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# SELF-ESTEEM AS A PREDICTOR OF MARITAL STABILITY AMONG MARRIED SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN DELTA NORTH SENATORIAL DISTRICT, DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

**Onwuasoanya P.N. (Ph.D.),**
Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,
Faculty of Education
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Paul.onwuasoanya@unn.edu.ng

**Falade T.A. (Ph.D.),**
Department of Counselling and Human Development Studies,
Faculty of Education
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Temitope.falade.pg90269@unn.edu.ng

**Okolo, I (Ph.D.)**
Dennis Osadebay University, Asaba
Department of Psychology
Faculty of Behavioural Sciences

**Correspondence:** Okolo, I. (Ph.D.) Ifelunwa.okolo@dou.edu.ng

## ABSTRACT

*Marital stability is fundamental to individual well-being, family cohesion, and professional effectiveness, particularly among teachers who often contend with demanding occupational and family responsibilities. Despite growing evidence linking psychological resources to healthy marital functioning, the contribution of self-esteem to marital stability among married secondary school teachers remains inadequately understood. This study examined the relationship between self-esteem and marital stability among married secondary school teachers in Delta North Senatorial District, Delta State, Nigeria. A predictive correlational research design was adopted. The study population comprised 3,177 married teachers in 169 public secondary schools, from which 413 participants were selected using a multistage sampling procedure. Data were collected using the Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ) and the Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ), which demonstrated satisfactory internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = .77$ and .81, respectively). Data were analysed using simple linear regression in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27 at the .05 level of significance. The findings revealed a significant moderate positive relationship between self-esteem and marital stability ($R = .504$, $\beta = .504$, $p < .001$). Self-esteem explained 25.4% of the variance in marital stability ($R^2 = .254$), indicating that teachers with higher self-esteem were more likely to experience stable marital relationships. The study concludes that self-esteem is an important psychological predictor of marital stability among married secondary school teachers. It is recommended that school counsellors and family therapists incorporate self-esteem enhancement strategies*

*into marital counselling and teacher wellness programmes to strengthen family stability and psychological well-being.*

**Keywords:** self-esteem; marital stability; married secondary school teachers; predictive correlational study; counselling psychology; Nigeria

## Introduction

Marriage remains one of the most important social institutions because it provides the foundation for emotional companionship, family formation, economic cooperation, and psychological well-being. Across cultures, stable marital relationships contribute to improved mental and physical health, greater life satisfaction, effective parenting, stronger family cohesion, and positive developmental outcomes for children, whereas unstable marriages are associated with psychological distress, diminished occupational functioning, family disruption, and adverse consequences for both spouses and their children (Robles et al., 2014; Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Finkel et al., 2017; Proulx et al., 2007). Consequently, promoting marital stability has become an important concern in psychology, counselling, and family studies, particularly in view of increasing social and economic pressures that threaten the quality and continuity of intimate relationships.

Contemporary marriages are increasingly shaped by financial pressures, changing gender roles, occupational demands, work–family conflict, and heightened psychological stress, all of which can undermine relationship quality and long-term stability (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Randall & Bodenmann, 2017). Rather than conceptualizing marital stability merely as the absence of separation or divorce, contemporary relationship scholars define it as the ability of spouses to sustain commitment, emotional intimacy, mutual support, and constructive conflict resolution despite life's inevitable challenges (Lavner et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2006). These challenges may be particularly pronounced among secondary school teachers, whose professional responsibilities often involve heavy workloads, emotional labour, classroom management, administrative duties, and continuous performance demands. The interaction between occupational stress and family responsibilities may increase vulnerability to work–family conflict, emotional exhaustion, and relationship strain, making the identification of psychological resources that promote stable marital relationships among teachers an important research priority (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011; Kelley et al., 2021; Kyriacou, 2001; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Zhou et al., 2024).

Among the psychological resources associated with healthy marital functioning, self-esteem has received considerable scholarly attention because it shapes individuals' perceptions of themselves, their interpersonal expectations, and their capacity to establish and maintain satisfying intimate relationships. Self-esteem refers to an individual's overall evaluation of personal worth and competence and reflects the extent to which people perceive themselves as valuable, capable, and worthy of acceptance (Rosenberg, 1965). According to

Sociometer Theory, self-esteem functions as an internal psychological monitor of perceived social acceptance and relational value, influencing how individuals interpret interpersonal experiences and respond to relationship challenges (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). Individuals with high self-esteem generally exhibit greater emotional security, resilience, optimism, and confidence in interpersonal interactions, whereas those with low self-esteem are more likely to experience insecurity, fear of rejection, and maladaptive responses to conflict. Consequently, self-esteem has increasingly been conceptualized not merely as a personality attribute but as a relational resource that facilitates constructive communication, emotional regulation, trust, and long-term relationship commitment (Harris & Orth, 2020; Orth & Robins, 2022; Overall & McNulty, 2017; Wood et al., 2024).

