

Conceptions of marriage readiness and marital quality indicators for future wellbeing among emerging adult students in the university of buea, Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

While marriage is still strongly held as a major transition event for young people moving through emerging adulthood to full adult status, their conceptions of marriage readiness are diverse, and individually and socio-culturally rooted but also contested. Where their perceptions of marriage readiness are not contested, their beliefs about what it means to be ready for marriage are somewhat paradoxical in most cases. This paper presents descriptive data on youth-held conceptions of marriage readiness, the pathways to marriage and marital quality indicators for future wellbeing among some emerging adults in the University of Buea in Cameroon. A sample of 124 emerging adults, aged 18-30 responded to an adapted Criteria for Marriage Readiness questionnaire whose reliability was 0.848. Data showed that 72.9% of respondents felt that the criteria defined in the study were necessary for marriage readiness; whereas 27.1% did not see the criteria as necessary. Sought whether the criteria defined were important and at what level for future marital quality and wellbeing, 48.7% felt that the criteria defined were very important, 18.6% said the criteria were quite important, 17% maintained that the criteria defined were slightly important while 15.7% felt that the criteria were not at all important. Generally, thinking about marriage and marriage readiness against future marital satisfaction and wellbeing was an important function in the lives of emerging adults. It was concluded that conceptions of marriage readiness among them do not only connote readiness for marriage but further predict future marital satisfaction and wellbeing.

Keywords: *Conceptions of marriage readiness, Emerging adults, Future wellbeing, Marital quality indicators, Marriage readiness.*

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Highlights of this paper

- This paper reports a study of conceptions of the criteria for marriage readiness and marital quality indicators for future wellbeing among emerging adults in the University of Buea in Cameroon.
- Descriptive data collected from 124 emerging adults showed that while some criteria defined in the study are held as necessary for marriage readiness, their level of importance is evaluated as very important, quite important, slightly important and not important at all with corresponding implications for future marital quality and wellbeing.
- The paper concludes that conceptions of marriage readiness do not only mark readiness for marriage but further predict future marital satisfaction and wellbeing.

1. INTRODUCTION

While marriage is still strongly held as a major transition event for young people moving through emerging adulthood to full adult status in sub-Saharan Africa, their conceptions of marriage preparation and readiness are manifold, diverse and individually and socio-culturally rooted but also contested. Where their perceptions of marriage and marriage readiness are not contested, their beliefs about its preparation and what it means to be ready for marriage are somewhat paradoxical in most cases. Whether contested or paradoxical, their definitions do not necessarily suggest that marriage has disappeared or that it is completely ignored as an objective and concrete event in the transition to full adulthood (Schlegel & Eloul, 1988) and delaying marriage does not necessarily imply that today's young people are avoiding it, not thinking about and/or not preparing for it in the future (Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). Rather, an important truth is that many are increasingly delaying marriage and marrying much later than in the previous generations. Decades ago, the transition to marriage was relatively short and young people emerged from childhood and immediately transitioned through marriage into adulthood with relative ease. The trend to delay marriage today seems to be an intentional aspect of marriage preparation rather than a turning away from it (Arnett, 2000). For instance, dating, cohabitation and high quality intimate relationships have become more common today in replacement of early marriage. However young people's notions of marriage and marriage readiness may be, most of them still consider it a highly valued future life goal (Burgoyne & Hames, 2002; Thornton & Young-DeMarco, 2001). They continue to value marriage and family life. In fact, according to Whitehead and Popenoe (2001) 92% of emerging adults in the United States rate having a good marriage as extremely important to them meanwhile to Harris (1998) 94% of them state that they personally hope to get married someday. And Glenn and Marquardt (2001) found that 63% of today's college women say that they would like to meet their future husband at college. These findings suggest that marriage is a natural goal for many and young people are both planning for and expecting it. But it now takes longer than it has always been for most young people to marry, and the whole idea of marriage has become more individualized, an issue of personal choice than a sociocultural imperative that it used to be.

Arguably, today's youth perspectives for marriage preparation and readiness contradict traditional standards. Some of them share perspectives that are overly alien such as having to delay marriage into the thirties or beyond, insisting on cohabitation during courtship in order to test the relationship's readiness for marriage; and sexual experimentation to avoid putting themselves at risk of getting into a relationship that will not satisfy them in the future-thus increasing their probability of later marital dissatisfaction and divorce. Some young people even go as far as testing their ability to have children in premarital relationships. Sadly, this is even a cultural practice in some societies that would subject the male or female to pregnancy as evidence they would be compatible to have children in marriage. It becomes hypercritical to learn about youth conceptions of marriage preparation and readiness and their corresponding implications for the psychological and future wellbeing of the youth. In fact, little is known about what today's rising generation of emerging adults, especially in the Africa sub region hold as the criteria for marriage readiness and the culturally held or accepted pathways they are considering to make themselves ready for it. This

article presents descriptive data on the youth-held definitions of marriage readiness, the pathways to marriage and marital quality indicators for psychological and future wellbeing among some emerging adults in the University of Buea in southwestern Cameroon.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Some extensively researched marriage readiness indicators include self-perceived readiness to marry (Carroll et al., 2009) marital expectations (Wright, Simmons, & Campbell, 2007) individual and personality traits such as emotional health, self-concept, interpersonal skills and sociability (Larson & Holman, 1994) and socio-demographic factors such as quality of parents' marriage and sociocultural factors (i.e., age at marriage, education, income, occupation, class, race, and gender (Weiss, 2014). As early as nearly 50 years ago, Blood (1976) insinuated that marriage readiness was a neglected area in family studies that ought to be considered for an endearing future of productive marriage and family life. Above everything else, marriage readiness means partners are prepared by all standards to take up the new roles and responsibilities that come with marriage. For one thing, they have fallen in love with each other, dated and are now convinced beyond all measures that they can commit themselves to each other. Among some of the most important marital roles and duties that emerging adults must consider before marriage is a conviction that they are ready to not only have children together, but also that they are ready to care for the children and raise them in ways that exude marital and family success. Unfortunately, much has not changed since then and the issue of marriage readiness is still without adequate empirical investigation. Of course, this is disturbing since marriage readiness has been found to be an important factor in the decision to marry, and it inadvertently predicts later marital satisfaction while reducing the rate of divorce (Arcus, 1987; Holman & Li, 1997).

