

# Marital Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction Among Ghanaians

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Esther K. Malm<sup>1</sup> , Mabel Oti-Boadi<sup>2</sup> ,  
Nana Ama Adom-Boakye<sup>3</sup>, and Aba Andah<sup>3</sup>

## Abstract

This study examined factors associated with marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction among Ghanaian couples living in Ghana and abroad. Using a correlational design, data from a convenience sample of 231 married participants from Ghana and abroad were collected via an online survey. Results from regression analyses revealed that four positive behaviors—affection, companionship, commitment to the family, and financial support—and one negative behavior, beatings/slaps, were significantly associated with marital satisfaction. Three negative behaviors—annoying habits, selfishness, and disrespect—were significantly associated with marital dissatisfaction. Participants in Ghana reported significantly higher rates of beatings in marriage compared to those abroad. Also, negative behaviors experienced in marriage were significantly associated with less secure and more anxious attachment styles. Finally, slaps/beatings as associated with marital satisfaction show unique cultural/sub-cultural interpretations of behaviors. Findings contribute to growing studies and clinical practice that serve multicultural individuals and families.

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<sup>1</sup>Murray State University, Murray, KY, USA

<sup>2</sup>University of Ghana, Legon, Ghana

<sup>3</sup>Health & Well-Being International, Ellicott City, MD, USA

## Corresponding Author:

Esther K. Malm, Murray State University, 212 Wells Hall, Murray State University, Murray, KY 42071, USA.

Email: [emalm@murraystate.edu](mailto:emalm@murraystate.edu)

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Several behaviors (regardless of whether it is verbal, non-verbal, emotional, or action-oriented), positive and negative, affect the levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of any relationship, including intimate relationships. Marital satisfaction is typically associated with positive behaviors, while conflict in intimate relationships displays a variety of negative behaviors. Many studies (mostly Western countries) have focused extensively on the consequences of behaviors in intimate relationships including conflict, divorce, co-parenting, marital satisfaction, and longevity in marriage (e.g., [Amato, 1996](#); [Henry et al., 2007](#); [Sands et al., 2017](#)); however, fewer studies exist on the predictors of these consequences. More importantly, there is also limited literature about such questions pertaining to non-Western groups or nationalities as related to predictors of marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

**Research on Negative and Positive Behaviors**

Negative behaviors associated with dissatisfaction include disrespect, angry outbursts, contempt and criticisms, infidelity, financial difficulties, and all forms of abuse ([Moller & Vossler, 2015](#); [Osafo et al., 2021](#); [Osei-Tutu et al., 2019](#); [Smith & Peterson, 2008](#)). Negative behaviors (and fewer positive behaviors) are the primary precursor of separations and divorces which are likely to lead to lifelong negative consequences for both children and adults. These effects are not common only in Western societies but also in developing societies across the world including Ghana ([Oppong-Asante et al., 2014](#); [Osafo et al., 2021](#); [Osei-Tutu et al., 2019](#)). For example, the effects of negative behaviors, such as parents' marital conflict and divorce can be observed in the lasting detrimental emotional, mental, behavioral, and academic functioning of children ([Amato & Cheadle, 2005](#); [Sands et al., 2017](#)), pose a risk for poor physical and mental health outcomes ([Gómez-Guadix et al., 2012](#)), as well as challenges with social networks for the adults involved ([Oppong-Asante et al., 2014](#); [Sbarra, 2015](#)). For example, a positive association has been found between parental conflict, separation and divorce and subsequent difficulties in adult romantic relationship ([Bartholomew & Shaver, 1998](#); [Cui & Fincham, 2010](#)). These effects are seen cross-culturally although there is more empirical data from Western societies compared to developing countries.

Marital satisfaction, on the other hand, is typically associated with the presence of positive behaviors than negative behaviors in a relationship ([Carstensen et al., 1995](#)). The presence of positive behaviors in marital

relationships has many benefits including improved physical and mental well-being (Yorgason et al., 2018), lower risk of disease and mortality (Robles et al., 2014), lower divorce rates (Hirschberger et al., 2009), faster conflict resolution, and lower physiological reactions to the distressing impact of negative behaviors and communication (Henry et al., 2007; Robles et al., 2014). Examples of positive behaviors include commitment to the family, honesty, respect, affection, forgiveness, engagement rather than avoidance, fewer criticisms, admiration, and similarity in values (Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010; Stinson et al., 2017). Based on meta-analytic reviews focusing on the use of positive and negative behaviors in communication and conflict, and the overall well-being of children from homes with overt marital conflict, we can conclusively say that positive behaviors reduce conflict, separation, and divorce. The presence of more positive behaviors compared to negative behaviors also improves conflict resolution and promotes better outcomes for children (Amato, 1996; Bertoni & Bodenmann, 2010; Weaver & Schofield, 2015).

