



Optimizing Marital Satisfaction: A Frame Work for Promoting Successful Marital Relations among Muslim Women in Nigeria

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Abstract

Marriage holds a deeply valued place in the lives of Muslim women in Nigeria, serving not only as a social bond but also as a religious responsibility that shapes family life and personal well-being. Yet, many women continue to experience challenges that affect marital satisfaction, including financial pressures, poor communication, conflicting expectations about gender roles, and limited access to marital guidance rooted in both Islamic teachings and modern counselling approaches. These challenges highlight the need for a practical and culturally sensitive framework that supports healthier marital relationships. This study seeks to develop a framework for promoting successful marital relations among Muslim women in Nigeria, focusing on the key elements that contribute to a fulfilling and stable marriage. The study used qualitative method. The study finds that four factors consistently enhance marital satisfaction: open and respectful communication, shared financial and domestic cooperation, strong religious and moral values, and emotional and social support systems. It also identifies major challenges such as cultural practices that conflict with Islamic principles, economic stress, misunderstandings around spousal rights and responsibilities, and inadequate marital education. The framework encourages pre-marital training, continuous marital counselling, financial planning, and clearer communication skills to help couples build stronger and more harmonious relationships. In conclusion, improving marital satisfaction among Muslim women in Nigeria requires a balanced approach that respects religious values while addressing modern social realities. The proposed framework offers actionable steps for families, counsellors, community leaders, and policymakers to support stable, peaceful, and fulfilling marriages.

Keywords: Marital satisfaction, Muslim women, Nigeria, Islamic marriage, marital counselling, family stability, marital framework, marital well-being.

INTRODUCTION

As a meaningful institution, marriage has two main purposes of ensuring preservation of the human species and continuation of the human race. Marriage provides spiritual physical, emotional and psychological companionship. This companionship generates and sustains love, kindness, compassion, mutual confidence, solace and succor. It lay a spiritual and legal foundation for raising a family. The children born of the matrimonial union become legitimate and mutual rights of inheritance are established.

If a marriage starts out right then most likely, it will be a stable and successful marriage. But if the marriage begins poorly, then more than likely, the marriage will become weak or even fail. Sometimes it is difficult and even impossible to treat a marriage that started out poorly. The spouses suffer many hardships and difficulties, usually ending in divorce. This leaves a negative impact on the children, the family and the community at large.

CONCEPT AND IMPORTANCE OF MARRIAGE

Some Muslim Jurists have defined marriage as a union between Man and Woman which legalise enjoyment between them as well as exchange of benefits in consonance with the laid down regulations of *Shari'ah*.ⁱ However, wealth is a necessary requirement for marriage just like pilgrimage does not become obligatory except on someone who has wealth or money.ⁱⁱ

The Glorious *Qur'an* and the prophetic *Sunnah* have encouraged on the need of marriage, and it is a consensus among people of sound reasoning throughout human history that it is part of the greatest favors and blessings which a mankind cannot do without.ⁱⁱⁱ

Marriage is the only way of building a strong and respectable family which builds and never destroys, enlivens not extinguish, strive to be part of the solution rather than a part of the problem and it helps others of its kind in promoting goodness and piety not on Sin and transgression.^{iv}

Marriage as a social institution is designed to make the world habitable and conducive for human existence, thereby sanitizing the society from all forms of immoral behaviours. It is in view of this fact that *Shaykhul Azhar*, professor *Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi (R.A)* said marriage is the best and responsible way which Allah the Almighty has chosen for the continued existence of humanity and He (S.W.T) has in His Omnipotence and mercy made the bond of relationship between couple to be the most powerful and admired. It is enough for you to know this through the saying of Allah:

...They are Libas (i.e body cover, or screen, or Sakan (i.e you enjoy the pleasure of living with them) for you and you the same for them. (Q2:187)

This statement shows the degree and intensity of the relationship that is between couple, it has reached the apex in terms of kindness, affection and comfort, it shows that each of the couple is dependably attached to the other and each has the feeling of being closed to the other as cloth which covers and is directly attached to the body.^v

Similarly, there is strong indication of love, affection and compassion between the couple in the saying of the Almighty Allah:

... And among His signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. (Q30:21).

