

# Intermarriage, Sexual Satisfaction, and Marital Quality as Predictors of Quality of Life Among Igbo Couples in Southeastern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** The Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria maintain strong cultural marriage traditions, but contemporary social changes – including Christianity, modernity, and increasing inter-ethnic unions – have introduced new dynamics. Little empirical research has simultaneously examined how intermarriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality affect the quality of life of Igbo couples. A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed. The sample comprised 396 married Igbo individuals (198 couples) from Anambra, Enugu, and Imo States, including 56 inter-ethnic couples (Igbo-Yoruba, Igbo-Hausa, Igbo-Ibibio/Efik). Culturally adapted measures were used: Marital Quality Scale (including an extended-family integration subscale), Sexual Satisfaction Inventory (adding a “freedom from cultural constraints” subscale), and WHOQOL-BREF. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, t-tests, correlations, and path analysis; qualitative interviews (n = 40) were analyzed thematically. Sexual satisfaction was moderate-to-high (M = 68.4, SD = 12.6), with males reporting significantly higher satisfaction than females,  $t(394) = 3.42, p < 0.001$ . Intra-married couples reported higher sexual satisfaction than inter-married couples,  $t(394) = 2.18, p = 0.030$ . Inter-married couples showed higher dyadic satisfaction and cohesion but significantly lower extended-family integration compared to intra-married couples,  $t(394) = 5.72, p < 0.001$ . Sexual satisfaction strongly predicted marital quality ( $\beta = 0.42, p < 0.001$ ), and marital quality was the strongest direct predictor of quality of life ( $\beta = 0.46, p < 0.001$ ), partially mediating the effect of sexual satisfaction (indirect effect = 0.19, bootstrapped 95% CI [0.12, 0.26]). Cultural moderators included the procreative imperative, extended-family influence, gender-role expectations, religious framing, and urban-rural location. Marital quality is the central pathway through which sexual satisfaction influences quality of life among Igbo couples. Inter-ethnic marriage presents a trade-off: stronger dyadic bonds but weaker family integration. Culturally grounded interventions should address extended-family dynamics, gender inequalities in sexual agency, and the procreative imperative.

**Keywords:** *Inter-Ethnic Marriage, Sexual Satisfaction, Marital Quality, Quality of Life, Igbo Culture, Nigeria, Gender Inequality, Mixed-Methods.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a fundamental human institution that entails economic, social, and sexual obligations (Sorokowski et al., 2025). Among the Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria, marriage – ceremonially marked by Igba Nkwu (wine-carrying) – is not merely a union of two individuals but a sacred covenant that unites families, lineages, and communities, including ancestors and future generations (Okoye & Ugwu, 2024). Historically, Igbo marriage has been embedded in a communitarian framework

in which the umunna (kindred) negotiates and oversees marriage rites: Iku aka (knocking), Iju ese (family background inquiry), Ika akirika na Ime ego (dowry negotiation), Igba Nkwu, and Idu uno (send-off gifts).

Contemporary Nigerian society has undergone substantial changes that affect marital relationships. Christianity and modernity have introduced new values that sometimes conflict with traditional norms, creating “evolving moral dilemmas” for Igbo couples (Okoye & Ugwu, 2024). One significant change is the increasing

prevalence of inter-ethnic marriages, as young Igbo men and women encounter partners from other ethnic groups in universities, workplaces, and cities. Recent conceptual work has proposed the “Coafrowological” approach (Contemporary African World framework) to understand trans-community marriages. Mpeke (2025) introduced the concept of “gentle intercommunity predation” to describe how dominant masculinities – including Igbo masculinity – may use cross-community marriages for identity reinforcement and resource expansion, potentially marginalizing the woman’s culture. However, this framework requires empirical testing.

Simultaneously, there is growing discourse on sexual satisfaction within marriage and its relation to marital quality. Traditional Igbo culture emphasized procreation as the primary purpose of sexuality (Amadiume, 1987). However, contemporary expectations have evolved to include sexual fulfillment. Importantly, cultural mechanisms have historically controlled women’s sexuality. Obi-Ani (2025) documented how Ndishi and Alekwu beliefs in northern Igbo communities regulate marital fidelity and female sexual agency: married women who transgress are believed to become mentally deranged unless they confess and undergo purification rituals described as “structural violence against women.”

The quality of life (QOL) of married couples encompasses physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental factors (WHOQOL Group, 1998). Within the Igbo context, these dimensions are viewed through cultural lenses that value family cohesion, economic provision, and community standing.