### *Early Childhood Experiences on Adult Marital (Dis)satisfaction*

Besides the effects of positive and negative behaviors on marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction, parental mental and emotional well-being as well as the quality of parental marriage influence children's own adult intimate relationship satisfaction. The parent-child relationship (attachment style) and other childhood experiences play a vital role in one's own functioning and marital relationship as adults (Butzer & Campbell, 2008). Considerable research conducted around the world indicates that there is a significant positive relationship between secure attachment in childhood and marital satisfaction as adults and a negative relationship between insecure attachment and marital satisfaction (Azadi & Mohammed, 2010; Jarnecke & South, 2013; Schmitt et al., 2004). Research also indicates the important role of culture in examining the quality of adult attachment and its subsequent influence on relationships (Schmitt et al., 2004; Wang & Mallinckrodt, 2006). For example, Schmitt and a consortium of researchers (2004) examined the universality of adult romantic attachment styles using the Relationship Questionnaire developed by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), across 10 world regions (62 countries). One of the results showed that Asians, particularly those from East, South, and Southeast, were more susceptible to preoccupied romantic attachment than any of the other three forms of adult attachment styles expressed across the world regions because of their unique cultural emphasis of pleasing others significantly more than themselves. Moreover, individuals from regions with higher stress and hardship like African cultures were more likely to develop insecure attachment in childhood and adulthood (Schmitt et al., 2004). Similarly, people with avoidant and anxious attachment styles were more

likely to have difficulty regulating their emotions and this affects their relationships in adulthood (Azadi & Mohammed, 2010; Jarnecke & South, 2013). It must be noted that some studies did not find any significant relationship between attachment styles and marital satisfaction (e.g., Ebrahimi & Kimiaei, 2014).

Another important childhood factor that influences adult functioning and predicts marital maladjustment in adulthood is childhood exposure to parents' intimate partner violence (Gover et al., 2008; Lawson, 2008). For example, there is a robust relationship between abusive males and exposure to family abuse as children compared to non-abusive males (Smith Slep & O'leary, 2001). White and Widom (2003) found that children who experienced family violence reported higher rates of abuse in young adulthood than their matched controlled comparison group. Margolin and Gordis (2004) also found that children exposed to abusive environments were more likely to become victims or perpetrators of aggression later in life. The relationship between childhood exposure to parent's intimate partner violence (verbal and physical abuse) and adult marital well-being also works through the mechanism of romantic attachment. Attachment patterns formed by children exposed to parental violence are more likely to influence romantic attachment in adulthood, which can in turn directly or indirectly influence relationship patterns including intimate partner violence, relationship stability, and levels of satisfaction (Godbout et al., 2009; 2017). Furthermore, children with poor attachment tend to display poor self-regulation skills and anger issues as a result of the intimate partner violence they witnessed. These (poor self-regulation and anger issues) poor adjustment behaviors can over time trigger intimate partner violence in their own adult relationships (Gover et al., 2008; Margolin & Gordis, 2004).

### *Culture, Relationship Behaviors, and Early Childhood Experiences*

While types of positive and negative behaviors may be similar across cultures, the interpretation of certain behaviors may be culturally determined. Second, some behaviors are more prevalent in specific cultures compared to others. For example, behaviors associated with the roles, presence and/or expectations of extended family, in-law involvement, religion, spousal abuse, and financial support of extended family (e.g., Adjei, 2016; 2018; Adonu, 2005; Rianon & Shelton, 2003; Stinson et al., 2017) are culturally defined. For instance, in a study among Mexican-American couples, Olson, Marshall, Goddard, and Schramm (2015) found that couples who rated their religion as an important cultural value were more likely to associate religious concordance and attendance with increased marital satisfaction. In another study that examined types of marital conflicts in a small population of Ghanaians, Abane (2003) found that while issues such as addictions and abuse reported

in Western cultures were also precursors for conflict in this non-Western sample, other factors pertinent in collectivist cultures, such as in-laws and extended family interferences played a major role in conflicts reported (Abane, 2003).

Cross-cultural psychological research also suggests that there may be almost universal positive and negative factors (e.g., attachment theory; secure romantic attachment styles; Schmitt et al., 2004) that predict human outcomes, including marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction. However, there are some behaviors that are culture specific, especially in the cultural nuances that influence prevalence of the various types of insecure attachment styles (e.g., models of self and other; insecure romantic attachment styles; Pines, 2004; Schmitt et al., 2004; communication styles; Firat & Okanlı, 2019). Limited studies exist on the examination of these constructs in non-Western populations. This study is interested in understanding the role of such proposed universal constructs (specifically attachment theory; secure romantic attachment styles) in a Ghanaian adult sample.