Evidence from meta-analytic, longitudinal, and relationship studies consistently supports the importance of self-esteem for relationship functioning. Harris and Orth (2020), in a meta-analysis of 53 longitudinal studies involving more than 47,000 participants, demonstrated reciprocal associations between self-esteem and social relationships, indicating that healthy self-esteem promotes positive interpersonal relationships while supportive relationships simultaneously strengthen self-esteem. Similarly, Orth et al. (2021) reported that positive self-evaluations remain relatively stable across adulthood and predict adaptive functioning in interpersonal, occupational, and psychological domains. Contemporary reviews further indicate that self-esteem enhances relationship quality by strengthening perceived partner responsiveness, emotional security, interpersonal trust, and constructive conflict management (Orth & Robins, 2022; Wood et al., 2024). Complementing these findings, empirical studies among married and dating couples have shown that individuals with higher self-esteem report greater marital adjustment, relationship satisfaction, and adaptive coping, whereas low self-esteem is associated with heightened relationship insecurity, defensive interpersonal behaviours, and poorer relationship outcomes (Bélanger et al., 2014; Harshita & Nakra, 2023; Mohammad & Elham, 2015; Murray et al., 2006).

Recent research has further demonstrated that the influence of self-esteem extends beyond individual psychological functioning to encompass dyadic relationship processes. Studies employing dyadic analytical approaches indicate that both partners' levels of self-esteem jointly influence relationship satisfaction and marital quality, while favourable trajectories of self-esteem are associated with healthier marital relationships over time (Chen et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025). Moreover, evidence suggests that self-esteem contributes to relationship stability indirectly through mechanisms such as emotional regulation, depressive symptoms, interpersonal functioning, and partner responsiveness (Tong et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2024). Collectively, these findings suggest that self-esteem operates as a dynamic interpersonal resource that strengthens couples' capacity to cope with relationship stressors and maintain stable marital relationships.

Although international research consistently supports the positive contribution of self-esteem to intimate relationship functioning, evidence from Africa remains comparatively limited. Existing African studies have largely examined broader determinants of marital functioning, including emotional intelligence, communication patterns, empathy, conflict resolution, and family support, with relatively fewer investigations focusing specifically on self-esteem as an independent predictor of marital stability. Nevertheless, available evidence suggests that positive psychological resources facilitate healthier marital relationships by enhancing emotional regulation, effective communication, collaborative problem-solving, and adaptive coping among spouses. These findings underscore the relevance of psychological factors in promoting marital stability while highlighting the need for additional empirical evidence from African sociocultural settings.

Within Nigeria, empirical findings generally indicate that self-esteem contributes positively to marital functioning, although the evidence remains inconclusive. Unamba et al. (2016) reported that self-esteem significantly influenced marital stability among married Igbo couples in Imo State, while Ebeh (2019) found that self-esteem significantly predicted marital stability among members of the Catholic Women Organisation in Anambra State. Similarly, Eze and Mba (2018) observed that emotional intelligence and self-esteem jointly predicted marital satisfaction among married couples in Ebonyi State. However, contrary findings have also been reported. Anyamene et al. (2021) found a weak and statistically non-significant relationship between self-esteem and marital adjustment among married secondary school teachers in Anambra State, whereas Konye and Otta (2020) reported that self-concept was a stronger predictor of marital stability than self-esteem among married adults in Rivers State. These divergent findings suggest that the influence of self-esteem may vary according to the marital outcome examined, occupational context, and sociocultural environment, indicating the need for further investigation among specific populations such as married secondary school teachers.
Despite substantial evidence supporting the importance of self-esteem in intimate relationships, important gaps remain in the literature. First, empirical findings are not entirely consistent. While numerous studies have reported significant positive associations between self-esteem and marital satisfaction, marital adjustment, relationship quality, and marital stability (Bélanger et al., 2014; Ebeh, 2019; Eze & Mba, 2018; Harshita & Nakra, 2023; Mohammad & Elham, 2015; Unamba et al., 2016), others have reported weak or non-significant relationships (Anyamene et al., 2021). Moreover, contemporary relationship research suggests that the effects of self-esteem may operate indirectly through interpersonal trust, emotional regulation, dyadic coping, perceived partner responsiveness, and constructive communication rather than through direct pathways alone (Harris & Orth, 2020; Overall & McNulty, 2017; Tong et al., 2021; Wood et al., 2024). These inconsistencies indicate that the relationship between self-esteem and marital stability may vary across populations, relationship contexts, and sociocultural settings.