Meaning, it is part of clear proofs that show the Oneness of Allah as well as His Omnipotence and mercy to you -O people - that He brought forth out of you in the human species, women that you will get repose in them and keep you off loneliness as a friend keeps company of his intimate friend, and Allah has in His Endless Bounties injected amongst you O husbands and wives - love, affection, care and kindness which was not known before the marriage which Allah has legislated between Men and women.^{vi}

Obviously, that is how Islamic *Shari'ah* formulate legislations, ethics, commandments, and I functions, with a view to directing society, groups, men and women to goodness as long as they hold unto those instructions and principles, Allah guides whom ever He wills to the righteous path.^{vii}

To keep man away from unlawful sexual contact, Allah has decreed marriage and has allowed the bridal money to be very small such as an Iron - ring, Shoes, Porridge made of wheat or barely and the memorization of some verses or chapters of the *Qur'an*.^{viii}

Shaykhul Azhar mentions that the Glorious *Qur'an* has encouraged Muslim Men and women on the need for marriage in various forms, which include among other things:

(I) Reminding people that marriage and its fruitful gain of children is part of the prophets traditions. Allah says:

... And indeed, we sent messengers before you (O Muhammad (S.A.W), and made for them wives and offspring...(Q13:38).

This verse was revealed in response to polytheists who saw it as an abomination for the prophet (S.A.W) to marry women, Allah explained that the earlier messengers before have married women and gave birth to children.... The verse explains that marriage between Men and women is a natural instinct which Allah has created in His servants.^{ix}

(II) Explanation that marriage which Allah has instituted for His servants is one of the best favors and blessings of Allah. The Qur'anic verse indicates:

... And Allah has made for you *Azwaj* (mates or wives) of your own kind, and has made for you, from your wives, Sons and grandsons, and has bestowed on you good provision... (Q16:72).

Above are some of the *Qur'anic* verses which encouraged its followers on marriage. The prophetic *Sunnah* has added to what the *Qur'an* says, that is what *Imam Muslim (R.A)* narrated in authentic book from the authority of *Abdullahi Bin Amr (R.A)* who said the prophet (S.A.W) said:

... The (life of this) world is a little enjoyment and the best of its enjoyment is responsible woman (wife).^x

The Muslim Scholars have formed a consensus from the time of the prophet (S.A.W) on the institution of marriage and that it is part of the *Sunnah* which Allah loves. Moreover, marriage is as old as the mankind as indicated by the story of prophet Adam (A.S) and one thing that shows the position of marriage is that, the favors of paradise cannot be complete without it as many authentic *Hadith* indicate which include among other things the *Hadith* of *Abu Huraira (R.A)*: It has been said I prophet (S.A.W) do we engage in sexual contact with our wives in paradise, he said "A Man may have sexual intercourse with hundred virgins".^{xi}

Furthermore, the love of children is a natural characteristic behavior in the minds of human beings, they are the fruits of hearts and a source of happiness. Indeed! All people including prophets and messengers of Allah aspire to have children. Here is prophet Ibrahim (A.S) making invocations:

.... My Lord! Grant me (offspring) from the righteous (Q37:100).

And here is prophet *Zakariyya (A.S)* requesting Allah:

.... I my Lord! Leave me not single (childless), though you are the best of the inheritors. (Q21:89).

In a nutshell, among the motives of marriage which legalise the Union of Man and Woman through the laid down rules and regulations of *Shari'ah* is that it is designed to help mankind in holding unto etiquettes of his religion and discharging the responsibility which his Lord placed on his shoulders and refraining from His prohibitions.

So also, marriage preserve lineage from disgrace, because the feeling of human being that he has a family to which he is connected and proud is always there, as such he will respect its honor and dignity, and it adds value prestige and goodness to his life.

Moreover, it enliven good morals and it promotes modesty and sense of belonging, it also makes him to have feeling of responsibility, helping one another and to crown it all it promotes love and affection. A deep and intense love that made a women to persevere and endure the loss of her brother at a battle, but when she was told that her husband was martyred, she instantly started shouting and shivering. When the prophet (S.A.W) heard about the incidence, he said:

"...Surely, a husband has a special position in the heart of his wife."^{xii}

CAUSES OF DETERIORATION OF A MUSLIM FAMILY

Mohammed Baianonie Opines that a Muslim family deteriorates when its members are ignorant about the Islamic teachings of how a Muslim family should be. Secondly, the Muslim family also deteriorates when members of the family are influenced by their selfishness, their desires, and when they allow un-Islamic traditions to affect their behavior. And thirdly, the family deteriorates when Muslims do not take issues seriously, until those issues become so big that they break up the Muslim family by ending the marriage.^{xiii} We should without delay, deal with all our family problems before it's too late or before the problem is impossible to fix.^{xiv}

