married women, leading to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety. Furthermore, Adeyemi and Oladipo (2023) supported these findings, highlighting that the societal pressure to conform to traditional roles and expectations significantly impacts the mental well-being of married women. The study found that women who faced constant interference from their in-laws reported higher levels of stress and lower levels of marital satisfaction.

Family systems theory, originally developed by Murray Bowen in 1978, posits that the family operates as an interconnected and interdependent system. This theory states that each member's behavior and emotional functioning affect the entire family unit. The Family systems theory emphasized that families are complex, dynamic systems in which the behaviour and well-being of each individual are influenced by interactions within the family. The theory suggests that problems in one part of the system can ripple through and affect the whole system. For example, if in-laws exert excessive pressure or interference on a married woman, this can create stress and anxiety not only for her but also for her spouse and children, thereby impacting the entire family dynamic. (Bowen, 1978; as cited in Smith & Clark, 2020).

Smith and Clark (2020) highlight that within the context of family systems theory, the interactions and relationships among family members, including in-laws, play a crucial role in shaping the mental health outcomes of individuals. The theory underscores the idea that stressors from in-law interference are not isolated issues but are part of a larger systemic interaction. The pressure to conform to in-laws' expectations can lead to a range of emotional responses, including anxiety, depression, and feelings of inadequacy, which can disrupt the harmony and functioning of the entire family system.

Research Question

1. What is the relationship between In-law Interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is significant difference between In-law Interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria based on religion.
2. There is no significant difference between In-law Interference and emotional stability among married women based on marital status.
3. There is no significant difference between In-law Interference and emotional stability among married women based on level of Education.
4. There is no significant difference between In-law Interference and emotional stability among married women based on years of marriage.

Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive survey of the correlational type. The instrument used to collect data from the respondents was a researcher-designed questionnaire entitled "In-law Interference and Emotional Stability Questionnaire (IIES)". The instrument had a reliability coefficient of 0.69 using PPMC. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Procedure was used to compute the reliability of the instrument by computing the correlation between the two subsets. After a period of two weeks Cronbach Alpha method of calculating reliability coefficient. This coefficient obtained confirmed that the instrument was suitable for use in this study. The population for the study comprised of all the married adult in Kwara State, estimated at 779,996 (National Population Commission, Kwara State, 2024). The target population for this study consist of selected married women in Kwara State. With reference to the Research Advisor (2006), a sample size of 383 was considered appropriate at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. However, an additional 5% was added to compensate for attrition, making a total of 403 respondents selected for the study. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in gathering data for the study. At stage one, purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting the local government areas for the study, while at stage two, clustering sampling technique was used to select married women who had sought help from civil society organizations and other legal bodies that offered services to women who had experienced domestic violence whereas at stage three, At stage three, simple random sampling technique was employed to draw participants for the study.

Research Question: What is the relationship between In-law Interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Respondents Based on Demographic Data

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Years in marriage		
1-5 years	157	39.0
6-10 years	128	31.8
More than 10 years	118	29.2
Total	**403**	**100**
Level of Education		
No formal Education	105	26.1
Primary Education	53	13.2
Secondary Education	130	32.3
Tertiary Education	115	28.4
Total	**403**	**100**
Religion		
Christianity	267	66.3
Islam	132	32.7
ATR	4	1.0
Total	**403**	**100**
Number of Children		
1-5	249	61.8
6-10	149	37.0
11 and above	5	1.2
Total	**403**	**100**