The existing literature is also characterised by conceptual and methodological limitations. Previous studies have examined self-esteem in relation to diverse marital outcomes, including marital satisfaction, adjustment, harmony, and relationship quality, which represent related but conceptually distinct aspects of marital functioning (Stanley et al., 2006). Furthermore, most studies have employed cross-sectional or correlational designs using heterogeneous populations such as community samples, university students, church members, newly married couples, and general adult populations (Ebeh, 2019; Eze & Mba, 2018; Konye & Otta, 2020). Self-esteem has also frequently been investigated alongside variables such as emotional intelligence, self-concept, communication patterns, and mental well-being, making it difficult to isolate its independent contribution to marital stability. Consequently, differences in research designs, measurement approaches, and study populations limit comparison across studies and constrain the generalizability of existing findings.

These limitations are particularly evident within the Nigerian educational context. Although secondary school teachers constitute one of the country's largest professional groups and routinely experience substantial occupational demands that may affect family life, relatively few studies have specifically examined self-esteem as an independent predictor of marital stability among this population. Existing teacher-focused research has concentrated largely on marital adjustment, communication, emotional intelligence, and occupational stress (Anyamene et al., 2021; Onovo & Ani, 2021), leaving the role of self-esteem in promoting marital stability insufficiently understood. Addressing this gap is important for extending the application of Sociometer Theory within occupational settings and for generating evidence to inform counselling interventions, teacher wellness programmes, and family support initiatives. Accordingly, the present study investigated self-esteem as a predictor of marital stability among married secondary school teachers in Delta North Senatorial District, Delta State, Nigeria.

## Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 significance guided the study:

**$Ho_1$**: There is no significant between prediction of self-esteem on marital stability of married secondary school teachers in DNSD of Delta State

## Methods

This study employed a predictive correlational research design to examine the predictive influence of self-esteem on marital stability among married secondary school teachers in Delta North Senatorial District, Delta State, Nigeria. The target population comprised 3,177 married teachers employed in 169 public secondary schools within the district. A sample of 413 participants was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations and selected through a multistage sampling procedure involving simple random, cluster, and proportionate stratified sampling techniques to ensure adequate representation across the nine Local Government Areas. Data were collected using the Self-Esteem Questionnaire (SEQ) and the Marital Stability Questionnaire (MSQ), each

comprising 20 items rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *Strongly Agree (4)* to *Strongly Disagree (1)*, with higher scores indicating higher levels of the respective constructs. The instruments underwent face validation by three experts in Counselling and Human Development Studies and Measurement and Evaluation from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A pilot study involving 20 married secondary school teachers outside the study area yielded satisfactory internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's α = .77 for the SEQ and α = .81 for the MSQ), indicating that the instruments were suitable for the study.

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate institutional authority, while permission to conduct the study was granted by the Delta State Post Primary Education Board and participating school principals. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured throughout the study. The questionnaires were administered using the direct-delivery approach with the assistance of two trained research assistants. Only married teachers who consented to participate were included in the study. Of the 413 questionnaires distributed, 412 were successfully retrieved, representing a 99.8% response rate. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 27. Prior to the main analysis, the assumptions underlying linear regression, including linearity, normality, homoscedasticity, independence of errors, and multicollinearity, were examined and found to be satisfactory. Simple linear regression analysis was performed to determine the extent to which self-esteem predicted marital stability. Standardized regression coefficients (β), the coefficient of determination ($R^2$), adjusted $R^2$, and associated *p*-values were reported, with statistical significance evaluated at the .05 alpha level.

## Results

**Research Question one:** What is the relationship between self-esteem and marital stability of married secondary school teachers?