Imam Baianonie added that *Imam Al-Ghazali*, a specialist in the treatment of bad behavior, concluded after long research and experience, that the treatment of misbehavior can be cured with medicine formed from two ingredients. People cannot simply cure bad behavior by wishes; they cure it using this medicine.^{xv}

The first ingredient is knowledge and the second ingredient is applying that knowledge. If either of these two ingredients is missing, then bad behavior will not be cured. He also added that because the taste of most medicines is sour, people don't use it. And if they do use it, they may not complete the dosage. And whoever does not have enough patience to use this sour medicine; then he will not enjoy the sweetness of the cure.^{xvi}

I personally have a strong suspicion that in most cases some spouses do not build their marriage on solid foundation as they regard it as fun and fashion rather than being an act of worship which is rewarded and blessed in all angles. Employing western cultures in our marriage ceremonies as well as running the marital life in a western pattern causes a lot of problems which must be properly addressed.

THE DUTIES OF WIFE TO HER HUSBAND

(I) Obedience in matters of good: She should obey him in matters that are not disobedience to Allah and matters of goodness. Therefore, she should not obey him in that which she is unable to do or it is too difficult for her. This is due to the saying of Allah's messenger (S.A.W) that:

" If I were to order anyone to prostrate to another, I would have ordered the woman to prostrate herself before her husband"... (*At-Tirmidhi* and others).^{xvii}

It is part of to this obedience that a wife should honors her husband and protects his and her honor, and protects his wealth, his children and his house. We have a beautiful lesson from the wives of the prophet's companions that demonstrates their submissive obedience to their husbands. Here is *Asma'u Bint Umaisi* giving women a shining example of obedience to husband even after his death. " *Sa'ad Ibn Ibrahim*, the chief Judge of *Madina* said *Abubakar (R.A)* made a will that *Asma'u* should bathe him after his demise. *Imamu Qatada (R.A)* said, so it happened, because daughter of *Umaisi*, his wife bathed him (Narrated by *Imamu Malik in Muwatta*).^{xviii} She did not contradicted his instruction even after his life, that is obedience in the true meaning of the word.

Imamu Abu Dawud narrated an authentic *Hadith* with its chain to *Aisha (R.A)* where she indicated that the water of ablution and chewing stick of the prophet (S.A.W) are kept for him (in a specific place where it would be easier for him to carry), so when he wakes up in the night, he eases himself and brush his teeth.^{xix} The point of reflection here is the cordial relationship and submissive loyalty of prophet's wives (R.A) by ensuring that his aspirations are well accomplished. This teaches married women to strengthen the bond of cordial relationship between them and their husbands, as it is a religious and obligatory duty and it makes the marital life more meaningful and attractive.

Similarly, the mother of believers, *Aisha (R.A)* told a story that her brother *AbdurRahman Ibn Abi Bakr (R.A)* visited the prophet (S.A.W) while he was in the *Aisha's* room shortly before he answered the call to glory; *AbdurRahman* was brushing his teeth with a fresh chewing stick. The prophet (S.A.W) cast his eyes looking at it ceaselessly. *Aisha* observed that so she inquired from the prophet (S.A.W) if he likes it, so that she will collect it for him, he indicated yes by nodding his head - either because he found it difficult to talk or he was engaged in supplication and prayers - so she collected it for him and cut the used portion and she chewed and softened it with her teeth; she cleaned it and gave it to the prophet (S.A.W) and he brushed his teeth.^{xx} This narration shows her commitment and obedience to husband, though he was about to die but she was observed and respectful with keen interest to his needs. Look at the way she accorded top priority attention to his welfare. Thus, it is vividly clear that women have a great lesson to emulate from *Aisha (R.A)* regarding the ideals of promoting successful marital relations.