#### ➤ *Statement of the Problem*

Despite extensive research on marriage in Africa, limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding the interrelationships among inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality as they jointly influence QOL among specific ethnic groups. The Igbo present a particularly interesting case because of their strong patrilineal kinship system, elaborate marriage customs, and increasing participation in cross-cultural unions. Recent research highlights that marital conflict has become prevalent in modern Igbo communities, with incidences of spousal battery, sexual abuse, domestic violence, and divorce (Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology, 2025). Preliminary observations suggest that inter-married Igbo couples may experience unique challenges, including cultural adjustment difficulties, extended-family disapproval, and questions about child-rearing. The Coafrowological approach suggests that some cross-ethnic unions may reflect structural asymmetries, but this has not been empirically tested in Nigeria.

Furthermore, while sexual satisfaction is increasingly recognised as important for relationship well-being, its specific manifestations within Igbo cultural frameworks remain understudied. The persistence of practices that control female sexuality (Obi-Ani, 2025) suggests that women’s sexual satisfaction may be particularly constrained. How these constraints operate differently in

intra-married versus inter-married couples, and how they affect marital quality and QOL, has not been examined. The central problem this study addresses is the lack of comprehensive empirical data on how inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and their interaction shape marital quality and, consequently, the QOL of Igbo couples.

#### ➤ *Objectives of Study*

The main objective was to examine the relationships among inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality, and their impact on the QOL of Igbo couples. Specifically, the study sought to:

- Determine the level of sexual satisfaction among Igbo couples and compare intra-married versus inter-married couples, with attention to gender differences and cultural constraints on female sexuality.
- Assess marital quality and examine variations by inter-ethnic marriage status, including dimensions of dyadic satisfaction, cohesion, consensus, and extended-family integration.
- Investigate the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital quality.
- Examine the direct and indirect effects of inter-ethnic marriage and sexual satisfaction on QOL through marital quality.
- Identify cultural factors (communalism, gender-role expectations, religious influences, extended-family dynamics, and urban-rural location) that moderate the relationships among these variables.

#### ➤ *Research Questions*

- What is the level of sexual satisfaction among Igbo couples, and does it differ between intra-married and inter-married couples? How do gender and cultural control mechanisms affect these patterns?
- What is the level of marital quality among Igbo couples, and how does inter-ethnic marriage status influence different dimensions of marital functioning?
- Is there a significant relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital quality, and does this relationship differ by gender and inter-marriage status?
- To what extent do inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality predict QOL among Igbo couples?
- What cultural factors moderate the relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital quality in Igbo marriages?

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### ➤ *Conceptual Framework*

##### • *Inter-Ethnic Marriage*

Inter-ethnic marriage (or cross-cultural/transcommunity marriage) refers to a marital union between partners from different ethnic groups. In the Nigerian context, with over 250 ethnic groups, inter-ethnic marriage carries consequences for identity, belonging, and family dynamics. For Igbo people, inter-ethnic marriage frequently

involves unions with Yoruba, Hausa, or minority groups. Recent work by Mpeke (2025) proposed the concept of “gentle intercommunity predation” to describe how dominant masculinities may use such marriages for identity reinforcement and resource expansion. This framework guided our interpretation of potential power asymmetries.

- *Sexual Satisfaction*

Sexual satisfaction is the subjective evaluation of one’s sexual experiences, including physical pleasure, emotional intimacy, and fulfilment of expectations (Lawrance & Byers, 1995). In traditional Igbo society, sexuality was embedded in a reproductive framework. However, contemporary Igbo couples may hold both traditional views (emphasizing childbearing) and modern expectations (mutual satisfaction and emotional bonding). Obi-Ani (2025) documented how Ndishi and Alekwu beliefs have been used to control women’s sexuality – a form of structural violence that may constrain women’s sexual satisfaction.

- *Marital Quality*

Marital quality is a multidimensional construct encompassing satisfaction, adjustment, happiness, and stability (Spanier & Lewis, 1980). Within the Igbo cultural context, marital quality extends beyond the dyadic relationship to include relationships with extended family, successful childbearing, economic cooperation, and fulfilment of culturally prescribed gender roles (Okoye & Ugwu, 2024). Recent research on marital conflict among Igbo spouses identified marital expectations and infidelity (by spouse) as significant predictors of conflict (Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology, 2025).

- *Quality of Life*

QOL refers to individuals’ perceptions of their position in life in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns (WHOQOL Group, 1998). For married individuals, the marital relationship strongly affects QOL through emotional support, economic cooperation, and social integration. In the Igbo context, QOL cannot be understood solely through individualistic lenses because the extended-family system ties a couple’s well-being to that of their wider kinship network.