**Table 1:** Linear regression analysis of the relationship between self-esteem and marital stability of married secondary school teachers.

| Variables | R | $R^2$ | Adjusted Square | RStd. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Self-esteem and marital stability of married secondary school teachers | .504[a] | .254 | .252 | 5.724 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-esteem ($R^2$) = Coefficient of Determination
b. Dependent Variable: Marital stability of married secondary school teachers

Table 1 reveals that the correlation coefficient between self-esteem and the marital stability of teachers who are married is .504. This suggests a moderate positive correlation between self-esteem and marital stability. Additionally, the coefficient of determination ($R^2$) linked to this correlation is .254, indicating that self-esteem explains 25.4% of the variance in marital stability. Therefore, 74.6% of the

differences in marital stability is due to factors unrelated to self-esteem.

**Hypothesis one:** There is no significant prediction of self-esteem on marital stability of married secondary school teachers.

**Table 2**: Regression analysis of the prediction of self-esteem on marital stability of married secondary school teachers.

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | T | Sig. |
| 1 | (Constant) | 24.027 | 3.143 | | 7.646 | .000 |
| | Self-esteem | .581 | .049 | .504 | 11.823 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Marital stability of married secondary school teachers.

Table 2 indicates a t value of 11.823, with an exact P-value of 0.000. When this probability is assessed against the significance threshold of 0.05 used for hypothesis testing, it is deemed significant since 0.000 is lower than 0.05. Consequently, the null hypothesis asserting no significant prediction of self-esteem on marital stability among married secondary school teachers is rejected. The researcher concludes that a significant prediction exists between self-esteem and marital stability in this group.

## Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between self-esteem and marital stability among married secondary school teachers in Delta North Senatorial District, Delta State, Nigeria. The findings revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between self-esteem and marital stability ($R = .504$, $\beta = .504$, $p < .001$). Furthermore, self-esteem accounted for 25.4% of the variance in marital stability, indicating that teachers with higher levels of self-esteem were more likely to experience stable marital relationships. Although a substantial proportion (74.6%) of the variance in marital stability remained attributable to other factors, the findings underscore self-esteem as an important psychological predictor of marital stability among married secondary school teachers.

The observed positive relationship suggests that self-esteem serves as a valuable psychological resource that enhances spouses' ability to navigate marital challenges effectively. Individuals with high self-esteem generally possess positive self-evaluations, greater emotional confidence, and stronger interpersonal competence, enabling them to communicate more openly, regulate emotions more effectively, and respond constructively to marital disagreements. These characteristics foster mutual trust, empathy, and commitment, thereby strengthening marital relationships. Conversely, individuals with lower self-esteem may be more susceptible to insecurity, fear of rejection, defensive communication, and emotional withdrawal, behaviours that can undermine marital stability over time. The moderate magnitude of the relationship further

indicates that while self-esteem is an important determinant of marital stability, successful marriages are also influenced by numerous interpersonal, social, economic, and contextual factors.

The findings are consistent with Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000), which posits that self-esteem functions as an internal indicator of perceived social acceptance and relational value. According to the theory, individuals with healthy self-esteem are more likely to perceive themselves as worthy of love and acceptance, thereby approaching intimate relationships with greater confidence, trust, and emotional security. Such positive interpersonal expectations encourage constructive communication, adaptive conflict resolution, and sustained relationship commitment, all of which contribute to marital stability. The present findings therefore provide empirical support for the applicability of Sociometer Theory within the context of married secondary school teachers in Nigeria.

The findings also corroborate contemporary relationship science, which increasingly conceptualizes self-esteem as a relational resource rather than merely an individual personality characteristic. Harris and Orth (2020), in their meta-analysis of longitudinal studies, demonstrated reciprocal associations between self-esteem and social relationships, indicating that healthy self-esteem promotes positive interpersonal relationships while supportive relationships simultaneously strengthen self-esteem. Similarly, Orth and Robins (2022) concluded that high self-esteem contributes positively to interpersonal functioning, psychological adjustment, and relationship quality across adulthood. Wood et al. (2024) further argued that self-esteem enhances romantic relationship quality by fostering trust, perceived partner responsiveness, emotional security, and constructive interpersonal behaviours. Collectively, these studies support the present finding that positive self-evaluations facilitate healthier marital relationships.