Table 1 shows the distribution of demographic data of the respondents. The table reveals that 157 (39.0%) of the respondents had spent between 1-5 years in marriage, 128 (31.8%) had spent between 6-10 years in marriage, while 118 (29.2%) of the respondents had spent more than 10 years in marriage. This implies that there were more married women who spent between 1-5 years in marriage that participated in this study compared to their other counterpart. Also, 105 (26.1%) of the respondents had no formal education, 53 (13.2%) had primary education, 130 (32.3%) had secondary education while 115 (28.4%) had tertiary education. This implies that majority of respondents had secondary education. Based on religious affiliation, 267 (66.3%) of the respondents were practicing Christianity, 132 (32.7%) were practicing Islam while only 4 (1.0%) were practicing African Traditional Religion (ATR). This indicates that there were more married women who practicing Christianity that participated in this study compared to their counterparts. The table also reveals that 249 (61.8%) of the respondents had between 1-5 children, 149 (37.0%) had between 6-10 children while 5 (1.2%) had 11 children and above. This indicates that there were more married women who had between 1-5 children that participated in the study than their counterparts.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and Rank Order Analysis on the Level of In-law Interference Experienced by the Married Women

Item No	As far as I know, my In-law interfered with my relationship by:	Mean	S.D.	Rank
9	gives unsolicited counsel	2.68	1.27	1st
5	criticizing my good intention	2.62	1.34	2nd
2	providing unsolicited advice regarding my marriage often	2.60	1.34	3rd
3	respecting boundaries regarding my marital privacy	2.55	1.11	4th
8	creating disagreements between me and my spouse	2.29	1.27	5th
1	frequently involving themselves in my daily family decisions	2.26	1.26	6th
7	giving bad report about me to my spouse	2.18	1.10	7th
4	comparing me unfavourably with other family member	2.10	1.08	8th
10	dropping by unannounced	2.07	1.38	9th
6	restricting me from visiting my family	1.58	1.14	10th
	Aggregate Mean	**2.29**		

Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation and rank order of the level of in-law interference experienced by the respondents. The table indicates an aggregate mean of 2.29 which is ranked below 2.50 cut-off point. The table also shows that items 9, 5 and 2 which state that as far as I know, my In-law interfered with my relationship by: gives unsolicited counsel; criticize my good intention; provides unsolicited advice regarding my marriage ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd with the mean scores of 2.68, 2.62 and 2.60 respectively. Likewise, items 4, 10 and 6 which state that as far as I know, my In-law interfered with my relationship by: compares me unfavorably with other family member; drops by unannounced; and restricts me from visiting my family ranked 8th, 9th and 10th with the mean scores of 2.10, 2.07 and 1.58 respectively. Since the aggregate mean falls below 2.50 and only 4 items ranked above 2.50 mean cut-off point, it can be said that respondents experienced low level of in-law interference but the in-laws still gave unsolicited counsel; criticized their good intention; and provided unsolicited advice regarding their marriage often.

Hypothesis 1: *There is no significant relationship between in-law interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria*

Table 3: Pearson Showing Relationship between In-Law Interference and Emotional Stability of the Respondents

Variables	N	Mean	Std. D	df	r	p-value	Decision
In-Law Interference	403	22.93	8.78	401	.202*	.00	Rejected
Emotional Stability	403	20.59	7.77				

Table 3 shows calculated r-value of .202 and p-value of .00 which is less than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated p-value is less that 0.05 level of significant, the null

hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between in-law interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2: *Years in marriage, level of Education, religion and number of children will not significantly influence the level of In-law interference experienced by married women in Kwara State, Nigeria*

Table 4: Correlation Matrix Showing the Influence of Years in marriage, level of education, religion and number of children on In-Law Interference Experience

Variables	In-law Interference	Years in marriage	Level of Education	Religion	Number of Children
In-Law Interference	1.000				
Years in marriage	.324*	1.000			
Level of Education	.320*	.266*	1.000		
Religion	.433*	.107*	.624*	1.000	
Number of Children	.570*	.232*	.456*	.465*	1.000

* Significance, p <0.05

The results from Table 4 shows that calculated r-values for years in marriage (r = .324, p<0.05), level of education (r = .320, p<0.05), religion (r = .433, p<0.05) and number of children (r = .570, p<0.05) are greater than critical r-value of .098 (table value). Since calculated r is greater than critical (table value), this implies years in marriage, level of education, religion and number of children significantly influenced the level of In-law interference experienced by married women in Kwara State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 3: *Years in marriage, level of education, religion and number of children will not significantly influence the emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria*