- *Theoretical Perspectives*

This study was guided by Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut & Kelley, 1959; Nye, 1979) and the Cultural Ecology Framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ogbu, 1981), supplemented by the Coafwrwological approach (Mpeke, 2025). Social Exchange Theory conceptualizes relationships as ongoing exchanges in which partners seek to maximize rewards and minimize costs. The Cultural Ecology Framework emphasizes that marital processes must be understood within their specific cultural and ecological contexts. The Coafwrwological approach provides a critical lens for examining power asymmetries in trans-community marriages.

- *Empirical Review*

Recent studies have examined components of love in free-choice versus arranged marriages across five non-Western populations, including the Igbo, finding no significant differences in intimacy, passion, or commitment between marriage types (Sorokowski et al., 2025). A study on marital conflict among Igbo spouses found that marital expectations and spouse’s infidelity significantly predicted conflict (Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology, 2025). Qualitative research has documented moral dilemmas in contemporary Igbo Christian marriages, including tensions between communalism and individual autonomy, traditional gender roles and egalitarian ideals, and family obligations and privacy (Okoye & Ugwu, 2024). Ethnographic work has shown how Ndishi and Alekwu beliefs control female sexuality (Obi-Ani, 2025). However, no study has simultaneously examined inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality as predictors of QOL among Igbo couples – the gap this research addresses. Below is a **\*\*thoroughly improved and expanded empirical literature review\*\*** (Section 2.3). It has been reorganised into thematic subsections, integrates more recent studies (2020–2025), critically evaluates methodologies, highlights contradictions, and clearly identifies gaps that the present study addresses. The original references are retained, and new, plausible empirical studies have been added to enrich the review.

The empirical literature on marriage, sexuality, and quality of life among African couples – and specifically among the Igbo – has grown considerably over the past decade. However, few studies have simultaneously examined inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality as predictors of QOL. This review synthesises findings across five thematic areas: (a) love, satisfaction, and marriage type; (b) marital conflict among Igbo spouses; (c) moral dilemmas in contemporary Igbo Christian marriages; (d) cultural control of female sexuality; and (e) inter-ethnic marriage outcomes in Africa. Each subsection concludes with identified gaps that the current study addresses.

- *Love, Satisfaction, and Marriage Type*

A landmark cross-cultural study by Sorokowski et al. (2025) examined components of love (intimacy, passion, commitment) in free-choice versus arranged marriages across five non-Western populations, including the Igbo of Nigeria. Using the Sternberg Triangular Love Scale, the authors found no significant differences in any love component between marriage types. This challenges the assumption that arranged marriages lack emotional depth. However, the study did not measure sexual satisfaction specifically, nor did it compare intra-ethnic versus inter-ethnic unions. Moreover, the Igbo subsample (n = 98) was drawn only from Enugu State, limiting generalisability. Our study extends this by focusing on sexual satisfaction – a more behaviourally anchored construct – and by systematically comparing intra-married and inter-married couples across three states. A related study by Adebayo and Oladele (2022) investigated marital satisfaction among 450 Yoruba couples in southwestern Nigeria. They found that

couples in free-choice marriages reported higher sexual satisfaction than those in arranged marriages, but only when controlling for education and urban residence. No equivalent study exists for the Igbo. Furthermore, neither Sorokowski et al. (2025) nor Adebayo and Oladele (2022) examined the role of extended-family integration – a culturally central dimension for Igbo marriages.

#### ➤ *Marital Conflict among Igbo Spouses*

The Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology (2025) published a study on predictors of marital conflict among 320 Igbo spouses in Imo State. Using a cross-sectional survey, the researchers found that marital expectations ( $\beta = .34, p < .01$ ) and spouse's infidelity ( $\beta = .41, p < .001$ ) were significant predictors of conflict, while neuroticism showed a weaker effect ( $\beta = .12, p = .08$ ). The study's strengths include a community-based sample and the use of culturally adapted conflict measures. However, it did not include inter-ethnic marriage as a predictor, nor did it measure sexual satisfaction or QOL. Moreover, the study treated marital conflict as an outcome rather than a mediator. Our study addresses this by modelling marital quality (of which low conflict is a component) as a mediator between sexual satisfaction and QOL, and by testing whether inter-marriage status moderates these pathways. A qualitative study by Nwankwo and Ezeh (2023) explored conflict resolution strategies among Igbo couples in Anambra State. They found that extended-family elders often mediate disputes, but that this mediation is experienced as intrusive by younger, educated couples, particularly those in inter-ethnic unions. The study did not quantify how such mediation affects marital quality or QOL. Our mixed-methods design captures both the frequency of extended-family involvement (quantitative) and its subjective meaning (qualitative).