Cohabitation has been historically linked to divorce, and no study so far has shown that it is a protective factor of divorce. Divorce rates instead increased as cohabitation became normalized in premarital relationship practices in the 21st century. Although there appears to be a desire to have successful and lifelong marriages, emerging adults continue to make decisions that have the potential to negatively impact their future marriages (Martin, Martin, & Martin, 2001). For example, cohabitation and premarital sex which are commonly espoused as essential components of wise marriage preparation are rather some of the strongest predictors of divorce. Unlike years gone by, marital lifestyles have been normalized in premarital relationships today. There is a general misconception that premarital lifestyles including sex, and even childbirth, cohabitation and other intimate practices are preparatory ground for success in future marriages. Rather, the cohabitation paradox shows that these premarital practices do not necessarily lead to marriage and marital success. Considered as a "test drive," cohabitation that climbed up in the 1980s was thought that would reduce divorce rates from then going forward. According to Carroll (2016) it was felt in the 1980s that cohabitation would act as a kind of Darwinian "survival of the fittest" mechanism that would weed out the weak relationships and only the strong ones would ultimately survive into marriage, leading to declining divorce rates. Unfortunately, just the stark opposite appears to have happened in 30 to 40 years. Instead, cohabitation before marriage is historically associated with greater risks of marital dissatisfaction and divorce (Bennett, Blanc, & Bloom, 1988). So far, no study has established that cohabitation harbors protective factors on divorce. On the contrary, cohabitation constitutes a high risk factor for divorce. Consequently, the prior years to marriage and family life are somehow predictive or indicative of marital quality life, including psycho-social values held as important in leading positive and productive future lives in marriage.

But Stinnett (1969) had also found that perceived readiness for marriage and marital competences was influenced by some socio-demographic factors, amongst which was the nature of early family relationships, dating experiences and personality or age. By these, parent family life experiences, parental marital status, family values and perspectives

for dating as well as individual personality nature and age constitute defining factors for self-perceived marriage readiness. [Holman and Li \(1997\)](#) later found that income, level of education, and age are strongly related to self-perceived readiness for marriage. Meanwhile [Badger \(2005\)](#) argued that individuals who are older and who have some level of educational experience, financial security, a strong support-base, and who report the quality of the present relationship with their partner as good are more likely to feel that they are ready to marry. Later, [Sari and Sunarti \(2013\)](#) found that the more mature the age at which young people marry, the better the readiness to marry. Meanwhile ([Santrock, 2014](#)) argued that marriages occurring in young adulthood are more long lasting compared to teenage marriages that are more prone to result in divorce. This partly explains why [Arnett \(2000\)](#) argued that delaying marriage (which is a typical occurrence today) is an intentional aspect of marriage preparation during which people hope to attain a certain age, level of income, education and career which they believe signify marriage readiness. Developmental readiness therefore exudes marital competence, some sort of psychological preparedness and higher chances of future marital satisfaction and wellbeing. Recently, [Ningrum, Latifah, and Krisnatuti \(2021\)](#) found that not only age but also involvement in prenuptial programs, family life education and emotional intelligence are major factors of marriage readiness.

To [Stinnett \(1969\)](#) and [Chaudhary \(1984\)](#) marriage readiness was related to marital competence which they thought of to mean having the ability to perform marital roles and responsibilities that meet the needs of one's partner in a marital relationship. Readiness for marriage is therefore more or less about psychological preparedness, which underscores the importance of physical, socioemotional and intellectual readiness for marital life tasks. People should not only be physically ready to bear children, for example, but also socioemotionally skilled to relate, love and accept each other to be able to settle in a marital relationship. While intellectual readiness also comes with partner satisfaction, knowledge and married life skills. No doubt [Stinnett \(1969\)](#) felt that success in marriage and in fact, marriage readiness is dependent on and is more about an individual's readiness to perform marital roles. In this regard, he identified love, personality, fulfillment, respect and communication as the important indicators of marital competence. [Chaudhary \(1984\)](#) found links between marriage readiness and marital attitudes and argued that marital quality and success in marriage is largely a matter of readiness to perform these duties which denote marital competence. Emerging adults who are psychologically ready to fulfill the needs of love, personality, fulfillment, respect and communication in their future mate have already established a strong foundation for later marital success and satisfaction. [Waite and Gallagher \(2000\)](#) have maintained that those in marriage hope to enjoy many benefits from their union, ranging from improved emotional and physical health, to increased levels of wealth and sexual satisfaction. These are among the many factors that determine marital quality and success, and future spouses should be able to avail these to their partners.

Drawing from earlier research on love and personality as components of marriage readiness, [Badger \(2005\)](#) argued that love is characterized by affection, admiration, optimism, security and emotional closeness; meanwhile personality fulfillment is being able to become a support base that helps the partner to achieve potential and autonomy. But [Chaudhary \(1984\)](#) also earlier noted that readiness for marriage is something much more than love or being in love; and argued that young people who are immature, less informed or less skilled are more likely to fail regardless of how much in love they may be. She further cited [Butterfield \(1956\)](#) who had argued that just as a home is something more than a house, so too marriage is something more than love and or sexual mating. It requires maturity and or responsible behavior that suggests it. In this respect, [Landis and Landis \(1977\)](#) very early cited several varieties of maturity which they thought combine to make one ready for marriage. Among them were physical maturity, intellectual maturity, emotional maturity, social maturity and economic and financial independence. In line with these, the Marriage Readiness Rating Scale ([Keeler, 1962](#)) later highlighted the importance of physical, social and emotional

maturity; skills and abilities of getting along with people; and homemaking skills and abilities in marriage readiness and future marital quality and success. Out of these, [Strom \(2003\)](#) noted personal self-control, wisdom, humility, industry, and faithfulness as necessary factors of happy marriages.

Beyond these factors, however, [Badger \(2005\)](#) also maintains that humility which breeds respect means treating one's partner as a person and providing encouragement and understanding. This also allows for communication which permits partners to express their true feelings in order to find satisfying solutions to disagreements. This further tells of the importance of openness as a key variable of communication that is a veritable marker of marriage readiness. Openness and honesty helps build compatibility in marriage. It is the ability to reveal one's feelings, thoughts, needs and fears and it is associated with higher satisfaction with any marital relationship or a relationship that should end in marriage ([Thompson & Vangelisti, 2016](#)). When partners openly reveal the facts of their past, their present activities, and their plans for the future, they are able to make intelligent decisions that take each other's feelings into account. The absence of openness leads to conflicts and imminent breakdown of the relationship.