The present result is also consistent with several empirical studies conducted in different cultural contexts. Bélanger et al. (2014) reported that spouses with higher self-esteem demonstrated more adaptive coping strategies and significantly better marital adjustment than those with lower self-esteem. Likewise, Mohammad and Elham (2015) found that self-esteem was positively associated with marital satisfaction among employed married women, while Harshita and Nakra (2023) observed a significant positive relationship between self-esteem and marital adjustment among married adults. More recent dyadic studies have similarly shown that both partners' self-esteem contributes to relationship satisfaction and marital quality (Chen et al., 2024; Jiang et al., 2024; Yang et al., 2025). These convergent findings reinforce the growing consensus that healthy self-esteem strengthens interpersonal functioning by promoting emotional regulation, constructive communication, and adaptive responses to relationship stressors.

Within the Nigerian context, the findings align with previous empirical evidence indicating that self-esteem contributes positively to marital functioning. Ebeh (2019) reported that self-esteem significantly predicted marital stability among members of the Catholic Women

Organisation in Anambra State, while Eze and Mba (2018) found that emotional intelligence and self-esteem jointly predicted marital satisfaction among married couples. Similarly, Unamba et al. (2016) established that self-esteem significantly influenced marital stability among married Igbo couples. These studies, together with the present findings, suggest that positive self-evaluations consistently contribute to healthier marital relationships across different Nigerian populations.

However, the present findings differ from those reported by Anyamene et al. (2021), who found a weak and statistically non-significant relationship between self-esteem and marital adjustment among married secondary school teachers in Anambra State. The disparity may be attributed to differences in the marital outcomes investigated, as marital adjustment and marital stability, although related, represent distinct constructs. Variations in sampling procedures, cultural contexts, measurement instruments, and statistical techniques may also have contributed to the inconsistent findings. Furthermore, occupational experiences and contextual differences between the two study populations may have influenced the extent to which self-esteem affected marital functioning. These inconsistencies highlight the need for continued investigation into the contextual conditions under which self-esteem promotes stable marital relationships.

The finding that self-esteem explained 25.4% of the variance in marital stability has important practical implications. Although self-esteem emerged as a significant predictor, nearly three-quarters of the variance in marital stability remained unexplained, suggesting that other psychological, relational, and contextual variables also contribute substantially to marital outcomes. Factors such as emotional intelligence, communication patterns, conflict-resolution skills, personality traits, work-related stress, financial stability, family support, and cultural expectations may interact with self-esteem in shaping marital stability. Future studies should therefore adopt multidimensional models that examine the combined influence of these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of marital stability among married teachers.

The findings also have important implications for counselling and educational practice. Counsellors, school psychologists, and family therapists should consider incorporating self-esteem enhancement strategies into premarital and marital counselling programmes for teachers. Interventions that promote positive self-concept, emotional resilience, effective communication, and adaptive coping may strengthen marital relationships and improve teachers' psychological well-being. Educational authorities may also consider implementing employee wellness programmes that address both occupational stress and family functioning, recognizing that psychologically healthy teachers are more likely to experience stable family relationships and perform effectively in their professional responsibilities.

The present study demonstrates that self-esteem is an important psychological predictor of marital stability among married secondary school teachers. Although it is not the sole determinant of stable marriages, healthy self-esteem appears to strengthen interpersonal functioning,

emotional regulation, and relationship commitment, thereby enhancing spouses' capacity to maintain stable and satisfying marital relationships. These findings contribute to the growing body of literature emphasizing the importance of positive psychological resources in promoting healthy marriages and provide empirical evidence to inform counselling interventions and future research on marital stability among teachers.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the relationship between self-esteem and marital stability among married secondary school teachers in Delta North Senatorial District, Delta State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that self-esteem is a significant and moderate positive predictor of marital stability, explaining 25.4% of the variance in marital stability. This suggests that teachers with higher self-esteem are more likely to experience stable marital relationships, supporting the view that positive self-evaluations enhance emotional security, adaptive coping, and constructive interpersonal behaviours essential for sustaining healthy marriages.

The findings have important implications for counselling and educational practice. Counsellors should incorporate self-esteem enhancement strategies into premarital and marital counselling programmes, while educational authorities should strengthen teachers' psychosocial well-being through counselling, wellness, and work–life balance initiatives. Because a substantial proportion of marital stability remains influenced by other factors, intervention programmes should also address communication skills, emotional intelligence, conflict management, and work-related stress.

Future studies should employ longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to establish causal relationships and examine other psychological and contextual predictors of marital stability among teachers and other occupational groups. This study contributes to the growing body of evidence that self-esteem is an important psychological resource for promoting stable marital relationships and provides empirical support for counselling interventions aimed at enhancing teachers' personal well-being and family stability.

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