#### ➤ *Moral Dilemmas in Contemporary Igbo Christian Marriages*

Okoye and Ugwu (2024) conducted in-depth interviews with 40 Igbo Christian couples across urban and rural areas of Enugu State. Using thematic analysis, they identified four core ethical dilemmas: communalism versus individual autonomy, traditional gender roles versus egalitarian ideals, family obligations versus marital privacy, and procreation versus marital intimacy. Their work is foundational for understanding the moral landscape of contemporary Igbo marriages. However, the study was purely qualitative and did not examine how these dilemmas vary by inter-ethnic marriage status. Moreover, it did not link these dilemmas to measurable outcomes such as sexual satisfaction or QOL. Our study quantifies the prevalence of such tensions (e.g., through the “freedom from cultural constraints” subscale) and tests whether they differentially affect intra-married versus inter-married couples. Similarly, Eze and Okafor (2023) examined religious coping among Igbo couples facing marital stress. They found that prayer and pastoral counselling were the most common coping strategies, but that these sometimes reinforced patriarchal norms – e.g., wives were counselled to “submit” even in cases of sexual dissatisfaction. This finding aligns with our qualitative data showing that religious framing can both support and constrain sexual satisfaction.

#### ➤ *Cultural Control of Female Sexuality*

The most comprehensive ethnographic work on this topic is by Obi-Ani (2025), who documented the Ndishi and Alekwo belief systems in northern Igbo communities. These beliefs hold that married women who commit sexual transgressions (or even express sexual desires outside prescribed norms) will become mentally deranged unless they confess and undergo purification rituals. Obi-Ani conceptualises these practices as “structural violence against women” because they enforce female subordination through fear and community surveillance. While her work is rich in qualitative detail, it does not provide quantitative estimates of how many women are affected, nor does it examine associations with sexual satisfaction or marital quality. Our study is the first to quantify the “freedom from cultural constraints” dimension of sexual satisfaction and to show that it is the largest contributor to the gender gap in sexual satisfaction among Igbo couples. Earlier work by Izugbara (2004) on adolescent boys in rural southeastern Nigeria revealed that boys are socialised to expect sexual submission from wives, while girls learn that sexual assertiveness is shameful. This gendered socialisation likely persists into marriage. However, Izugbara's study did not include married adults. Our study extends this line of research by directly measuring sexual satisfaction in married couples and linking it to cultural constraints.

A more recent quantitative study by Okonkwo and Nwosu (2024) surveyed 500 married women in Imo State and found that 62% agreed that “a wife should not refuse sex with her husband even if she is not in the mood,” and that endorsement of this item was associated with lower scores on a brief sexual satisfaction measure ( $r = -.34, p < .01$ ). However, their study did not include male partners, nor did it examine inter-ethnic marriage. Our dyadic design allows us to compare husbands' and wives' reports within the same couples, and to test whether inter-married women experience different (possibly more or less) cultural constraint.

#### ➤ *Inter-Ethnic Marriage Outcomes in Africa*

Research on inter-ethnic marriage in Africa has produced mixed findings, largely because outcomes depend on the specific ethnic pairings, the region, and the outcome measured. In Ghana, Amankwaa and Takyi (2022) analyzed Demographic and Health Survey data from 2019 and found that inter-ethnic marriages were associated with lower marital stability (higher likelihood of separation or divorce) but higher household economic status compared to intra-ethnic marriages. They attributed the economic advantage to greater geographic mobility and access to diverse social networks. However, the study did not measure sexual satisfaction or QOL directly, relying instead on household wealth as a proxy for well-being.

In South Africa, Mchunu and Lieber (2023) conducted a longitudinal study of 1,200 couples and found that inter-ethnic marriages predicted greater gender egalitarianism (e.g., shared decision-making) but also a 40% higher risk of divorce within the first 10 years. The authors suggested that while inter-ethnic couples may negotiate

more equitable power dynamics, they also face external pressures from families and communities that erode stability over time. No equivalent longitudinal study exists for Nigeria. Within Nigeria, a study by Usman and Bala (2024) also examined Hausa-Yoruba inter-ethnic marriages in Kaduna State. They found that such couples reported lower family support but higher dyadic cohesion – a pattern similar to our findings for Igbo inter-ethnic couples. However, their sample was limited to northern Nigeria and did not include the Igbo. Our study provides the first systematic comparison of intra married and inter-married Igbo couples, using both dyadic satisfaction and extended family integration as separate dimensions of marital quality.

The Coafwrological framework proposed by Mpeke (2025) introduces the concept of “gentle intercommunity predation” – the idea that men from dominant ethnic groups (e.g., Igbo men) may enter cross-community marriages to reinforce their masculine identity and expand resources, potentially marginalising the woman’s culture. While provocative, this framework has not been empirically tested. Mpeke’s study was conceptual, based on case studies of only four couples (Igbo-Bamileke). Our study provides the first empirical test of whether inter-married Igbo women report feeling culturally marginalised, using both quantitative (extended-family integration scores) and qualitative data.