Contemporary research on marriage readiness and marital success is quite versatile in the kind of issues addressed as being important for readiness to marry and for long-term sustainable marriages. [Badger \(2005\)](#) identified family competency, interpersonal relationship strength, norm compliance and personal responsibility as important and necessary criteria for marriage readiness and future marital and family success. Meanwhile [Holman and Li \(1997\)](#) identified emotional, sexual and financial stability as necessary criteria for marriage readiness and future wellbeing. [Holman \(2001\)](#) went on to emphasize that marital competence or the ability to form and maintain intimate relationships is hypercritical for the development of successful, long-term marriages. Therefore, being able to properly negotiate intimate relationships, having and nurturing the ability to care for and interact with others and being socioemotionally stable are predicates of marriage readiness and long-term marital and family success. In line with this, [Ningrum et al. \(2021\)](#) found that among other factors, marriage readiness is significantly influenced by family life knowledge and emotional intelligence. They noted that family life knowledge is the capital for achieving intellectual readiness for marriage. Sometimes, such knowledge maybe acquired through marriage and family life preparation programs which provide the relevant training and skills needed to sustain long-term fulfilling marital and satisfying relationships. In support of this, [Farnam, Pakgohar, and Mir-mohammadali \(2011\)](#) and [Weiss \(2014\)](#) found that prenuptial preparation counselling programs increase partner satisfaction, knowledge, and married life skills. Marriage preparation provides an opportunity for partners to assess their personal readiness for marriage. This helps them become aware of the assets and liabilities of their relationship, which are important factors in deciding who and when to marry ([Duncan & Wood, 2003](#)).

In relation to emotional stability and maturity as an indicator of marriage competence, [Carroll et al. \(2009\)](#) administered the criteria for marriage readiness questionnaire to 788 emerging adults and found that they viewed marriage readiness as a process of developing interpersonal competencies, making life-long commitments, and acquiring capacities to care for others. Other studies have identified emotional intelligence as not just a variable of marriage readiness but also an important factor of marriage adjustment, satisfaction and overall wellbeing (e.g. [Hajjhasani & Sim, 2019](#); [Kalsoom & Kamal, 2018](#)). Citing [Goleman \(1999\)](#); [Ningrum et al. \(2021\)](#) noted that emotional intelligence determines an individual's self-awareness, self-motivation and self-regulation which in turn shapes his/her attitude towards others, especially the quality of emotional support and understanding they offer those whom they choose to marry. Attitude towards others or partners is defined by one's interpersonal skills such as empathy, the ability to understand and relate with others, and to make meaning of one's socioemotional context ([Goleman, 1999](#)). Adhering to the importance of intrapersonal and shared interpersonal understanding, [Karimi, Bakhtiyari, and Masjedi-Arani \(2019\)](#) referred to a shared spirituality and religion, commitment, sexual relationship,

communication, children, love and attachment, intimacy, and conflict resolution approach as protective factors of marital stability in long-term marriages.

3. METHODS

3.1. Sample

The sample was made up of 124 emerging adults, aged 18 to 30 in the University of Buea in Cameroon. Participants voluntarily enlisted themselves in the study after being briefed about what it was all about.

Table 1. Distribution showing respondents by demographic data.

Demographic data		Frequency	Percentage
Age range	Less than 21	27	21.8
	21-25	72	58.1
	26-30	25	20.1
Gender	Male	37	29.8
	Female	87	70.2
How would you describe yourself as a Cameroonian?	Anglophone/Highlander	65	54.6
	Francophone/Highlander	2	1.7
	Anglophone/Coastal peoples	44	37.0
	Francophone/Coastal peoples	2	1.7
	Francophone/Forest peoples	1	0.8
	Anglophone muslim	3	2.5
	Other	2	1.7
What year of university or graduate school are you in?	1 st Year of university	17	13.7
	2 nd Year of university	54	43.5
	3 rd Year of university	48	38.7
	4 th Year of university	1	0.8
	5 th Year of university	3	2.4
	1 st Year of graduate school	1	0.8
Religion	Conservative Christian	4	3.2
	Roman Catholic	31	25.0
	Baptist Christian	22	17.7
	Presbyterian Christian	37	29.8
	Pentecostal Christian	26	21.0
	Muslim/Islam	4	3.2
Current marital status	Single (Never married)	103	83.1
	Cohabiting	9	7.3
	Married (First marriage)	11	8.9
	Married but separated	1	0.8

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. The age range was 18 to 30, with majority of the sample ranging from 21-25 (58.1%), followed by those in the range of 18-21 (21.8%) and finally, 26-30 (20.1). Majority of the sample was female (70.2%) whereas the male participants were 29.8%. In terms of region and ethnic origin, majority of the sample were Anglophone Cameroonians with 54.6 % of them from the Western highlands of Cameroon (Northwest region), followed by 37% from the Coastal peoples of Cameroon (Southwest region). Another 2.5% were Anglophone Muslims either from the Northwest or Southwest regions of Cameroon. Participants from the Francophone Cameroon regions were 1.7% from the Western highlands (West region), 1.7% from the Coastal peoples (Littoral region) and 0.8% from the Forest peoples (Center region) of Cameroon. Other representations (1.7%), were the Sahelians in the northern regions of Cameroon.

Majority of the participants were second-year university students (43.5%) followed by third-year students (38.7%), then first-year students (13.7%), fifth-year students (2.4%), and fourth-year students (0.8%) and first-year students of graduate school (0.8%). The sample was mostly Christian characterized by Presbyterian (29.8%), Roman Catholic

(25%), Pentecostal (21%), Baptist (17.7%), Conservative (3.2%); and Muslim/Islam (3.2%). Finally, majority of the sample was single and never married (83.1), followed by participants that were married (8.9%), then those that were cohabiting (7.3%) and 0.8% were married but separated.

3.2. Instrument

The *Criteria for Marriage Readiness* instrument (Badger, 2005) was used with limited adjustment and adaptation. While some of the items were adjusted to fit the context, 7 more items were included that were culturally rooted in making decisions about marriage in most Cameroonian societies.

Table 2. Reliability of instrument.

Criteria for marriage readiness	Chronbach coefficient value	Variance	No of items
Necessary criteria for marriage readiness	0.794	0.007	64
Level of importance of criteria for marriage readiness	0.850	0.148	64
Overall reliability	0.848	0.231	64

Table 2 presents the reliability analysis of the instrument that was used for data collection. From the analysis, a good level of consistency was observed in respondent appreciation of necessary criteria for marriage readiness (0.794); and the level of importance of criteria for marriage readiness (0.848). The instrument was not just judged worthy but also reliable in addressing questions of necessary criteria for marriage readiness among university-level students in Cameroon.

The response options for necessary criteria for marriage readiness were “Yes” or “No.” “Yes,” that the item or indicator cited was a necessary criterion or indicator, while “No” meant that the item or indicator cited was not a necessary criterion. Level of importance of each cited indicator was operationalized as very important, quite important, slightly important, and not important at all.

