




Mothers-in-law' attitudes towards daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State, Nigeria

¹Lateef Omotosho Adegboyega 

¹Department of Educational Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, Nigeria

¹Primary author: adegboyega.lo@unilorin.edu.ng

Abstract—The relationship between a wife and her mother-in-law plays a crucial role in fostering a stable and harmonious marriage. This study examined the mothers-in-laws' attitudes towards their daughters-in-law, contributing to marital stability among married adults in Ilorin, Kwara State. It used a quantitative approach and descriptive survey design involving 150 respondents. Data were collected through a designed questionnaire called "Attitude of Mothers-in-Law towards Daughters-in-Law in Promoting Marital Stability." Data were analysed using percentages, ranking, t-tests, and ANOVA, which test the study's hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. The findings showed that mothers-in-law generally have positive attitudes toward promoting marital stability in their daughters-in-law. This study revealed no significant differences in attitudes related to gender, age, or duration of marriage. Thus, this study recommended that mothers-in-laws maintain a positive approach to foster marital stability. It also emphasised the importance of pre-marital counselling to help couples understand each other and their in-laws before marriage. Young couples were advised to prioritise mutual understanding and actively work on their marriage while minimising in-law interference. Finally, all societal stakeholders were encouraged to promote marital harmony regardless of demographic differences.

Keywords: Daughter-in-law, Marital stability, Mothers-in-law' attitudes

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I. INTRODUCTION

MARRIAGE is a vital social and legal institution that forms the foundation of family life in virtually all societies. According to Matsumura (2016), it represents the union of two mature individuals, often a man and a woman, who enter a mutually agreed-upon life-long partnership. This partnership typically aims to achieve personal development, companionship, and, in many cases, procreation. Beyond the individuals involved, marriage also unites two families, establishing a relationship that extends beyond the couple. As the African proverb aptly states, "You do not marry a person; you marry a family." The intertwining of marriage and family institutions indicates the collective nature of these unions. When two individuals marry, they bring themselves and their families into a shared network of relationships (Lau, 2005).

Watkins (2020) defines marriage as a legal and contractual relationship between a man and a woman formalised through societal or religious customs and recognised by law. This relationship, which establishes the couple as husband and wife, is often cemented by mutual commitments, legal obligations, and religious ceremonies.

From a sociological perspective, marriage transcends the romantic or legal connection between two people. It functions as a structural and functional link between two families, effectively transforming the dynamics of these familial units (Willoughby et al., 2015). For example, in-laws become extended family members, to the extent that brothers-in-law are often seen as brothers, and sisters-in-law as sisters. At the same time, a mother-in-law could be a secondary mother within the marital framework (Byng-Hall, 2008). According to sociologists, marriage is a personal commitment and a cultural universal; some form

exists in every society (Edgell, 2023).

Furthermore, sociologists regard marriage as a personal commitment and a cultural universal, existing in every society (Willoughby et al., 2015). Sociologists regard it as a socially supported union, typically based on a sexual bond and shared responsibilities, which fosters stability and enduring relationships. It is crucial in fulfilling societal norms and preserving cultural continuity (Edgell, 2023).

According to the United States Bureau of the Census (2006), a family can be defined as a group of one or more people connected by birth, marriage, or adoption and living together in the same household, with one member recognised as the head of the household. This implies that families are essential to society's fabric, providing a sense of identity, belonging, and support. However, family relationships evolve as other family members grow in significance and as society affects their respective lives (Riley, 2008). Notably, the most difficult familial relationship is between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.