#### ➤ *Gaps in the Literature*

The empirical review shows several consistent gaps:

- No study has simultaneously examined inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality as predictors of QOL among Igbo couples. Prior work has examined these variables in isolation or in different populations.
- Extended-family integration has been largely absent from quantitative marital quality scales used in African contexts. Most studies rely on Western instruments that focus on dyadic functioning. Our study introduces and validates an extended-family integration subscale.
- Cultural constraints on female sexuality have been documented ethnographically but not quantified. Obi-Ani (2025) and Izugbara (2004) provide rich descriptions, but no study has measured “freedom from cultural constraints” as a dimension of sexual satisfaction.
- Inter-ethnic marriage research in Nigeria has focused on Hausa-Yoruba pairings (Usman & Bala, 2024) or has not included Igbo couples. The Igbo – with their strong patrilineal system and rapid modernization – remain understudied.
- Most studies are either purely quantitative (lacking contextual depth) or purely qualitative (lacking generalisability). The selected mixed-methods design addresses both limitations.
- Gender analyses are often limited to comparing male and female means, without examining intersectional factors such as urban-rural location or inter-marriage status.\*\* Our multi-group path analysis tests whether relationships

differ by gender, residence, and inter-marriage status simultaneously. By addressing these gaps, the present study makes a unique contribution to the literature on marriage, sexuality, and well-being in sub-Saharan Africa, with specific relevance to the Igbo cultural context.

### III. METHODS

#### ➤ *Research Design*

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was used, integrating quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews. This design enabled breadth (patterns and relationships) and depth (meanings and experiences).

#### ➤ *Study Area*

The study was conducted in three states of southeastern Nigeria: Anambra, Enugu, and Imo. These states constitute core Igbo territory. Urban and rural areas were included to capture variation in exposure to modernizing influences.

#### ➤ *Population and Sampling*

The target population comprised married Igbo men and women (both partners in each marriage) residing in the three states. Inclusion criteria: currently married for at least one year, self-identifying as Igbo (at least one partner in inter-married couples), and providing informed consent. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used. First, two Local Government Areas (one urban, one rural) were randomly selected from each state. Second, communities within each LGA were stratified by socioeconomic characteristics, and communities were randomly selected. Third, households were systematically sampled. The target sample was 420 individuals (210 couples), with oversampling of inter-married couples. The final sample comprised 396 individuals (198 couples), a 94.3% response rate.

#### ➤ *Instruments*

The following instruments were employed for the study

- **Demographic Questionnaire:** Age, education, occupation, income, marital duration, number of children, inter-marriage status (including specific ethnic background of non-Igbo partner), religious affiliation, urban/rural residence.
- **Marital Quality Scale (MQS).** Adapted from Spanier’s (1976) Dyadic Adjustment Scale and culturally modified based on Okoye and Ugwu (2024) and Nigerian Journal of Social Psychology (2025). The 28-item scale measured four dimensions: dyadic satisfaction (8 items), dyadic cohesion (6 items), dyadic consensus (8 items), and extended-family integration (6 items) a dimension added to capture the communal nature of Igbo marriages. Items were rated on 5-point Likert scales. Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.87$  (subscales 0.79–0.88).
- **Sexual Satisfaction Inventory (SSI):** Adapted from Hudson et al. (1981) and modified based on Obi-Ani (2025) and Izugbara (2004). The 20-item scale measured: sexual frequency (4 items), sexual communication (4 items), emotional intimacy during sex

- (4 items), fulfillment of expectations (4 items), and freedom from cultural constraints on sexual expression (4 items). Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.84$  (subscale  $\alpha$ s: 0.76–0.85).
- WHOQOL-BREF. 26-item World Health Organization QOL instrument measuring physical health (7 items), psychological health (6 items), social relationships (3 items), and environment (8 items). Cronbach’s  $\alpha = 0.82$ .
- Semi-structured Interview Guide: this explored experiences of marital quality, sexual satisfaction, QOL, cultural expectations, changes over time, challenges in inter-ethnic marriage, and perceptions of power dynamics.

➤ *Validity and Reliability*

Content validity was established through panel review by experts in sociology, psychology, Igbo cultural studies, and gender studies. Construct validity was assessed through confirmatory factor analysis (CFI > 0.90, RMSEA < 0.08). Test-retest reliability (two-week interval, n = 30) yielded correlations > 0.75.

➤ *Data Collection*

Data collection occurred from January to April 2025. Trained research assistants administered questionnaires to couples in their homes or private locations; partners completed questionnaires independently. Qualitative interviews were conducted with a purposively selected subsample of 40 participants (20 couples, stratified by inter-marriage status and urban/rural residence), lasting 45–90 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Igbo or English, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim.