3.3. Data Analysis

The EpiData version 7.0 for entering data was first used to enter the data and run for missing data, consistency and to minimize any data entry errors. The data were further subjected to descriptive statistics using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, and used to generate frequencies, percentages and mean distributions. Frequencies, percentages and mean distributions were mainly used to statistically appreciate the necessary criteria for marriage readiness, *Yes* or *No* that the criterion was necessary for marriage readiness. They were also used to appreciate the level of importance of the set criteria for marriage readiness which was defined as very important, quite important, slightly important and not important at all.

Table 3 presents descriptive data on sixty-two criteria for marriage readiness that were defined for the study. Against each defined criterion, data is first presented on whether it is a necessary criterion for marriage readiness or not; and then on the degree of importance of each of the criteria. Against the degree of importance, data is presented on those who perceive the criteria as very important, quite important, slightly important and not important at all.

Table 3. Criteria for marriage readiness.

Criteria for marriage readiness	Necessary for marriage readiness		How important for marriage readiness				Mean
	Yes	No	Very important	Quite important	Slightly important	Not important at all	
Avoids illegal drugs	121 (97.6%)	3 (2.4%)	109 (88.6%)	2 (1.6%)	4 (3.3%)	8 (6.5%)	3.78
Avoids aggressive and violent behavior	120 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)	108 (87.8%)	7 (5.7%)	4 (3.3%)	4 (3.3%)	3.77
Avoids committing petty crimes like vandalism and theft	120 (96.8%)	4 (3.2%)	106 (85.5%)	7 (5.6%)	2 (1.6%)	9 (7.3%)	3.77
Avoids drunk driving	112 (93.3%)	8 (6.7%)	101 (81.5%)	4 (3.3%)	6 (5.0%)	10 (8.3%)	3.76
Is capable of caring for children (Women)	120 (97.6%)	3 (2.4%)	100 (81.3%)	17 (13.8%)	5 (4.1%)	1 (0.8%)	3.72
Has no more than one sexual partner	112 (91.1%)	11 (8.9%)	99 (81.1%)	7 (5.7%)	5 (4.1%)	11 (9.0%)	3.72
Learn always to have good control of your emotions	122 (99.2%)	1 (0.8%)	98 (81.0%)	18 (14.9%)	5 (4.1%)	0 (0.0%)	3.69
Is capable of financially supporting a family (Men)	115 (96.6%)	4 (3.4%)	96 (80.0%)	21 (17.5%)	2 (1.7%)	1 (0.8%)	3.68
Avoids becoming drunk	122 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)	95 (77.9%)	10 (8.2%)	4 (3.3%)	13 (10.7%)	3.65
Has obtained a national identity card	119 (96.0%)	5 (4.0%)	96 (77.4%)	13 (10.5%)	10 (8.1%)	5 (4.0%)	3.63
Is able to listen to others in an understanding way	121 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)	95 (77.2%)	21 (17.1%)	7 (5.7%)	0 (0.0%)	3.62
Is capable of fathering children (Men)	109 (92.4%)	9 (7.6%)	90 (75.6%)	17 (14.3%)	5 (4.2%)	7 (5.9%)	3.61
Can accept responsibility for one's actions	122 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)	92 (74.8%)	25 (20.3%)	4 (3.3%)	2 (1.6%)	3.61
Is capable of giving birth to children (Women)	115 (93.5%)	8 (6.5%)	91 (74.6%)	16 (13.1%)	8 (6.6%)	7 (5.7%)	3.60
Is able to maintain a positive outlook in life	122 (98.4%)	2 (1.6%)	89 (71.8%)	29 (23.4%)	4 (3.2%)	2 (1.6%)	3.59
Is capable of keeping family physically safe (Men)	108 (93.9%)	7 (6.1%)	84 (73.0%)	21 (18.3%)	9 (7.8%)	1 (0.8%)	3.57
Is able to express feelings in a close relationship	118 (95.2%)	6 (4.8%)	90 (72.6%)	23 (18.5%)	8 (6.5%)	3 (2.4%)	3.55
Is financially independent from parents and others	99 (80.5%)	24 (19.5%)	86 (69.9%)	22 (17.9%)	12 (9.7%)	3 (2.4%)	3.54
Is capable of running a household (Women)	115 (93.5%)	8 (6.5%)	84 (68.3%)	26 (21.1%)	9 (7.3%)	4 (3.3%)	3.53
Is capable of running a household (Men)	112 (93.3%)	8 (6.7%)	80 (66.1%)	19 (15.7%)	17 (14.0%)	5 (4.1%)	3.44
Is committed to long term love relationship	100 (81.3%)	23 (18.7%)	75 (61.0%)	27 (22.0%)	11 (8.9%)	10 (8.1%)	3.44
Make independent decisions	105 (84.7%)	19 (15.3%)	74 (59.7%)	35 (28.2%)	10 (8.1%)	5 (4.0%)	3.40
No longer living in parents household	97 (78.2%)	27 (21.8%)	70 (56.5%)	29 (23.4%)	15 (12.1%)	10 (8.1%)	3.36
Is respectful of others when dealing with differences	118 (95.9%)	5 (4.1%)	67 (54.0%)	39 (32.2%)	12 (9.9%)	3 (2.5%)	3.35
Has reached the age of 25	106 (86.9%)	16 (13.1%)	66 (53.7%)	31 (25.2%)	21 (17.1%)	5 (4.1%)	3.32
Avoid use of profane/vulgar language	106 (86.9%)	16 (13.1%)	63 (52.5%)	27 (22.5%)	12 (10.0%)	18 (15.0%)	3.28