Family specialists say the most challenging relationship is between the mother and daughter-in-law. Conflicts between spouses and their mothers-in-law are not inevitable. Similarly, bacteria and viruses require an environment to reproduce; they need a suitable arena (Lau, 2005). Initially, there must be a typical area where the wife and her mother-in-law are in continual communication. In theory, there would be no issue between the wife and her mother-in-law if they did not interact and each led their own lives. This is due to the absence of contact. There is no conflict, as there is no contact. It is as straightforward as that. It is equivalent to asserting that there would be no divorces without marriages (Philips, 2005). "Unless one plays like a chimpanzee, there is practically no likelihood of clashing with an opponent during badminton or tennis." However, when engaging in a game such as squash, it is imperative to exercise extreme caution to avoid colliding with your opponent or using your instrument to strike

their head (Lau, 2005). According to Silverstein (2012), the wife's interaction with her mother-in-law is comparable to the game of squash, in which numerous opportunities exist for both participants to collide. The wife and her mother-in-law are typically involved when intergenerational conflicts arise. The maintenance of kinship relations has historically been the responsibility of women, which is why in-law trouble is often labelled a "female problem" (Marotz-Baden & Cowan, 2008).

Mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law often have complex relationships with their sons or husbands. Despite both women being subject to patriarchal norms, their roles differ. In many traditional societies, family ties between generations were considered more important than the marital bond. For example, Fischer (2008) found that wives often rely on their mothers after childbirth. However, they might see their mother-in-law's involvement with the baby as intrusive.

Tensions between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law rarely lead to positive outcomes. These conflicts can divide women who share everyday experiences and could benefit from mutual support. Mothers-in-law may feel rejected when their efforts to build a relationship are met with resistance, which they fear may result in the loss of closeness with their son and grandchildren. On the other hand, daughters-in-law often feel judged and pressured, especially regarding their role within the family (Apter, 2011).

Effective communication is crucial in fostering better relationships. Interpersonal skills are essential for adjustment, happiness, and success. Awareness of how communication impacts the relationship between mothers and daughters-in-law is vital. Miscommunication can create conflict, while clear and respectful dialogue can promote understanding (Byng-Hall, 2008).

Simmel (1955) pointed out that conflict and cooperation are natural human relationships. Conflict between a wife and her mother-in-law can be avoided or minimised if communication is handled effectively. Sharing information openly can help both women understand each other better and foster more positive relationships.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Strained relationships are frequently observed in numerous extended families, leading daughters-in-law to wish for the absence of mothers-in-law or to prefer those who do not cohabit with them. This often stems from the perceived threat that mothers-in-law present to the family's normal functioning. Ilumoye (2011) asserts that numerous households have been disrupted due to familial (mother-in-law) intervention in marriages.

One must inquire why daughters-in-law exhibit heightened sensitivity to perceived deficiencies in a mothers-in-law's acknowledgement of them. The solution may be in the significant expectations they place on the response of a maternal figure. Daughters-in-law frequently exhibit sensitivity to a mother's behaviour that resembles that of a teenager towards her mother (Apter, 2010). Numerous tensions also arise within the broader framework of the work/family problem that permeates the lives of many of these women.

The contemporary couple perceives marriage as the unification of two individuals, the husband and the wife. This represents the contemporary understanding of marriage. Upon marriage, contemporary couples often overlook that their union creates both their relationship and the connection between the husband's family, regardless of its size, and the wife's family, irrespective of its size. Issues emerge from this contemporary yet significantly erroneous view of marriage, as it diminishes the importance of in-laws. Consequently, brothers-in-law are not regarded as brothers, sisters-in-law are not regarded as sisters, and mothers-in-law are not seen as mothers. When this occurs, Duvall (2004) says the relationship has commenced on an improper foundation.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

This evaluates the mother-in-law's attitude towards her daughter-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in the Ilorin metropolis.

IV. RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

The following null hypotheses were postulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in the Ilorin metropolis, based on age.
2. There is no significant difference in the attitude of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in the Ilorin metropolis, based on gender.
3. There is no significant difference in the attitude of mothers-in-law towards daughter-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in the Ilorin metropolis based on the length of years in marriage.

V. METHODS

Research approach

This study employed a quantitative approach. Using a quantitative approach to study the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability is relevant because it allows for the collection and analysis of numerical data to identify patterns and trends (Creswell, 2014). This approach helps us understand the relationship between variables, such as communication styles and attitudes, and their impact on marital stability (Amato, 2001). Quantitative research enables researchers to test hypotheses, establish cause-and-effect relationships, and generalise findings to larger populations (Babbie, 2013). Studies have shown that quantitative approaches, such as surveys and questionnaires, are effective in studying marital stability and relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law (Okon, 2018; Adeyemi, 2020).