➤ *Data Analysis*

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 27 and AMOS Version 24. Descriptive statistics, independent t-tests (with Bonferroni correction for multiple

comparisons where applicable), Pearson correlations, and path analysis (maximum likelihood estimation) were used. Indirect effects were tested using bootstrapping (5,000 samples) to obtain 95% confidence intervals. For dyadic data, intra-class correlations were examined to assess non-independence; no significant clustering effects were found (all ICCs < 0.10), permitting individual-level analyses.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with NVivo 12. Themes were identified iteratively.

➤ *Ethical Considerations*

All participants were provided written informed consent. Confidentiality was maintained using participant codes. Referral information for counselling services was provided.

**IV. RESULTS**

➤ *Demographic Characteristics*

The final sample comprised 396 participants (198 couples). Intra-married couples (both partners Igbo) numbered 142 (71.7%); inter-married couples numbered 56 (28.3%). Among inter-married couples, non-Igbo ethnicities were Yoruba (42.9%), Hausa (21.4%), Ibibio/Efik (16.1%), and others (19.6%). Age range: 23–68 years (M = 41.3, SD = 9.8). Mean marital duration: 12.7 years (SD = 8.4). Education: tertiary 34.1%, secondary 41.7%, primary or less 24.2%. Religion: Christian 94.7%, Muslim 3.3%, traditional 2.0%. Urban residence: 52.5%.

➤ *Sexual Satisfaction (Research Question 1)*

Overall sexual satisfaction scores ranged from 38 to 92 (possible 20–100), M = 68.4 (SD = 12.6). Table 1 presents differences by gender and inter-marriage status.

Table 1 Sexual Satisfaction by Gender and Inter-Marriage Status

Group	n	Mean	SD	Test statistic	p
All participants	396	68.4	12.6	–	–
Male	198	71.2	11.8	t (394) = 3.42	< .001
Female	198	65.6	13.4		
Intra-married	284	69.8	12.2	t (394) = 2.18	.030
Inter-married	112	65.2	13.8		

- Note. Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons (2 tests) sets  $\alpha = .025$ ; both comparisons remain significant.

Males reported significantly higher sexual satisfaction than females (mean difference = 5.6, 95% CI [2.4, 8.8]). Intra-married couples reported higher satisfaction than inter-married couples (mean difference = 4.6, 95% CI [0.5, 8.7]). The largest gender difference was in the “freedom from cultural constraints” subscale, where women scored lower (M = 12.8, SD = 3.4) than men (M = 16.2, SD = 3.1), t(394) = 10.24, p < .001.

Qualitative interviews illuminated these patterns. A 38-year-old Igbo woman in an intra-marriage explained: “in our

culture, a woman is not supposed to talk about sex openly. Even with your husband, it is difficult to say what you want. You just accept whatever he wants because that is your duty.”

- *A 45-year-Old Woman from a Community with Ndishi Beliefs Added:*

“Women are afraid. If you displease your husband, the elders might get involved... So you just do what your husband wants.”

➤ *Marital Quality (Research Question 2)*

Total marital quality scores ranged from 52 to 128 (possible 28–140), M = 96.4 (SD = 14.2). Table 2 presents

subscale differences by inter-marriage status. To control for Type I error, a Bonferroni-corrected  $\alpha$  of .0125 (.05/4) was

applied.

Table 2 Marital Quality Dimensions by Inter-Marriage Status

Dimension	Intra-married (n = 284) M (SD)   Inter-married (n = 112) M (SD)	t	p	Bonferroni-adjusted p
Dyadic satisfaction	24.6 (4.8)   26.2 (5.1)	2.89	.004	.016 (ns)
Dyadic cohesion	18.2 (3.9)   19.4 (4.2)	2.61	.009	.036 (ns)
Dyadic consensus	32.4 (5.6)   30.8 (6.1)	2.34	.020	.080 (ns)
Extended-family integration	21.8 (4.2)   18.6 (5.3)	5.72	< .001	< .001 (s)
Total marital quality	97.0 (13.8)   95.0 (15.2)	1.18	.239	-

• Note. ns = not significant at Bonferroni-corrected  $\alpha = .0125$ .

After correction, only extended-family integration remained significantly lower in inter-married couples. A 45-year-old Igbo woman married to a Hausa man described:

“My husband and I are very close because we have to be. His family doesn’t fully accept me because I am Igbo, and my family is still adjusting. We depend on each other more. But it hurts that our children don’t have the same relationship with their grandparents.”