Table 5: Correlation Matrix Showing the Influence of Years in marriage, level of education, religion and number of children on Emotional Stability

Variables	In-law Interference	Years in marriage	Level of Education	Religion	Number of Children
Emotional Stability	1.000				
Years in marriage	.222*	1.000			
Level of Education	.509*	.266*	1.000		
Religion	.301*	.107*	.624*	1.000	
Number of Children	.116*	.232*	.456*	.465*	1.000

* Significance, p <0.05

The results from Table 5 shows that calculated r-values for years in marriage (r = .222, p<0.05), level of education (r = .509, p<0.05), religion (r = .301, p<0.05) and number of children (r = .116, p<0.05) are greater than critical r-value of .098 (table value). Since

calculated r is greater than critical (table value), this implies years in marriage, level of education, religion and number of children significantly influenced the emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria

Discussion of Findings

The finding showed that married women experienced low level of in-law interference but sometimes the in-laws still gave unsolicited counsel; criticized their good intention; and provided unsolicited advice regarding their marriage often. The low level of reported in-law interference aligns with studies of Bryant, Conger and Meehan (2001); Timmer and Veroff (2000) who found low interference of in-laws in marital relationship and as well as a negative association between excessive in-law involvement and marital quality. The finding of relatively low interference suggests that the respondents enjoyed a degree of autonomy and independence in their marital lives, which is generally considered beneficial for marital satisfaction. A study by Goldstein (2015) found that while overt interference from in-laws may be relatively rare, indirect forms of involvement, such as offering unsolicited counsel or criticism, are more common. Similarly, Machette and Cionea (2023) reported that in-law involvement often takes the form of subtle intrusions into the marital relationship, including providing unwanted advice or opinions on matters such as child-rearing or household management. The reasons could be that In-laws may feel entitled to offer advice based on their experience and position within the family structure. They might believe they have a stake in the couple's relationship and feel it's their responsibility to offer guidance, even if it's unsolicited.

The finding revealed that married women experienced emotional instability as they did not feel contented with their spouse; did not have a good sense of self-esteem with their spouse; not satisfied with the level of communication between their spouse and them. The finding is in line with the study of Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan and Whitton (2010) who disclosed that poor communication patterns, lack of emotional connection, and an inability to effectively resolve conflicts have been consistently linked to decreased marital satisfaction and increased emotional distress. Whisman and Uebelacker, 2016) reported that marital dissatisfaction and negative marital interactions can negatively impact an individual's self-concept and overall emotional well-being. Similarly, Proulx, Helms and Buehler (2017), Buttner, Lowe and Billings-Al-Araee (2010) reported that conflictual or dissatisfying relationship contributed to feelings of insecurity, low self-worth, and emotional distress. The reason could be as a result of unmet expectations ranging from their spouse regarding emotional support, validation, or

companionship might result in feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction by married women.

There was significant relationship between in-law interference and emotional stability of married women in Kwara State, Nigeria. This suggests that in-law interference can undermine emotional stability among married individuals. The finding supports the study of Rittenour and Soliz (2018) who found a significant relationship between frequent in-law interference and decreased emotional stability among married women. Cherri, Bhandari, Hosseini, and Bhandari (2017) reported that women who experienced in-law conflict were found to be at a higher risk of developing depression and anxiety disorders, indicating a negative impact on emotional stability.. This could be that when in-laws interfere, married women may feel unsupported or misunderstood by their extended family and this can contribute to feelings of isolation and emotional instability, especially if the interference leads to marital discord or dissatisfaction.

Hypothesis two was also rejected based on the analysed data. It revealed that years in marriage, level of education, religion and number of children significantly influenced the level of In-law interference experienced by married women in Kwara State, Nigeria. Based on years in marriage, research findings suggest that the duration of marriage can play a role in the level of in-law interference experienced by married women. This is in line with the submission of Adeoti and Akande (2018) who asserted that women in newer marriages were more likely to report higher levels of interference from their in-laws compared to those in relatively longer marriages. The reason could be that newly married couples may be more susceptible to in-law interference as they navigate the transition into married life and establish their own family dynamics.