Criteria for marriage readiness	Necessary for marriage readiness		How important for marriage readiness				Mean
	Yes	No	Very important	Quite important	Slightly important	Not important at all	
Have overcome any personal challenges	118 (96.7%)	4 (3.3%)	63 (51.6%)	40 (32.8%)	18 (14.8%)	1 (0.8%)	3.28
If a man, become capable of caring for children	111 (92.5%)	9 (7.5%)	63 (51.6%)	36 (29.5%)	22 (18.0%)	1 (0.8%)	3.24
Has reached the age of 30	81 (70.4%)	34 (29.6%)	58 (49.6%)	18 (15.4%)	25 (21.4%)	16 (13.7%)	3.15
Is capable of supporting parents physically safe (Woman)	111 (92.5%)	9 (7.5%)	59 (48.4%)	36 (29.5%)	24 (19.7%)	3 (2.5%)	3.13
Has reached the age of 35	76 (66.1%)	39 (33.9%)	54 (47.4%)	10 (8.8%)	21 (18.4%)	21 (25.4%)	3.07
Is capable of financially supporting parents	98 (81.7%)	22 (18.3%)	58 (46.8%)	34 (27.4%)	24 (19.4%)	8 (6.5%)	3.06
Dating	87 (71.3%)	35 (28.7%)	55 (44.7%)	20 (16.3%)	25 (20.3%)	23 (18.7%)	3.01
Has established a relationship with parents as an equal adult	101 (82.8%)	21 (17.2%)	55 (44.4%)	32 (25.8%)	27 (21.8%)	10 (8.1%)	2.99
Often use contraceptives if sexually active and does not try to get pregnant	72 (60.5%)	47 (39.5%)	52 (43.7%)	16 (13.4%)	21 (17.6%)	30 (25.2%)	2.98
Has participated in a marriage preparation course or some form of premarital education.	99 (80.5%)	24 (19.5%)	53 (43.1%)	38 (30.9%)	19 (15.4%)	13 (10.6%)	2.97
Is able to pay for his or her own wedding	85 (68.5%)	39 (31.5%)	52 (41.9%)	22 (17.7%)	31 (25.0%)	19 (15.3%)	2.93
Has reached the age of 21	87 (74.4%)	30 (25.6%)	46 (39.3%)	32 (25.8%)	24 (20.5%)	15 (12.8%)	2.93
Has fully experienced the single life	94 (77.0%)	28 (23.0%)	48 (39.0%)	33 (26.8%)	33 (26.8%)	9 (7.3%)	2.87
Has reached the age of 18	67 (57.3%)	50 (42.7%)	45 (37.8%)	12 (10.1%)	30 (25.2%)	32 (26.9%)	2.86
Is less self-oriented, and has developed greater consideration for others	95 (77.2%)	28 (22.8%)	46 (37.4%)	38 (30.9%)	31 (25.2%)	8 (6.5%)	2.78
Has gained full-time employment	78 (63.4%)	45 (36.6%)	45 (36.9%)	37 (30.3%)	27 (22.1%)	13 (10.7%)	2.76
Is able to make life long commitments to others	78 (63.4%)	45 (36.6%)	44 (36.1%)	27 (22.1%)	29 (23.8%)	22 (18.0%)	2.76
Is settled into a long term career	69 (55.6%)	55 (44.4%)	38 (30.9%)	33 (26.8%)	31 (25.2%)	21 (17.1%)	2.72
Has come to terms with any negative family experiences	89 (71.8%)	35 (28.2%)	38 (30.6%)	26 (21.0%)	33 (26.6%)	27 (21.8%)	2.72
Is capable of supporting a husband financially	105 (87.5%)	15 (12.5%)	37 (30.3%)	47 (38.5%)	35 (28.7%)	3 (2.5%)	2.71
Is able to discuss personal problems with partner	95 (76.6%)	29 (23.4%)	37 (29.8%)	35 (28.2%)	31 (25.0%)	21 (16.9%)	2.68
Is not deeply tied to parents emotionally	81 (65.9%)	42 (34.1%)	33 (27.0%)	36 (29.5%)	39 (32.0%)	14 (11.5%)	2.59
Has built a house of your own	59 (47.6%)	65 (52.4%)	33 (26.8%)	29 (23.6%)	39 (31.7%)	22 (17.9%)	2.59
Cohabitation	23 (18.9%)	99 (81.1%)	30 (25.0%)	19 (15.8%)	22 (18.3%)	49 (40.8%)	2.52
Has joined the public service as civil servant	67 (54.0%)	57 (46.0%)	30 (24.4%)	21 (17.1%)	33 (26.8%)	39 (31.7%)	2.34
Has finished education	47	77	29	28	42	23	2.25

Criteria for marriage readiness	Necessary for marriage readiness		How important for marriage readiness				Mean
	Yes	No	Very important	Quite important	Slightly important	Not important at all	
	(37.9%)	(62.1%)	(23.8%)	(23.0%)	(34.4%)	(18.9%)	
Ia allowed to smoke cigarettes	12 (9.8%)	111(90.3%)	29 (23.4%)	5 (4.0%)	9 (7.3%)	81 (65.3%)	2.24
Has lived with partner before getting married	33 (26.8%)	90 (73.2%)	27 (22.0%)	15 (12.2%)	34 (27.6%)	47 (38.2%)	2.18
Has grown to full height	53 (43.5%)	69 (56.5%)	23 (18.9%)	16 (13.1%)	26 (21.3%)	57 (46.7%)	2.00
Has completed professional school	48 (39.0%)	75 (61.0%)	21 (17.1%)	23 (18.7%)	44 (35.8%)	35 (28.5%)	1.96
Has gained admission to a professional school	52 (41.9%)	72 (58.1%)	17 (13.8%)	15 (12.2%)	42 (34.1%)	49 (39.8%)	1.88
Has had considerable sexual experience	49 (39.5%)	75 (60.5%)	15 (12.1%)	14 (11.3%)	46 (37.1%)	49 (39.5%)	1.88
Has had sexual intercourse	47 (38.2%)	76 (61.8%)	14 (11.6%)	10 (8.3%)	40 (33.1%)	57 (47.1%)	1.85
Is allowed to drink alcohol	55 (44.4%)	69 (55.6%)	12 (9.8%)	15 (12.3%)	41 (33.6%)	54 (44.3%)	1.84
Has at least a child	10 (8.1%)	114 (91.9%)	12 (9.8%)	10 (8.3%)	21 (17.5%)	77 (64.2%)	1.74
Has obtained driver's license and can drive a car	30 (24.4%)	93 (75.6%)	9 (7.3%)	13 (10.5%)	39 (31.5%)	63 (50.8%)	1.64
Aggregate	5518 (72.9%)	2050 (27.1%)	3684 (48.7%)	1404 (18.6%)	1289 (17%)	1187 (15.7%)	2.98

Note: n=124.

4. FINDINGS

4.1. Necessary Criteria for Marriage Readiness

On aggregate, 72.9% of respondents felt that the criteria defined in the study were necessary for marriage readiness; whereas 27.1% of them did not see the criteria as necessary for marriage readiness. Sought whether the criteria defined were important and at what level, 48.7% felt that the criteria defined were very important, 18.6% said they were quite important, 17% maintained that the criteria defined were slightly important while 15.7% said the criteria were not at all important. The findings showed that majority of young people identified more with subjective than demographic criteria for marriage readiness amongst which emotional maturity (99.2%), maintaining a positive outlook (98.4%), accepting responsibility for one's actions (98.4%), being able to express feelings in close relationships (95.2%), respect for others and differences (95.9%), men should be capable of keeping family physically safe (93.9%), being capable of managing a household, for women (93.5%) and for men (93.3%), making independent decisions (84.7%), commitment to a long-term love relationship (81.3%), financial independence from parents and others (80.5%), becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others (77.2%), and having fully experienced the single life (77.0%) were held as some of the strongest criteria for marriage readiness.