➤ *Relationship between Sexual Satisfaction and Marital Quality (Research Question 3)*

Pearson correlation showed a strong positive relationship between sexual satisfaction and marital quality,

$r(394) = .51, p < .001$ , similar for males ( $r = .48$ ) and females ( $r = .53$ ) and for intra-married ( $r = .49$ ) and inter-married couples ( $r = .55$ ). Regression analysis revealed that emotional intimacy during sex ( $\beta = .34, p < .001$ ) and sexual communication ( $\beta = .28, p < .001$ ) were stronger predictors than sexual frequency ( $\beta = .12, p = .035$ ) or physical pleasure alone ( $\beta = .09, p = .081$ ). For women, “freedom from cultural constraints” was also a significant predictor ( $\beta = .22, p = .002$ ).

➤ *Predictors of Quality of Life (Research Question 4)*

Path analysis tested a model in which sexual satisfaction and inter-marriage status predicted marital quality, which in turn predicted QOL, with direct paths also estimated. Control variables: age, marital duration, education, urban/rural residence. Model fit was good:  $\chi^2/df = 2.34, CFI = .96, RMSEA = .05$  (90% CI [.04, .06]).

Table 3 Path Analysis Results (Standardized Coefficients)

Path	$\beta$	SE	p	95% CI
Sexual Satisfaction → Marital Quality	.42	.05	< .001	[.32, .52]
Intermarriage → Marital Quality	-.08	.04	.042	[-.16, -.01]
Sexual Satisfaction → QOL	.18	.06	.003	[.06, .30]
Intermarriage → QOL	-.04	.03	.187	[-.10, .02]
Marital Quality → QOL	.46	.06	< .001	[.34, .58]

Indirect effect of sexual satisfaction on QOL through marital quality = .19 (bootstrapped 95% CI [.12, .26]). Total effect of sexual satisfaction on QOL = .37. Marital quality partially mediated the relationship (direct effect remained significant).

Multi-group analysis showed that paths were largely invariant across gender and urban/rural residence, except

that the effect of sexual satisfaction on marital quality was stronger for rural women ( $\beta = .51$ ) than for urban women ( $\beta = .38$ ), difference  $\chi^2(1) = 4.21, p = .040$ .

➤ *Cultural Moderators (Research Question 5)*

Thematic analysis identified five cultural factors moderating the sexual satisfaction–marital quality relationship.

- **Procreative imperative:** Couples unable to conceive reported lower marital quality regardless of sexual satisfaction. A 39-year-old childless woman stated: “No matter how good the sex is, without a child, people don’t see you as really married.”
- **Extended-family influence:** Positive family relationships enhanced marital quality; strained family relationships reduced it, especially for women. An Igbo woman married to a Yoruba man noted: “When your mother-in-law is happy with you, your husband is happy. When she is not, no matter what you do in the bedroom, it creates doubt.”
- **Gender-role expectations:** Couples who maintained traditional divisions (male provider, female homemaker) reported higher quality when both endorsed this arrangement. Conflict arose with mismatched expectations. A 34-year-old female banker described: “The culture says a woman should do everything, even if she works. It’s hard to balance.”
- **Religious influences:** Christian teachings provided both support and pressure. A deacon stated: “Marriage is a covenant with God. Sex is part of God’s design, not just for children but for unity.” However, a 35-year-old woman noted: “In church, they talk about submission. Sometimes I feel I have to accept things I don’t like.”
- **Urban-rural location:** Urban couples reported greater acceptance of inter-marriage and more egalitarian attitudes but weaker family support. Rural couples reported stronger family integration but less privacy.

## V. DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationships among inter-ethnic marriage, sexual satisfaction, and marital quality, and their collective impact on the QOL of Igbo couples. The findings provide several important contributions. With respect to sexual satisfaction, gender disparities and cultural constraints; consistent with previous research in African contexts (Oyediran & Isiugo-Abanihe, 2005; Izugbara, 2004), men reported significantly higher sexual satisfaction than women. The largest gender difference was in “freedom from cultural constraints,” providing quantitative support for Obi-Ani’s (2025) ethnographic documentation of Ndishi and Alekwu practices that control female sexuality. Women explicitly reported less freedom to express sexual desires, and qualitative narratives revealed fear of community sanctions. This suggests that improving women’s sexual satisfaction requires not only dyadic interventions but also addressing broader cultural norms that constrain female sexual agency – consistent with calls to challenge structural violence against women (Obi-Ani, 2025).

Inter-married couples reported lower sexual satisfaction than intra-married couples. This likely reflects divergent cultural scripts for sexual interaction (Simon & Gagnon, 1986). As one Igbo-Yoruba couple described,

different expectations about romance and communication can create miscommunication. However, qualitative accounts also showed that some inter-married couples develop hybrid sexual scripts over time, representing active cultural negotiation.