An additional curiosity for the authors is whether positive and negative behaviors associated with marital (dis)satisfaction vary when people who grow up within a particular culture exhibit similar or different behaviors in their intimate relationships when they migrate to another country or live outside their native/childhood culture/environment. This question has limited study if any, and yet it is important, as culture specific behaviors may clash (e.g., female genital mutilation and spousal abuse), or be acceptable in host/resident culture/country. For example, female genital mutilation is an acceptable behavior in certain cultures in different African, Asian, and Middle Eastern countries (WHO, 2020), but illegal in most Western countries including United States, Sweden, and United Kingdom (e.g., Goldberg et al., 2016). As such immigrants and residents who still practice this behavior as part of normal cultural practice do it in secrecy or send their children back to their native country for the exercise (Black & Debelle, 1995).

Similarly, a behavior related to marital relationship of interest is spousal abuse. Spousal abuse or intimate partner violence (IPV), especially male-to-female abuse/violence, is common across many cultures and heavily frowned upon in Western societies. While spousal abuse comes in different forms and severity, the general forms include physical abuse, verbal abuse, and neglect (Adjei, 2016; Rianon & Shelton, 2003). Intimate partner violence such as beating and slapping is a common practice in different African, Asian, and Middle Eastern people groups (Alio et al., 2009; Chikhungu et al., 2021) including ethnicities in Ghana (Adjei, 2018). While this practice seems to be declining worldwide, and in Ghana (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS) (2018), due to increased publicity and advocacy on IPV, it remains a normalized culturally acceptable behavior in different societies. For

example, [Adjei \(2018\)](#) examined the perspectives of Ghanaian male perpetrators on why they beat their wives. Responses included beating as a form of correction, putting wife in her social place, and show of male authority in the family and community ([Adjei, 2016; 2018](#)). Similarly in a study that examined the experiences of women from Bangladesh who had immigrated to America with their husbands, participants reported continued forms of verbal and physical abuse while in the United States regardless of education and employment status ([Rianon & Shelton, 2003](#)). Considering the concept of universal and culture specific behaviors, we assume that positive behaviors from native culture that are similar in host culture would naturally continue. We, however, empirically know little about whether positive and negative behaviors common in one's native culture change or continue to be practiced in marital relationships, when that behavior is illegal or contrary to host culture's values.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Three related theoretical frameworks explain the interconnectivity of these behaviors developed and maintained in adulthood that may be associated with predictors and outcomes of marital satisfaction/dissatisfaction. The first theoretical framework, the bioecological model of human development ([Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007](#)), suggests that we are more likely to develop and embrace behaviors, norms, and mindsets of people closer to us (e.g., immediate family unit) compared to norms, behaviors, and mindsets of distal and indirect influence (e.g., governmental plans and broader societal norms). These behaviors are developed from childhood via the relationships and bonds formed by the children and their caregivers. The bond is also known as attachment. Attachment theory ([Ainsworth et al., 2015; Bell, 2009](#)), the second theory, provides a framework for understanding children's need to achieve a sense of security and support from caregivers. Children who experience strong emotional and nurturing bonds consistently in childhood show patterns of confidence in developing relationships with others and are termed securely attached, while children with insecure attachment show patterns of weak, inconsistent emotional bonds that predispose them to be either anxious, avoidant, or dismissive in attachment styles ([Colomnesi et al., 2011](#)). These patterns can be persistent through adulthood. Bowenian family systems theory ([Kerr & Bowen, 1988](#)), the third theoretical framework, further explains how norms, and behaviors developed across the lifespan based on family dynamics and functioning, are passed down the generations. This includes attachment patterns developed in childhood and transferred through interactions, communication and behaviors to offspring ([Ainsworth et al., 1978; 2015; Main et al., 1985](#)). These three interrelated theoretical frameworks explain why there can be persistent

patterns of behaviors in families regardless of culture, and include behaviors such as intergenerational patterns of infidelity, abuse, alcoholism, or longevity in marriage (e.g., Amato, 1996; Cotești et al., 2014; Hwang et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2014; Yoshida & Busby, 2012).

Research among Ghanaians has many advantages. First, there is limited empirical data related to the interconnectedness of these key variables of interest in this population. Findings will therefore produce empirical evidence for behaviors that promote marital well-being or trigger conflict, especially considering cultural perceptions associated with marital issues. As a people group with rich cultural, family, and collectivist worldview, an empirical understanding of these issues pertinent to the Ghanaian population will generate and promote healthy and non-threatening dialog on relationship topics, with the hope of supporting couples, children, and families from the devastation and silence that often riddles conflictual marital relationships. Findings will also expose similarities and differences in conflictual topics/issues among Ghanaians who live in different dominant cultures, as the population of Ghanaians in the diaspora continue to increase, while still connected to their roots. Last, the study will provide significant information to professional and lay counselors in Ghana and abroad working with Ghanaians, and multicultural couples in general.

