

## **RESIDENTIAL SEPARATION AND ATTACHMENT STYLES AS PREDICTORS OF MARITAL SATISFACTION AMONG MARRIED EMPLOYEES OF TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ONDO STATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study examined the relationships among residential separation, attachment styles, and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State, Nigeria. Two research questions were raised and one hypothesis was formulated. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised all 560 married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The sample of the study comprised 300 married employees of tertiary institutions. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted to select the sample size. Two adapted instruments: Attachment styles Questionnaire, Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and one self-constructed questionnaire on Residential Separation were used for data collection. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Findings revealed that residential separation was significantly related to marital satisfaction, with higher levels of separation associated with lower marital satisfaction. Attachment styles also showed significant relationships with marital satisfaction: secure attachment positively predicted marital satisfaction, while anxious and avoidant attachment styles negatively predicted marital satisfaction. The study concludes that residential separation and attachment styles are critical factors influencing marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions. It recommends the provision of marital counselling services and workplace policies that promote family cohesion, as well as interventions aimed at fostering secure attachment among couples.

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**Keywords:** Residential separation, attachment styles, marital satisfaction, married employees, tertiary institutions

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### **Introduction**

Marriage is a fundamental social institution that plays a vital role in the emotional, psychological, and social well-being of individuals and society at large. A satisfying marital relationship seems to provide emotional security, companionship, and mutual support, which contribute significantly to personal adjustment and productivity at work. Consequently, marital satisfaction has become an important focus in family setting, particularly among working couples whose occupational demands may pose challenges to marital stability. In contemporary society, it seems that work-related factors increasingly influence family life. One such factor is residential separation, a situation in which married couples live apart for extended periods due to employment obligations such as job postings, transfers, study leave, or institutional assignments. Among employees of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, including those in Ondo State, residential separation is relatively common because of limited institutional accommodation, dual-career marriages, inter-campus postings, and career advancement opportunities.

Residential separation refers to a living arrangement in which married couples reside in different physical locations for a period of time due to circumstances such as employment, educational pursuits, financial constraints, migration, health reasons, or other

social factors, while still maintaining their marital relationship (Chukwu & Eze 2022). According to Ibrahim and Bala (2023) residential separation offers economic or professional benefits, it reduces daily interaction, emotional closeness, and shared responsibilities between spouses, which may adversely affect marital satisfaction. Aroyewun (2022) observed that prolonged physical separation can strain marital relationships by reducing opportunities for communication, emotional support, and effective conflict resolution. It was observed that beyond physical proximity, the quality of marital relationships is strongly shaped by individuals' emotional and relational orientations, particularly attachment styles (Arinze & Olawa (2024).

Attachment styles refer to the patterns of emotional bonding, relationships, and interpersonal behaviours that individuals develop, especially among the married couples (Shettima, 2024). These styles are commonly categorized as secure, anxious, or avoidant. Securely attached individuals tend to feel comfortable with intimacy and dependence, whereas anxiously attached individuals may fear abandonment and seek excessive reassurance, and avoidant attached individuals often maintain emotional distance (Nweke, et al., 2021). However, married couple may respond differently to attachment bond in the family setting. One factor that may explain these differences is attachment style, which reflects individuals' patterns of emotional bonding, trust, and dependency in intimate relationships. According to Nweke, et al., (2021) observed secure attachment is generally associated with healthy communication and relational stability, whereas anxious and avoidant attachment styles have been linked to increased conflict, emotional withdrawal, and reduced marital satisfaction.

The interaction between residential separation and attachment styles is increasingly important in the family setting in the recent time. It appears that prolonged physical separation may challenge couples' emotional bonds, and the impact of such separation may vary depending on spouses' attachment orientations. For securely attached couples, residential separation may be managed with trust and effective communication. However, for individuals with insecure attachment styles, separation may heighten feelings of anxiety, loneliness, emotional withdrawal, or mistrust, thereby increasing marital strain and reducing satisfaction. Research has consistently shown that attachment styles play a crucial role in how couples communicate, manage conflict, and provide emotional support, thereby influencing marital satisfaction (Solomon and Akonam 2025; Shettima, 2024; Nweke et al., 2021). Despite growing global research on marital satisfaction, attachment styles, and marital satisfaction, there is a relative scarcity of empirical studies examining these variables together within the Nigerian context, particularly among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. In light of these considerations, this study seeks to examine the relationships among residential separation, attachment styles, and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. By exploring these variables among married employees of tertiary institutions, the study aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge and provide practical insights for enhancing marital satisfaction among working couples.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In Nigeria, employees of tertiary institutions often face work-related demands such as inter-campus postings, study leave, limited institutional housing, and dual-career obligations, which frequently result in residential separation between spouses. While such separation may enhance career advancement and economic stability, it may also disrupt marital interaction, emotional intimacy, and shared responsibilities, thereby posing challenges to marital satisfaction. Despite extensive research on marital satisfaction and