Research design

The research employed a descriptive survey design. Using a descriptive survey design is relevant to this study because it enables the collection of data that describes the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability. This design helps gather information about a specific population's characteristics, behaviours, and opinions (Creswell, 2014). Descriptive survey design enables researchers to identify patterns and trends in the data, which can inform understanding of the research problem (Babbie, 2013).

Recent studies have used descriptive survey designs to investigate similar research questions. For example, a study on the relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law used a descriptive survey design to collect data from a sample of married women (Okon, 2018). Another study employed a descriptive survey design to investigate the impact of mothers-in-law's attitudes on marital stability (Adeyemi, 2020).

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), descriptive survey design is suitable for studies that describe a phenomenon, identify patterns, and explore relationships between variables. This study examined the mothers-in-law's perspective on the daughter-in-law in Ilorin. The process entails using a questionnaire to gather information from respondents regarding the research topic.

Respondents

The population of this study comprises all married adults in Kwara State, Nigeria. The target demographic consisted of married adults from the Ilorin metropolitan area, specifically from the Ilorin East, Ilorin West, and Ilorin South local government areas. A purposive sampling method was employed to select participants from various locations, including Churches, Mosques, Marketplaces, Public institutions, and Private institutions. This approach enabled the recruitment of married

adults residing in the Ilorin metropolitan area. A total of 150 participants were involved in the investigation, with 50 participants selected from each of the three Local Government areas: Ilorin-East (50 participants), Ilorin-West (50 participants), and Ilorin-South (50 participants). The participants in this study are married adults of varying ages, educational backgrounds, occupations, socioeconomic statuses, and religious affiliations. The purposive sampling method ensured that participants were selected based on their relevance to the study's objectives and willingness to participate.

Data collection instruments

The primary instrument employed was a mixture of standardised and structured questionnaires. The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A and Section B. Biographical information of the respondents is in Section A. Section B included statements regarding mothers-in-law's attitudes towards daughters-in-law in fostering marital stability, utilising a four-point Likert-type scale that required respondents to select their level of agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire's questions. Responses may be categorised as Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), or Strongly Disagree (SD). Validity refers to the determination of correctness, correlation, and significance, primarily based on study findings.

Validity pertains to the extent to which the instrument accurately measures its intended construction. A test is valid solely when it accurately assesses what it claims to assess. Abiri (2007) emphasised that an instrument's validity pertains to its effectiveness in serving its intended purpose. To evaluate the instrument's validity, the researcher submitted the generated questionnaire to five specialists in counselling and psychology for review. The researcher meticulously noted and implemented all adjustments and recommendations provided.

The instrument's reliability was assessed by distributing twenty (20) questionnaire forms to twenty community members who were not part of the initial respondents on two occasions separated by a three-week gap. The two score sets underwent Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation analysis. A reliability coefficient of 0.70 was achieved, signifying that the instrument is sufficiently dependable for the investigation.

Research sites

The research site for this study was Ilorin metropolis, specifically focusing on Ilorin East, Ilorin South, and Ilorin West. In this area, the attitude of mothers-in-law towards daughters-in-law was investigated as a determining factor in marital stability. Selected families in Ilorin metropolis were chosen to investigate the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law as a determining factor in marital stability.

Data analysis

The collected data were analysed using percentages for section A, while t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) were used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 significance level. Hypothesis 1 was tested using a t-test, while hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested using Analysis of Variance.

Ethical considerations

This study involves human participants, and as such, it is essential to consider the ethical implications of the research. The following ethical considerations were considered:

Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits. They were provided with an informed consent form that outlined their rights and responsibilities as participants. Participants were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants' identities were kept confidential, and their responses were anonymous. All data collected was stored securely, and access was limited to the researcher and authorised personnel. The study was designed to minimise potential harm or discomfort to participants. Participants were not exposed to any physical or emotional risks that could cause harm. Participants' rights and dignity were respected throughout the study. Participants were treated with respect

and courtesy, and their autonomy was preserved. The study was approved by the relevant institutional review board or ethics committee. The researcher adhered to the institution's guidelines and policies for conducting research with human participants. The study aimed to promote the well-being and benefits of the participants. The researcher ensured that the study did not cause any harm or injury to the participants. The researcher ensured that the study was conducted ethically and responsibly and that the rights and dignity of the participants were respected.