Based on level of education, the finding showed that level of education significantly correlated with the level of In-law interference experienced by married women in Kwara State, Nigeria. This implies that level of in-law interference experienced was as a result of level of education of the respondents. The finding supports the study of Dasgupta and Zahedi (2021) who found that higher levels of education among married adults have been associated with lower levels of in-law interference as the women with higher educational attainment tend to have greater financial independence, career prospects, and self-confidence, which can contribute to their ability to establish boundaries and assert their autonomy within the marital relationship. Additionally, Saraff and Srivastava (2017) stated that education provide women with greater awareness and understanding of cultural norms and expectations surrounding in-

law relationships. The reason could be that women with low levels of education may exhibit poor assertiveness in their relationships, including with their in-laws**.**

It revealed that religion significantly influenced the level of In-law interference experienced by married women in Kwara State, Nigeria. This implies that religion could influence in-law interference experienced. The finding relates with the study of Sahu and Kumar (2021) stated that religious beliefs and practices influenced the dynamics of in-law relationships and the level of interference experienced by married women. In some religious traditions, specific roles and expectations are outlined for family members, including in-laws. According to Dhamija and Ajanta (2019), these cultural and religious norms may contribute to varying degrees of in-law interference, depending on the extent to which they are adhered to or challenged by individual families. This could be to the fact that some religions emphasize the importance of family unity and support, which may lead to more involvement and interaction with in-laws.

Based on number of children, a significant influenced was found on the level of In-law interference experienced by married women in Kwara State, Nigeria. This implies that number of children born by the respondents facilitate the level of in-law interference experience. The finding is in line with the submission of Sharma and Arora (2019) who asserted that having children could introduce additional complexities and potential sources of conflict within the extended family dynamic, particularly regarding childrearing practices and grandparental involvement. Furthermore, the presence of children may heighten the involvement and perceived sense of entitlement of in-laws in family affairs, potentially leading to increased interference (Dasgupta & Zahedi, 2021). This could be that the presence of children in the family sometimes make in-laws to call or visit in order to ask about the welfare of married women' family.

Implications of Findings for Counselling Practice

The findings of this study have implications for counselling practice. Since the importance of familial bonds is rooted across Nigeria's diverse ethnic group, and each ethnic groups with its own unique customs and traditions.

The interference of In-law cannot be totally eradicated and it influence on married women as reported in the study highlights the need for counselling services. The findings related to in-

law interference suggest a need for family counselling services to help married women establish healthy boundaries with their in-laws. Counsellors can assist in facilitating open communication, resolving intergenerational conflicts, and promoting respect for the autonomy of the couple. Counselors should guide couples on how to continue establishing and maintaining healthy boundaries with their in-laws. Also, equip couples with effective communication skills to address issues with their in-laws constructively

Conclusion

This study revealed that in-law interference significantly affects the emotional stability of married women in Kwara State. though the level of interference was relatively low, unsolicited advice and criticism were common experiences. Demographic factors such as years in marriage, education, religion, and number of children influenced both interference and stability. The findings show that in-law interference can lead to stress, dissatifaction, and emotional instability. Counselling interventions are needed to help couples set healthy boundaries and improve communication.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

1. Counsellors should develop comprehensive educational programmes targeting both women and men to raise awareness about domestic violence, its impact on emotional stability, and the importance of healthy relationships irrespective of their years in marriage, level of education, number of children and religion.
2. Counselors should work with couples to identify areas of dissatisfaction and collaborate on developing solutions. This could include setting goals for quality time together, improving emotional intimacy, and addressing unmet needs within the relationship.
3. Marital counsellors should develop and provide counseling programmrs that focuse on emotional resilience and coping strategies for women experiencing domestic violence. This includes both individual and group counseling sessions
4. The government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should implement policies that promote women's education at all levels, particularly in rural and underserved areas. Education has been shown to empower women, increase their economic independence, and reduce their vulnerability to domestic violence.

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