attachment styles globally, there is a noticeable gap in empirical studies that examine how residential separation and attachment styles jointly influence marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. Most existing studies in Nigeria have focused either on marital satisfaction in general populations or on individual psychological factors, with limited attention given to work-induced residential separation and its relationship with attachment styles. This study seeks to fill this gap by systematically examining how residential separation and attachment styles influence marital satisfaction within married working couples in tertiary institution of Ondo State, thereby providing evidence-based insights for improving marital well-being and institutional support systems. Through these objectives, the study aims to provide empirical evidence on how work-related living arrangements and individual attachment orientations affect marital satisfaction. The findings are expected to contribute to psychological and family studies literature and inform counselling practices, institutional policies, and intervention programs designed to promote marital well-being among employees of tertiary institutions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to examine residential separation and attachment styles as predictors of marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. determine residential separation as predictor of marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State.
2. examine attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) as predictor marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State;
3. determine joint predictive contribution of secure, anxious, avoidance marital on satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent does residential separation predict marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State?
2. To what extent do attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) predict marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State?

### **Hypothesis**

A null hypothesis was formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant relationship among residential separation, attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State.

### **Methods**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research designs. The survey design was used to capture large sample size of population. The population of the study comprised all 560 married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The sample of the study comprised 300 married employees of tertiary institutions, drawn from tertiary institutions in Ondo North Senatorial district of Ondo State. Multistage sampling procedure was adopted to select 300 married employees of tertiary institutions of Ondo North Senatorial Districts of Ondo State. In the first stage, simple random sampling technique was employed to select two (2) tertiary institutions from Ondo North Senatorial District of Ondo State. Second stage involved the selection of 300 employees from one university

and one polytechnic using simple purposive sampling technique. In the third stage, stratified proportionate sampling technique was adopted to select 150 married women and 150 married men. Two adapted instruments: Attachment styles Questionnaire, Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and one self-constructed questionnaire on Residential Separation were used for data collection. Face and content validities were employed to validate the instrument. Test – retest method of estimating reliability was conducted to determine the consistency of the instrument. The data collected from pilot study were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and the reliability coefficient value of 0.66 was obtained for residential separation, 0.57 was obtained for attachment styles while 0.61 was obtained for marital stability. The services of research assistant were employed to help in administering the instrument to 300 respondents across the selected tertiary institution in Ondo State, Nigeria. The research assistance was thoroughly trained in the administration of questionnaires to ensure data quality and consistency. The training covered both the practical aspects of administering the questionnaire and the underlying purpose of the research study. Data collected were subjected to both descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, the research questions were subjected to mean scores and standard deviation while Hypothesis 1 was subjected to correlation analysis.

## RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** To what extent does residential separation predict marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State?

**Table 1:** Residential separation predict marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD
1	My job requires me to live in a different location from my spouse which affect our relationship	3.3	0.43
2	I spend long periods away from my spouse because of work-related duties which hinder our relationship.	3.4	0.45
3	I find it difficult to cope with being away from my spouse for long periods	2.7	0.51
4	If not for my job, I would prefer to live permanently with my spouse	3.3	0.44
5	Residential separation limits the amount of time I spend with my spouse	3.5	0.55
<b>Average Mean</b>		<b>3.2</b>	

Date presented in Table 1 revealed the mean score and standard deviation of residential separation among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. Using mean score as a medium of taking decision, respondents submitted that residential separation limits the amount of time they spent with their spouse with mean score ( $\bar{x}$ =3.5,  $sd$ = 0.55). Respondents submitted that they spent long periods away from their spouse because of work-related duties which hinder our relationship with mean value of ( $\bar{x}$ =3.4,  $sd$ = 0.45). Respondents also reported that their job required them to live in a different location from their spouse which affect their relationship with mean score ( $\bar{x}$ =3.3,  $sd$ = 0.43). Respondents reported that If not for their job, they would prefer to live permanently with my spouse with mean score ( $\bar{x}$ =3.3,  $sd$ = 0.44). It was least reported that respondents find it difficult to cope with being away from their spouse for long periods ( $\bar{x}$ = 2.7,  $sd$ = 0.51).

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) predict marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard deviation of attachment styles among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State?