(II) Another duty of the wife is that she must not allow anyone to enter or stay in her husband's house without his permission. The prophet (S.A.W) said:

"... Your rights on them on them (your wives) are that they do not allow anyone that you dislike to enter your home. (*Imams At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Majah*).^{xxi}

So also, in this regard, let us look at a very interesting example and a great lesson from the life of a woman - companion. It has been narrated by *Ash-Sha'abi (R.A)* who said when *Fatima (R.A)* fell sick, *Abubakar (R. A)* came to visit her and sought permission to enter. So, *Aliyu (R.A)* said O' *Fatima*, *Abubakar* is by the door to great you. She said: "do you accept my permission for him to enter. He answered in the affirmative. *Imam Adh-Dhahabi* said in his comments to this episode "She knows the *Sunnah* (may Allah be pleased with her), she did not permitted a visitor in her matrimonial home except with his permission. *Imam Sa'ad Yusuf Abu Aziz* commented on this note that "where is this moral teaching of Islamic norms and values in our contemporary time, in which many Muslim homes fell in the trap of moral decadence... Modesty and decency were completely buried and the cherished norms and values are violated."^{xxii}

STRATEGIES OF PROMOTING MARITAL RELATIONS FOR WOMEN

Ideally a husband must cater for all the basic needs of his wife such as food, clothing, shelter and medication within his capability. This is due to the messenger of Allah's statement to questioner who asked about the woman's rights upon her husband:

" You should give her food when you eat, clothe her when you clothe yourself. And do not strike her in the face, nor revile her (by saying 'may Allah disfigure your face'). And do not shun her except within the house." (*Ahmad, Abu Dawud and Ibn Hibban*, and it was graded *Sahih* by *Al-Hakim*).^{xxiii}

The salient points, this paper intends to discuss under this sub-heading which have the value of promoting marital relations are many but I will discuss the most important ones. These issues included:

(a) Cooking and preparing a delicious food: It is very necessary for a wife to prepare food for her family at specific intervals and it should be ready on the time needed as long as the husband provided within his capability of financial

resources. However it is imperative for the wife to design a meal time - table that will give room for alternation, so that the members of the family will not get fed up with the affected members of the family will be comfortable.

(b) Cleanliness: It occupies a special position in the life of a Muslim - most especially the marital life - which is built upon love, affection, comfort and happiness. In line with this, it is necessary for a wife to take bath at least twice a day, clean her teeth with brush and chewing stick and remove anything that has bad odour from her body. So also, it is imperative for her to sweep and clean the house - ranging from the bedroom, sitting room, kitchen, toilets and the house premises - It is part of the mistakes of some married women to leave her clothes and bed sheets without washing it for a long period of time, such is extremely bad and can cause breakup in the marital life; thus has to be addressed.

(c) Religious Solidarity and seeking Beneficial knowledge: Love of religion is a sign of goodness and blessing in the life of a Muslim. It is generally known that responsible people love and admire religious person. On the other hand, knowledge is a light that leads to wisdom. It is life for the soul and fuel for the character. If a woman is religious, that will make her to be more admired by her husband, as it happened to the mother of believers, *Hafsah*, the prophet's wife (R.A). It has been narrated that the prophet (S.A.W) divorced *Hafsah* then the prophet (S.A.W) took her back in line with the directives of Angel *Jibril* (A.S) and he said: " She fasts regularly and always perform night prayers and she is your wife in the paradise".^{xxiv}

(d) Shouldering the responsibility of home management is a necessary duty of the wife, contrary to what happens in our contemporary time. Here is *Asma'u* daughter of *Abu Bakr* (R.A) telling us that apart from normal domestic activities, she used to go to the farm and cut grass for her husband's horse.^{xxv} On this note, there is an authentic *Hadith* narrated by *Bukhari* and *Muslim* that the prophet's daughter, *Fatima* (R.A) got her hands wounded as a result of the domestic activities she is carrying out in her husband's house, *Aliyu Bin Abi Talib* (R.A). It went to an extent that she went to the prophet (S.A.W) to assist her with a house boy to ease her work but he (S.A.W) declined her request.^{xxvi} If domestic activities are not obligatory upon a wife, he would have helped her and he would not have left her in that condition.^{xxvii}

(e) Thankfulness: It is imperative for a woman to be grateful and appreciate the tireless efforts of her husband as he is always thinking of how he will make her comfortable. Thankfulness is praise worthy attitude that multiplies and sustain a favor. This it is necessary for a woman to thank her husband for shouldering her responsibilities no matter the circumstances of economic hardship. A good example here is the unique character of appreciation to husband demonstrated by the first female professor in the northern Nigeria and the former Minister of education, professor *Ruqayyatu Ahmed Rufa'i*. Of course, she used to say it publicly that it is a must for her to thank the invaluable contributions and encouragement of her husband until she became what she is today. This shows that apart from shouldering her responsibilities he was committed in assisting her to continue pursuing her educational career up to professorial level. On the other hand, she was not arrogant to show her appreciation openly even when addressing a press conference. That is indeed a shining example that needs to be emulated.

(F) Moderation in Jealousy.