VI. RESULTS

Demographic results

Table 1: Demographic results of respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	63	42.0
Female	87	58.0
Total	150	100.0
Length of Years in Marriage		
Below 6yrs	69	46.0
6-10yrs	42	28.0
11- Above	39	26.0
Total	150	100.0
Age		
18-24 years	24	16.0
25-29 years	42	28.0
30-39 years	66	44.0
40 years and above	18	12.0
Total	150	100.0

Source: Author's computation (2025)

Table 1 illustrates the distribution of respondents by gender, years of marriage, and age. 63 respondents (42.0%) were male, while 87 (58.0%) were female. Regarding the length of marriage, 69 respondents (46.0%) had been married for less than 6 years, 42 (28.0%) for 6–10 years, and 39 (26.0%) for 11 years or more. In terms of age, 24 respondents (16.0%) were between 18 and 24 years old, 42 (28.0%) were between 25 and 29 years old, 66 (44.0%) were aged 30–39 years, and 18 (12.0%) were 40 years or older.

Mean and Rank Order on attitude of mothers-in-law towards daughter-in-law in promoting marital stability

Table 2: Mean and Rank order on the attitude of mother-in-law towards daughter-in-law in promoting marital stability

S/N	Attitude of the mother-in-law towards the daughter-in-law in promoting marital stability	Mean	Rank
6	Increase mutual understanding	3.10	1 st
8	Promote love, respect, and trust in the family	3.09	2 nd
1	Reduces conflict in the family	3.08	3 rd
3	Reduce the rate of divorce	2.98	4 th
5	Gives room for negotiation instead of violence	2.94	5 th
7	Enhances interpersonal relationships	2.87	6 th
2	Increases mutual understanding in the family	2.77	7 th
13	Affect the psychological well-being of the couples	2.73	8 th
10	Help promote commitment in marriage.	2.66	9 th
4	Promote family growth	2.62	10 th
12	It reduces the rate of abuse between married adults.	2.60	11 th
9	Help to master a suitable communication style	2.56	12 th
11	Allow husband and wife to be decisive on sensitive matters that concern the family	2.55	13 th

Source: Author's computation (2025)

Table 2 shows the mean scores and rank order of mothers-in-law's attitudes toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability. Items ranked 1st, 2nd, and 3rd are 6, 8, and 1, with mean scores of 3.10, 3.09, and 3.08, respectively. These items highlight increasing mutual understanding, promoting love, respect, and trust in the family, and reducing conflicts. Conversely, items 12, 9, and 11, with mean scores of 2.60, 2.56, and 2.55, respectively, are ranked 11th, 12th, and 13th. Since all items scored above the 2.50 benchmark, it can be concluded that mothers-in-law's attitudes toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability are generally positive.

Hypotheses testing

Three null hypotheses were developed for this study and tested using a t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at a 0.05 significance level. Hypothesis 1 was tested using a t-test, while hypotheses 2 and 3 were tested using Analysis of Variance.

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the attitudes of mothers-in-law toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis based on gender.*

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-test values for respondents' perceptions of mothers-in-law's attitudes toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability based on gender.

Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	p-value
Male	63	38.500	11.921	14	0.57	1.96	.067
Female	87	37.154	12.790	8			

Source: Author's computation (2025)

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.57 is lower than the critical t-value 1.96. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical value, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in mothers-in-law's attitudes toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in the Ilorin metropolis based on gender is not rejected.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the attitudes of mothers-in-law toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis based on age.*

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results for respondents' perceptions of mothers-in-law's attitudes toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability based on age.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-value	Crit. F-value	p-value
Between Groups	54.563	3	18.188	0.41	2.60	.543
Within Groups	6474.884	146	44.349			
Total	4597.660	149				

Source: Author's computation (2025)