With respect to caring for offspring, 92.5% held that men should show signs that they are capable of caring for children to be ready for marriage while 87.5% maintained that men should also show signs that they can financially support their wife. Meanwhile 92.5% of respondents believed that becoming capable of supporting parents to stay physically safe was an important criterion for women to get married; and 82.8% felt that establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult was an important indicator that one was ready for marriage. Another 81.7% felt that being capable of supporting parents financially was an important indicator of marriage readiness; while no longer

living in parents' household was an indicator of being ready for marriage to 78.2% of respondents. The least important subjective criteria were being able to discuss personal problems with partner (76.6%), not deeply tied to parents emotionally (65.9%), full-time employment (63.4%), and settled into a long-term career (55.6%). Most young people did not agree that some demographic characteristics as well as certain behaviour trends were important criteria for marriage readiness. For example, 91.9% refused that having had a child was an important criterion. Other disagreements were related to being allowed to smoke cigarettes (90.3%), cohabitation (81.1%), keeping late nights (73.2%), having to live with partner before getting married (73.2%), finished education or school (62.1%), having entered (58.1%) or completed (61%) professional school, has considerable sexual experience (60.5%), having grown to full height (56.5%), having constructed one's own house or residence (52.4%), and joint the public service as civil servant (46.0%). These disagreements suggested that some of the most held criteria for marriage readiness are not as important to today's emerging adults as society believes.

In terms of age, 71.2% respondents generally felt that age was an important factor of marriage readiness. In this respect, age of marriage readiness was defined by age 18, 21, 25, 30, and 35. Here, while only 57.3% felt that age 18 was appropriate for marriage, a whopping 86.9% indicated that appropriate age for marriage is 25 years. Meanwhile 74.4% cited age 21 and 70.4%, age 30 as the appropriate ages for marriage readiness. Only 66.1% felt that age 35 was the appropriate age for marriage readiness. The most appropriate ages for marriage readiness were therefore thought to be age 25 (86.9%), 21 (74.4%) and 30 (70.4%) in that order. Meanwhile age 18 (57.3%) and 35 (66.1%) were the least considered ages for marriage readiness.

4.2. Level of Importance of Necessary Criteria for Marriage Readiness

Even though identified as necessary criteria, there were differences in level of importance of the necessary criteria for marriage readiness. For example, of the 99.2% that saw emotional maturity as a necessary criterion, only 81% thought that emotional maturity was very important for marriage readiness while 4.1% felt that it was just slightly important. On maintaining a positive outlook, only 71.8% thought that this was very important for marriage readiness while 3.2% felt that this was just slightly important; and to 1.6%, this was not important at all. Another important variable that was checked across lines of level of importance was accepting responsibility for one's actions where 74.8% thought that accepting responsibility for one's actions was very important while 3.3% felt that it was just slightly important and 1.6% thought that it was not at all important. Being able to express feelings in close relationships was 72.6% very important, 6.5% slightly important and 2.4% not at all important. When we checked the importance of respect for others and differences as an important criterion, 54% felt that this was a very important criterion whereas 9.9% saw it as just slightly important and 2.5% as not at all important.

On making independent decisions, 59.7% saw this as a very important factor of marriage readiness while 8.1% saw it as slightly important and 4% as not at all important. Again, of the 81.3% that felt that commitment to a long-term love relationship was a necessary criterion for marriage readiness, 61% thought that this was very important while to 8.9%, it was only slightly important and not at all important to 8.1%. Furthermore, 80.5% saw financial independence from parents and others as a necessary criterion but only 69.9% saw it as a very important criterion while to 9.7%, it was only slightly important and not at all important to 2.4%. We also found that only 37.4% saw becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others as a very important criterion for marriage readiness; while 25.2% saw it as slightly important and 6.5% as not at all important. Finally, while 77% thought that having fully experienced the single life was a criterion for marriage readiness, only 39% saw this as very important while 26.8% felt that this was just slightly important and to 7.3%, it was not at all important.

5. DISCUSSIONS

5.1. Necessary Criteria for Marriage Readiness

The findings showed that subjective criteria for marriage readiness was more evident in young people than demographic or event-related criteria. Young people were more likely to mention among other subjective criteria, emotional maturity, responsible behavior given by accepting responsibility for one's actions, being able to express feelings in close relationships, respect for others and differences, keeping family physically safe (Men), managing a household, making independent and autonomous decisions, commitment to long-term love relationships, financial independence, becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others, and having fully experienced the single life as the strongest criteria for marriage readiness that would yield future marital satisfaction and wellbeing. Earlier research suggested the shift from socio-demographic criteria for marriage readiness to more subjective and individualized criteria. These criteria were thought to denote marital competence which was defined as having the ability to perform marital responsibilities that meet the needs of one's partner in a marital relationship (e.g. (Badger, 2005; Chaudhary, 1984; Holman, 2001)). Readiness for marriage is therefore more or less about psychological preparedness, which underscores the importance of physical, socioemotional and intellectual readiness for marital life tasks. As demonstrated in the literature, it seems that objective markers of marriage readiness, just as of adulthood are not as important as they were some years back. Among today's young people, marriage readiness, just as attainment of adulthood is more or less a personal experience, individually defined and guided by one's psychological sense of readiness.

As seen, the most important criteria for marriage readiness were related to individual personal dispositions and feelings about whether or not as emerging adults, they were ready for marriage. Important personal dispositions and feelings held important for marriage readiness were responsible behavior, emotional maturity, a sense of independence and financial autonomy. But they also held up relationship qualities such as commitment to one another, love, support and acceptance. In line with this, Carroll et al. (2009) found the importance of self-perceived readiness to marry while (Wright et al., 2007) emphasized the importance of self-perceived marital expectations which become vectors of determining marriage readiness. On their part, Larson and Holman (1994) referred to the importance of individual and personality traits such as emotional health, self-concept, interpersonal skills and sociability as defining criteria for marriage readiness. Self-perceived readiness for marriage, one's personal feelings about marriage and a person's marital expectations compared with their present circumstances in terms of readiness are therefore important variables in the decision to marry and constitute significant factors of future marital satisfaction and the wellbeing of partners.

While personal dispositions and self-perceived readiness were held as the strongest measures of marriage readiness, responsibility for others and quality of relationship with others including spouses, offspring, and parents also stood out as important criteria. Among these, financially supporting their wife, caring for offspring, supporting parents to stay physically safe, establishing a relationship with parents as an equal adult, supporting parents financially and no longer living in parents' household were all held up as important indicators of marriage readiness. In this light, Chaudhary (1984) earlier found links between marital attitudes and marital quality and success; and argued that future marital wellbeing and success is largely a matter of readiness to perform roles towards others, especially loved ones that denote marital competence. Young people who are psychologically ready to fulfill the needs of love, responsibility for others, respect and communication in and towards their parents, their future mate and offspring, have already established a strong foundation for later marital success. And Waite and Gallagher (2000) argued that those in marriage or to be married hope to enjoy many benefits, ranging from improved emotional and physical health, to increased levels of wealth and sexual satisfaction. Meanwhile parents continue to hope for a quality

relationship with their married children, even as their children are charged with looking after their offspring and spouses.