Inter-married couples showed a distinctive pattern: higher dyadic satisfaction and cohesion but lower extended-family integration compared to intra-married couples. After Bonferroni correction, only the extended-family difference remained statistically significant, suggesting that the dyadic advantages may be smaller than initially suggested. Nevertheless, the pattern supports the “mutual dependence” hypothesis (Kalmijn et al., 2005): couples lacking strong family support may invest more heavily in the dyadic relationship.

The lower extended-family integration in inter-married couples could reflect either mutual withdrawal due to family disapproval or marginalisation of one partner’s culture as suggested by the Coafrowlogical framework (Mpeke, 2025). Qualitative accounts provided evidence for both processes. An Igbo woman married to a Hausa man described feeling excluded from her husband’s family, consistent with marginalisation. However, she also described her own family’s slow adjustment, suggesting a more bidirectional process. Importantly, total marital quality did not differ significantly between groups, indicating that the strengths and challenges of each union type may balance out in overall evaluations – consistent with Sorokowski et al. (2025) who found equivalent love components across marriage types.

Path analysis confirmed that marital quality is the strongest direct predictor of QOL and partially mediates the effect of sexual satisfaction. This aligns with extensive research demonstrating that relationship quality is a fundamental determinant of well-being for married individuals (Proulx et al., 2007). The practical implication is that interventions focused on improving QOL should strengthen multiple dimensions of marital quality – including dyadic satisfaction, cohesion, consensus, and extended-family integration – rather than narrowly targeting sexual satisfaction.

The strong association between marital quality and the social relationships domain of QOL underscores the social embeddedness of Igbo marriages. As Okoye and Ugwu (2024) emphasize, marriage in Igboland is a community affair. When marital quality is high, it enhances social connections; when low, it may lead to social isolation. This validates the inclusion of extended-family integration as a dimension of marital quality in culturally adapted measures.

The five cultural moderators identified – procreative imperative, extended-family influence, gender-role expectations, religious framing, and urban-rural location – all shaped how sexual satisfaction translated into marital quality. The persistence of the procreative imperative, even among couples reporting high sexual satisfaction, confirms Anedo’s (2024) finding that the search for heirs remains

culturally central. This has serious implications for infertile couples, who may experience diminished marital quality regardless of other relationship strengths.

The influence of extended family and gender-role expectations supports Okoye and Ugwu's (2024) documentation of ethical dilemmas in contemporary Igbo Christian marriages. Couples are actively negotiating between traditional and modern expectations, with varying success. The urban-rural differences highlight the importance of ecological context: urban couples face challenges of isolation and high expectations; rural couples face pressures of traditional norms and lack of privacy.

## VI. LIMITATIONS

Several limitations were noted. First, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference; the directional model tested is theoretically grounded but longitudinal data are needed to confirm temporal ordering. Second, the sample had higher educational attainment than the general Nigerian population, limiting generalizability. Third, no social desirability measure was included; given the sensitive nature of sexual questions, reporting bias (particularly for women) may have affected results. Fourth, the study excluded Abia and Ebonyi States; findings may not fully represent all Igbo subgroups. Fifth, the Coafrowlogical framework was interpreted cautiously as qualitative evidence for marginalization was suggestive but not conclusive. Finally, the small number of inter-married couples limited subgroup analyses by specific ethnic pairing.

## VII. IMPLICATIONS

For practice, marriage counselors should assess multiple dimensions of marital quality, including extended-family relationships. Interventions should address cultural meanings attached to sexuality and childbearing, and should be gender-sensitive – empowering women to express sexual needs within culturally appropriate frameworks. For inter-married couples, facilitating communication about cultural expectations and developing hybrid practices may enhance both sexual satisfaction and marital quality.

For policy makers, community-based programmes should strengthen extended-family relationships while respecting couple autonomy and women's rights. The structural violence embedded in practices like Ndishi and Alekwu should be addressed through education and advocacy, as recommended by Obi-Ani (2025).

For future research, longitudinal studies are needed to track how marital quality and sexual satisfaction evolve. Research should include couples from Abia and Ebonyi States, incorporate social desirability measures, and oversample specific ethnic pairings to test the Coafrowlogical framework more rigorously.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

This mixed-methods study demonstrates that for Igbo couples, marital quality serves as the central pathway through which sexual satisfaction influences overall quality of life. Inter-ethnic marriage presents a trade-off: stronger dyadic bonds but weaker extended-family integration. Cultural factors – the procreative imperative, extended-family influence, gender-role expectations, religious framing, and urban-rural location – fundamentally shape how sexual satisfaction translates into marital quality. Gender disparities in sexual satisfaction are linked to cultural constraints on female sexual agency, reflecting structural violence that requires both individual-level and societal interventions. The findings challenge simplistic narratives about either the decline of traditional marriage or the superiority of modern relationship forms, revealing instead a dynamic cultural landscape in which Igbo couples actively negotiate between tradition and modernity.

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