As a responsible and obedient wife, do not quarrel unnecessarily as such is capable of creating serious problems to your marriage. Therefore, even if you find yourself in a polygamous setting, where you have mates. Since in an Islamic setting, a man is allowed as a conditional privilege to marry up to four wives if he can affords that - do not turn the matrimonial home in to a battle field by creating unnecessary problems to the family as such is disastrous to your life, your children and by extension your family; thus refrain from such and be conscious of Allah the Almighty in whatever you undertake, many women engaged in such acts but they could not go free as it backfires on them seriously when there was no chance of regret.

On this note, I would like to advise that you should never engage in quarrelling or fighting with your husband because you can never triumph. Try to be a peace - maker in your matrimonial home. Professor *Aisha Hamdan* Opines: " Remember that it takes two to quarrel, if only one person chooses not to argue, there will be no wrong does most of the talking."^{xxviii} She added that "Never yell at each other unless the house is on fire. Of course, house fires do not occur at about the same rate."^{xxix}

(g) Prudence and Refraining from Extravagance: A university don, professor *Yakubu Yahaya Ibrahim* describes some of the natural characteristics of women, where he says: "It is the nature of some women to demand from their husbands what t^{xxx}hey cannot afford. The love for worldly adornments is prominent and profound among women. Unless their attentions are well drawn, they tend to forget or even overlook at the reality on ground when making a demand."^{xxxi} He suggested that Muslim women should borrow a leaf from the wives of the prophet (S.A.W) and be sympathetic to their husbands as far as material aspect of marital life is concerned.^{xxxii} Indeed! There are great benefits in Prudence as it eases things and makes it affordable. Allah (S.W.T) praised His servants who are prudent where He says:

... And those who, when they spend, are neither extravagant nor niggardly, but hold a medium (way) between those (extremes). (Q25:67)

So also, refraining from Extravagance is mandatory in consonance with the Islamic teachings. Allah says:

... But spend not wastefully (your wealth) in the manner of a spend thrift. Verily, the spendthrifts are brothers of the *Shayatin* (devils), and the *Shaitan* (devil - Satan is ever ungrateful to his Lord. (Q17:26-27)

On this note, it is clear that Extravagance is forbidden, it is also understood that it is a duty of a responsible wife to guard against extravagance and make judicious use of all the facilities in her matrimonial home.

(h) Patience and Endurance

Patience is the leading component of moral behaviors and is a way to attaining leadership position in religious matters and nearness to Allah. He (S.W.T) mentions in the Glorious *Qur'an* that He loves the patient servants and Allah has attached most of good things to patience.^{xxxiii} Forbearance is the most useful tool to have in managing a healthy marital life. Being patient and forbearing puts us in a proactive frame of mind, it brings us closer to Allah and we develop an inner mechanism that empowers us to handle life's difficult moments.

Patience is needed. Patience is the capacity to accept or tolerate delay, problems or suffering without becoming annoyed or anxious. It is also the ability to wait or to continue doing something despite difficulties or to suffer without complaining.

Many of us face obstacles in life. Some seem to feel as though their trials are much more frequent than that of others. This is however not necessarily true; however, the truth is that people who lack patience find themselves more at disadvantage than those who have patience. Moreover, you need to intensify prayers for Allah to make your matrimonial life be a promising one. By being prayerful, Allah controls the "how, when and where". Allah answers every sincere prayer offered, He delays some, give some and holds back some for a while. In all, you must know this. A sincere prayer offered to Allah never dies.

CONCLUSION

On the final note, I would like to suggest and recommend the ideals of the pious Muslim women who demonstrated extraordinary commitments in building a successful marital life. Professor *Aisha Hamdan* advised both spouses to enter the marriage with the pure intention of pleasing Allah (S.W.T), in order to receive His Grace and Blessings. The marriage itself then becomes an act of worship and one for which both spouses will be rewarded. Allah will be pleased with them and this will be the most critical element in ensuring peace, stability and happiness throughout the marital life. It is also important to realise that when an act of worship is continued over a long period of time, it becomes necessary to renew one's intention often to remain on the correct path and to obtain the most benefit.

Moreover, it should be recalled that life is a constant stream of challenges and tribulations, and to approach it in a light - hearted manner will help to make the journey smooth and more enjoyable. In conclusion, I would like to say no one person, and no one gender can look at the world with complete perspective. Therefore, Allah has designed things so that when the female and the male work together in unity, they can help each other to see a more balanced picture of life.

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