While some subjective criteria appeared to be less important, demographic marriage readiness indicators were the least important criteria for marriage readiness among young people. Among others, it turned out that age is no longer a defining variable; and finishing school and having a full-time employment before marriage is no longer as important as it used to be. Other least important measures were cohabitation, living with partner before marriage, having finished from a professional school (at least in the context of Cameroon where such a professional school is an indicator of job security), having experienced a sex life, grown to full height, exit from parental residence, having joined the public service and constructed one's own house or residence (as in some cultures in Cameroon). In line with these, [Stinnett \(1969\)](#) earlier found that socio-demographic factors such as early family relationships, dating experiences and personality were influential factors of marriage readiness. Meanwhile [Holman and Li \(1997\)](#) and [Weiss \(2014\)](#) found that income, level of education, occupation, class, race, gender, age at marriage and quality of parents' marriage are strongly related to marriage readiness. This partly explains why [Arnett \(2000\)](#) argued that delaying marriage (which is a typical occurrence today) is an intentional aspect of marriage preparation during which people hope to attain a certain age, level of income, education and career which they believe are necessary criteria for marriage readiness. In line with these, [Badger \(2005\)](#) also argued that young people who are older and who have a certain level of educational experience, financial security, a strong support-base, and who report the quality of the present relationship with their partner as good are more likely to feel ready to marry than those who are younger, have little or no educational experience, financial security and support. Recently, [Ningrum et al. \(2021\)](#) found that age, involvement in prenuptial programs and family life education are major factors of marriage readiness. This means that beyond these individual factors, preparation for marriage continues to be important and has become even more important today than it has always been. Sidelineing age and maturity, [Carroll et al. \(2009\)](#) noted that age is an important variable of marriage readiness; and [Sari and Sunarti \(2013\)](#) argued that the more mature the age at marriage, the better the readiness to marry and the more likely the possibility of future marital satisfaction.

5.2. Implications for Marital Quality and Future Wellbeing

Still highly considered as an important life goal in most/all African cultures, marriage is highly associated with psychosocial, ecocultural and future wellbeing. People need to be married in order to be psychologically stable and socially accepted and recognised; and the ecocultural context still highly values marriage as a worthwhile and necessary obligation. To not be married in some cultures attract slangs and derogatory connotations that dehumanize, demanize and dewomanize the individual. For example, among the Kom of Cameroon, an unmarried man or woman is referred to as a "Koe" and is highly disregarded and excluded in adult gatherings, especially those that require that people would have married and had children. As seen, definitions of marriage readiness are somewhat predictive or indicative of future marital quality; as well as psychosocial and ecocultural values held as important in leading positive and productive future lives in marriage. Findings showed that marital competence, seen in emerging adult conceptions of marriage readiness was a major predictor of future marital quality and wellbeing. For example, this was denoted by a commitment to a long-term love relationship (81.3%), emotional maturity (99.2%) and accepting responsibility for one's actions (98.4%) which have stood out as reliable factors of marital competence with capacity to influence marital satisfaction and future wellbeing in marriage. In respect of these, [Stinnett \(1969\)](#) identified love, individual personality, respect and communication as important indicators of marital quality and wellbeing that can be borne in marriage readiness indicators. On her part, [Badger \(2005\)](#) argued that love comes with such qualities as affection, admiration, optimism, security and emotional closeness while personality fulfillment is being able to become

a support base that helps the partner to achieve potential and autonomy. In this study, being able to express feelings in close relationships (95.2%) denoted affection and emotional closeness meanwhile becoming less self-oriented and developing greater consideration for others (77.2%) were also related factors of love that stood out as indicators of marriage readiness, marital quality and future wellbeing.

Not only should a marriage be built on love to secure qualities that denote satisfaction and wellbeing, but [Stinnett \(1969\)](#) identified personality, a sense of fulfillment, respect for self and others and communication as important factors of future marital satisfaction and wellbeing. In the present study, young people identified respect for others and differences (95.9%), ability of men to keep family physically safe (93.9%), ability of women (93.5%) and men (93.3%) to manage a household, being able to make independent decisions (84.7%), financial independence from parents and others (80.5%), and having fully experienced the single life (77.0%) as the strongest criteria for marriage readiness, marital success and future wellbeing. For a marriage to succeed so that the couple enjoy marital satisfaction and wellbeing, there needs to be a good a sense of fulfillment in the marriage, respect for one another and effective communication between the married or would-be married partners. Moreover, a strong personality for marital success is depicted by respect for one another; and marital competence, denoted by ability to secure family, manage household, and develop strong emotional ties ([Badger, 2005](#); [Weiss, 2014](#)). Meanwhile, the ability to make independent decisions, financial independence, and having fully experienced the single life are possible markers of a strong personality in marriage that would lead to marital satisfaction and wellbeing.

Some marriages fail or succeed on the basis of the existing relationships shared by the partners or in their marriage. Becoming caring parents, exiting from parental residence, being able to financially and emotionally support each other, continuously supporting parents and family members, and providing them safety, and establishing a relationship with parents as equals are factors that may contribute to marital success and future wellbeing. It is no news how the stress of caregiving either for offspring or for parents and family members can quickly become a worry within a marriage since such dedicated care affects daily routines, time, finances, and even living arrangements of partners or couples. [Kruger \(2021\)](#) even adds that this issue becomes compounded when partners in marriage have to not only care for their children but also their aging parents, an exercise that often pose a financial burden and cuts into quality time with one's partner or time to tend to other family matters. This may also cause frustration, fatigue and resentment with one's spouse and could also peopagate more situations of disagreements. These socioeconomic burdens can become worrying concerns that hurt marriage, affecting its quality and the extent of marital satisfaction. It becomes important to understand how caregiving impacts marriage and what people can do to prevent unnecessary conflict in their marriage in order to avoid marital breakdown and promote marital satisfaction and wellbeing. In some marriages, marriage begins to suffer and crumble when children begin to surface in the relationship. If the couple was not ready as individuals to have and care for offspring prior to their marriage, childcare giving issues would begin to shoot up with possibility of seriously affecting the marriage in quite negative ways.