S/N	Statement on Secure Attachment	Mean	SD
1	I feel comfortable depending on my spouse	3.3	0.66
2	I trust my spouse even when we are apart	3.4	0.69
3	I feel emotionally close to my spouse most of the time	2.9	0.56
4	I can rely on my spouse when I need support	3.0	0.50
5	I feel confident in the stability of my marriage	2.8	0.49
	<b>Average Mean</b>	<b>3.1</b>	<b>0.58</b>
	<b>Statement on Anxious Attachment</b>		
6	I worry that my spouse may abandon me	2.5	0.64
7	I often need reassurance that my spouse loves me	3.3	0.67
8	I feel uneasy when my spouse is not around	3.1	0.74
9	I become upset when my spouse does not communicate with me frequently	3.2	0.75
10	I often feel rejected or unloved, even when there is no clear evidence.	2.6	0.69
	<b>Average Mean</b>	<b>2.9</b>	<b>0.69</b>
	<b>Statement on Avoidant Attachment</b>		
11	I prefer to handle my problems without relying on my spouse	3.2	0.49
12	I feel uncomfortable sharing my deepest feelings with my spouse	3.4	0.66
13	I try to maintain emotional distance from my spouse	2.5	0.69
14	I find it difficult to depend on my spouse	2.6	0.55
15	I prefer not to depend too much on my spouse.	2.5	0.50
	<b>Average mean</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>0.57</b>

Data presented in Table 2 showed the mean score and standard deviation of attachment styles among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. Using the mean score as a mean of taking decision, the result indicated that secure attachment is the most common form of attachment style among married employees of tertiary institution of Ondo State with mean score and standard deviation ( $\bar{x}=3.5$ ,  $sd= 0.58$ ). Respondents reported that anxious attachment is another form of attachment style with mean score and standard deviation of ( $\bar{x}=2.9$ ,  $sd= 0.69$ ) while avoidant attachment reported the least form of attachment style with mean score and standard deviation of

( $\bar{x}$ =2.9,  $sd$ = 0.57). By implication, the secure attachment style is the most common form of attachment style among married employees of tertiary institution of Ondo State.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship among residential separation, attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State.

**Table 3:** Correlation matrix showing relationship among residential separation, attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Residential separation	1				
Secure Attachment	.922	1			
Anxious Attachment	.648	.695**	1		
Avoidant Attachment	.304	.728**	.543	1	
Marital Satisfaction	-.504**	.728**	-.491**	-.404**	1

Table 4 presented the relationship among residential separation, attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The result showed that there was negative relationship between residential separation and marital satisfaction ( $r = -.504^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The result showed that secure attachment had a positive relationship with marital satisfaction ( $r = 0.728$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The table further revealed a negative relationship between anxious attachment and marital attachment ( $r = -.491^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The table also indicated a negative relationship between avoidant attachment and marital attachment ( $r = -.404^{**}$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## Discussion

The finding of study revealed that residential separation limited the amount of time they spent with their spouse because of work-related duties. The finding agreed with the finding Viashima et al., (2025) that living separately places a significant emotional and financial burden on women, who often face increased stress, anxiety, and a lack of support. Marital relationships are strained by distance, leading to weakened communication, trust issues, and disruptions in parenting roles. The finding of the study also indicated that secure attachment is the most common form of attachment style among married employees of tertiary institution of Ondo State. The finding gave credence to the finding of Solomon and Akonam (2025) who found a significant relationship with marital. The finding agreed with the assertion of Orhe et al., (2024) that married couples are psychologically stable in their marriage.

Finding from hypothesis 1 showed that there significant relationship among residential separation, attachment styles (secure, anxious, and avoidant) and marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The finding agreed with the finding of Aroyewun, Oyeyemi and Omosipe (2022) who found a correlation between qualities of time spent together and marital satisfaction. The finding also corroborated the finding of Olagundoye and Odunjo-Saka (2022) who found a correlation between parental attachment and marital satisfaction.

## Conclusion

This study examined residential separation and attachment styles as predictors of marital satisfaction among married employees of tertiary institutions in Ondo State. The findings revealed that residential separation significantly influences marital satisfaction, as

physical distance between spouses may create emotional strain, communication gaps, and reduced intimacy, which can negatively affect the quality of the marital relationship. Furthermore, attachment styles were found to play a crucial role in determining marital satisfaction. Secure attachment was positively correlated with marital satisfaction while anxious and avoidant attachment was negatively associated with marital satisfaction due to tendencies toward fear of abandonment, emotional withdrawal, or difficulty in expressing needs.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made

1. Tertiary institutions should collaborate with professional counsellors to organize periodic marital enrichment and counselling programs for married employees.
2. Counselling services should incorporate attachment-based therapeutic approaches to help individuals with insecure attachment styles (anxious or avoidant) develop healthier relational patterns that enhance marital satisfaction.
3. Couples experiencing residential separation should be encouraged to maintain consistent and meaningful communication through digital platforms, scheduled visits, and intentional emotional engagement to reduce the negative effects of physical distance.

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