Table 4 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 0.41 is lower than the critical F-ratio of 2.60, with a corresponding p-value of 0.543, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level. Since the calculated F-ratio is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Hypothesis three: *There is no significant difference in the attitudes of mothers-in-law toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability among married adults in Ilorin metropolis based on the length of years in marriage.*

Table 5: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) results for respondents' perceptions of mothers-in-law's attitudes toward daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability based on the length of years in marriage

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	Cal. F-value	Crit F-value	p-value
Between Groups	65.385	2	32.693	0.54	3.00	.753
Within Groups	4532.275	147	30.832			
Total	4597.660	149				

Source: Author's computation (2025)

Table 5 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 0.54 is lower than the critical F-ratio of 3.00, with a corresponding p-value of 0.753, which exceeds the 0.05 significance level. The null hypothesis is not rejected since the calculated F-ratio is less than the critical value.

VII. DISCUSSION

The study found that mothers-in-law generally have a positive attitude towards their daughters-in-law, which promotes marital stability, as perceived by married adults. This finding contradicts the work of Turner et al. (2006), who argued that negative expectations and emotions often dominate relationships between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law. Furthermore, the study's findings differ from those of Ogidan (2010) and Kolo (2009), who, in separate investigations, reported

that many marriages in Nigeria face challenges such as interference from parents-in-law, which often leads to higher divorce rates and marital separations. Still, as couples stay married longer, they tend to adapt, which can foster marital stability. The study suggests that most mothers-in-law in the Ilorin metropolis view their daughters-in-law as part of the family, and this contributes to their positive role in promoting stability within their son's home.

Another key finding revealed no significant difference in the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability, regardless of the gender of the married adults in the Ilorin metropolis. This finding aligns with the observations of Fingerman and Hay (2002), who noted that both married male and female adults perceived mothers-in-law as playing a crucial role in maintaining close ties with their married children and their children-in-law.

Watkins (2020) also emphasised that marriage constitutes the legal union of a man and woman as husband and wife; it is the state of being united to a person of the opposite sex in a consensual and contractual relationship acknowledged by law and social institutions, wherein a man and woman formalise their intention to cohabit as husband and wife through legal commitments and religious ceremonies. The study's results suggest that gender does not influence how mothers-in-law relate to their daughters-in-law, as their attitudes were consistently positive across male and female respondents.

The findings also revealed no significant age difference in the attitudes of married adults' mothers-in-law toward their daughters-in-law in terms of encouraging marital stability. This supports Omoiya (2015), who observed that the age and life experiences of couples and their parents play a role in marital stability. Fischer (2008) noted that while wives often turn to their mothers for support after childbirth, they may view their mothers-in-law's involvement as interference, primarily due to perceived generational differences and their own experiences. The study concludes that respondents' age does not significantly affect the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards daughters-in-law in promoting marital stability in the Ilorin metropolis.

Finally, the study found no significant difference in perceptions of mother-in-law's attitudes based on the length of the respondents' marriages. This finding aligns with Omoiya's (2015) argument that the duration of marriage influences marital stability. Fowler and Rittenour (2017) further observed that problems with in-laws, particularly in the first 5–15 years of marriage, can negatively impact marital satisfaction and stability. Notably, the study reveals that the length of marriage does not affect the positive attitude of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law in promoting marital harmony in the Ilorin metropolis.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The research indicated that married adults consider the mother-in-law's approach towards the daughter-in-law positively in fostering marital stability. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in the attitudes of mothers-in-law towards their daughters-in-law on the promotion of marital stability, as perceived by married adults in Ilorin metropolis, based on gender, age, and length of marriage. According to the study's findings, the following recommendations were proposed: Mothers-in-law should adopt a positive attitude towards their daughters-in-law to enhance marital stability. Pre-marital counselling is essential for prospective couples to facilitate their understanding of themselves and their in-laws before marriage. Young couples must cultivate mutual understanding and strategies to ensure the success of their marriage and prevent parental meddling from undermining their relationship. Societal stakeholders, regardless of demographic factors, should promote marital harmony among couples.

IX. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this study.

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