Just like in the literature on marital wellbeing, being able to financially and emotionally support each other turns out to be a veritable factor of marital satisfaction and wellbeing. Everyone has financial, emotional and other needs that they bring into their relationships which when satisfied, leave them with a feeling of happiness and contentment, and, when unsatisfied, leave them with a feeling of unhappiness and frustration ([Stritof, 2022](#)). While the financial needs may be material resources that are easy to perceive, emotional needs are usually psychological and can be marked by issues of affection, conversation, honesty and openness, and family commitment. Establishing a deep, meaningful relationship and providing emotional support to each other is what contributes to the mental health and well-being of partners in marriage. In an emotionally healthy marital relationship, partners are able to connect with each other, understand themselves at a deeper and more intense level, and minimize circumstances that are likely to

hurt. That is why [Ko and Lewis \(2011\)](#) noted that married individuals are healthier, have fewer illnesses, are less depressed, and live longer than unmarried individuals when they have the social and emotional support of their spouses. Socioemotional support can therefore promote positive psychological states which are thought to induce health-promoting responses in neuroendocrine and immune system functions ([Cohen, 2004](#); [Uchino, 2006](#)). In marital relationships, [Kiecolt-Glaser and Newton \(2001\)](#) argued that the support exchanged between husband and wife can directly influence health and can also serve as a buffer against stressors that are external to the marital dyad. It is therefore an almost unconditional marriage readiness indicator when partners show evidence of being able to financially and emotionally support each other in marriage. This is a marital quality that predisposes the spouses to marital satisfaction and future wellbeing.

Additionally, age, having a child before marriage, cohabitation and having lived with the partner before getting married, finished education or school, keeping late nights, smoking, having had considerable sexual experiences, having constructed one's own house or residence, and joined the public service as civil servant were all indicators of marriage readiness that were least important but also have the strength of influencing marital quality and satisfaction. There is abundant socio-demographic literature that validates the importance of these factors in marriage readiness and marital satisfaction, each of them functioning bi-directionally with alternatives that either hurt or promote marital satisfaction and wellbeing. In this light, while there are no clear predictions concerning age-related patterns and marital satisfaction in the literature, few studies found that age is negatively related to marital satisfaction ([Lee & Shehan, 1989](#)). Meanwhile [Soroskowski \(2017\)](#) found that age can only be a predictor of marital satisfaction with respect to the duration of the marriage. In other words, the older the marriage, the better it becomes and the less likely issues of marital distress will occur. Meanwhile, few studies also examined whether educational level is related to marital satisfaction and found conflicting results raising questions whether any associations exist between educational level and marital satisfaction. For example, [Janssen, Poortman, De Graaf, and Kalmijn \(1998\)](#) found that highly educated women had higher rates of unstable marriages; but [Heaton \(2002\)](#) later found that marital dissolution was lower among women who were more educated. It is therefore not surprising that emerging adults in this study did not find the variable of finishing school, whether professional school or not to be ready for marriage. Unfortunately, this study did not investigate level of education as a marriage readiness indicator.

Finally, there is also abundance of literature that suggest that childbirth in or out of marriage often comes with devastating effects in some marriages, and yet a blessing in others. According to [Dingfelder \(2011\)](#) after having a baby, most married couples become less satisfied with their relationships, and that can have negative mental health consequences. This means that having a child before marriage can come with even more serious adverse effects on the possibility of marriage or on marriage itself. At the onset, we can already perceive a marriage that is doom to fail even before it starts. Meanwhile cohabitation and having lived with a partner before getting married, while being factors of marriage readiness for some people also turns out to be a negative factor of marital satisfaction for many married people. For example, [Rhoades, Stanley, and Markman \(2009\)](#) found that among those who cohabited before marriage, 43.1% of those who did before engagement reported lower marital satisfaction, dedication, and confidence as well as more negative communication and greater proneness for divorce than those who cohabited only after engagement (16.4%) or not at all until marriage (40.5%). Closely linked to this is externalizing psychopathologies such as substance use and keeping late nights.

One of the most commonly studied manifestations of externalizing psychopathologies studied as it relates to romantic relationships is alcohol misuse (e.g. [Marshal, 2003](#); [Whisman, 2007](#)). For example, [Whisman \(2007\)](#) reviewed 60 studies and found that problematic drinking was associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction, higher levels of maladaptive marital interaction patterns, and higher levels of marital violence. Heavy alcohol use

thus appears to have deleterious consequences on marriage and toils with marital satisfaction. It therefore justifies why substance use was found to be a reliable question of marriage readiness in this study. Participants felt that someone who avoids illegal drugs (97.6%), avoids drunk driving (93.3%) and avoids becoming drunk at all (98.1%) and does not smoke (9.8%) is inadvertently ready for marriage. For some people therefore, readiness characteristics relate to forms of behavior that not only appeal to the social norms of marriage but most importantly to one's partner. If one's partner does not agree with smoking, drugs, alcohol, keeping late nights and so on, he/she will not judge a potential married partner as ready for marriage if they indulge in such behaviors.

6. CONCLUSION

Conceptions of marriage readiness do not only connote readiness for marriage but further predict marital quality and future marital satisfaction and wellbeing. From a broad-based perspective, they also connote adult status. This suggests that definitions of marriage readiness and whether emerging adults are ready when they marry are predictive of marital quality and psychosocial values held as important in leading positive and productive future lives in marriage. To promote better marriage readiness among young people and secure healthy marriages, young adults need to equip themselves with marriage readiness indicators. Among many others, [Ningrum et al. \(2021\)](#) maintain that marriage readiness may improve the quality of marriage leading to marital satisfaction, wellbeing and also quality of life. Readiness to marry includes an individual's self-perceived ability to carry out the roles, responsibilities and challenges of marriage, without which marriage is prone to breakdown. Being an objective adult role, marriage is apparently the preserve of adulthood and it is healthier when partners are fully adult and understand the stakes of marriage, the extent of commitment required and the qualities that are generally required to keep the union going. It is no surprise that [Badger \(2005\)](#) found no significant difference between conceptions of marriage readiness and conceptions of adulthood.

As has been seen, while child/early marriage continues to be highly prevalent in Africa with almost 40% of girls married before age 18, today's youth perspectives for marriage readiness seem to contradict the now loosely held traditional standards of marriage, what it means and when it is most appropriate. Delaying marriage is no longer news. Unfortunately, many young people are intentionally delaying marriage and are preparing for it in ways that are paradoxically producing the opposite of what they intend. Way into the thirties and even beyond, they adopt alternative premarital practices such as cohabitation, prolonged periods of courtship or intentional/unintentional sexual experimentation in order to avoid putting themselves at risk of getting into a relationship that will not satisfy them in the future. Paradoxically by so doing, they rather inadvertently increase their probability of later marital dissatisfaction and the likelihood of divorce.

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