### *Purpose of Study*

Based on existing literature and guided by these theoretical frameworks, it was therefore hypothesized that positive behaviors would be associated with marital satisfaction, while negative behaviors will be associated with dissatisfaction. Second, couples living in Ghana would have different factors associated with satisfaction and dissatisfaction compared to those living outside Ghana. Finally, we expected that exposure to parents' intimate partner violence and lower family emotional health would be significantly associated with insecure adult romantic attachment styles and marital dissatisfaction. To achieve these goals and the quest to collect data from participants in the diaspora, an online survey was designed for the study.

## **Methodology**

### *Research design*

A correlational design was adopted for this study along with data collection exclusively conducted online using a survey designed in Google Forms.

## Sample Characteristics

A convenience sample of 533 participants was recruited as part of a large mixed-methods online survey. Of these participants, 231 were married (43%), 148 (28%) were single, and 96 (18.4%) were in a relationship. The remaining were either widowed (2), separated (7), or divorced (10). This study focuses on the married sample only ( $N = 231$ ) since the divorced/separated group was underpowered and singles were not asked questions about marriage. Participants consisted of 59% female, with ages ranging from 24 to 76 years of age ( $M = 40.90$ ,  $SD = 9.89$ ). Of those individuals, 97% self-identified as Ghanaians, with 64% living in Ghana, while the rest lived abroad (across 10 countries). [Table 1](#) outlines demography of this sample.

## Procedure

In 2018, participants were recruited via Ghanaian social media groups (WhatsApp and Facebook) to complete an anonymous online survey. Participants who voluntarily consented to participation received questions related to attachment styles, family dynamics, relationship satisfaction/dissatisfaction, premarital counseling questions, and demographic information. Using skip patterns, participants responded to the appropriate questions based on their marital status (married/divorced/separated/in a relationship/cohabiting/widowed/single). The whole study and survey protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the first author. All data was collected anonymously, with no identifying information; therefore, responses cannot be lined/traced back to participants. Data was collected over a secure market research platform and stored on an encrypted password protected external hard drive assigned for data storage. The lead researchers have access to the data storage portal.

## Measures

*Adult romantic attachment* ([Shaver & Hazan, 1993](#)). This is a three-item self-report of adult romantic attachment based on Mary Ainsworth's original work on the three main types of attachment patterns ([Ainsworth et al., 1978; 2015](#)). Participants were asked to reflect on their romantic relationships (emotional or sexual intimacy) and select one of three short scenarios that best fit them. The three styles were secure, anxious, and avoidant. For example, the description for anxious romantic attachment style has the following scenario: I find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I often worry that my partner does not really love me or won't want to stay with me. I want to get very close to my partner, and this sometimes scares people away ([Shaver & Hazan, 1993](#)). This scale has high reliability

and validity (Shaver & Hazan, 1993) and has been translated and used in other languages and cross-cultural studies by others in Likert scale format where the three types were still evident based on factor analyses (e.g., Mikulincer & Erev, 1991; Pines, 2004).

**The Marital Problem Analysis Questionnaire** (Harley, 1986; 2017) is a two-part survey created by Willard F. Harley, Jr. to examine the positive and negative behaviors that predict marital (dis)satisfaction. This study used the first part of the survey and adapted some of the questions to provide clarity and better suit our target population. While the original study had 10 positive and six negative behaviors, our study items consisted of eleven positive and eight negative behaviors to assess marital (dis)satisfaction. Examples of additional negative and positive questions added to the original questions were physical abuse/beating/slaps, intimidation and fear, infidelity, and financial accountability. Examples of modified items were: (a) *domestic support* revised to *help with household chores* and (b) *angry outbursts* was modified *angry outbursts and insults*. For questions on negative behaviors (e.g., annoying habits and infidelity), the items were scored on a four-point scale of 0 = not a problem at all to 3 = serious problem enough to break up our marriage if unresolved. Higher scores indicate more dissatisfaction. For positive behaviors (e.g., sexual fulfillment and companionship), the items were also scored on a four-point scale 0 = *very dissatisfied* to 3 = *very satisfied*. Higher scores indicate higher relationship satisfaction. The reliability for this instrument was high with  $\alpha = .91$  for positive behaviors and  $\alpha = .94$  for negative behaviors for this study sample.

**Exposure to intimate partner violence (EIPV).** The authors created four items that asked participants how often mother (mother figure) and father (father figure) were (a) verbally and (b) physically abusive to their spouse, during the participant's upbringing. The EIPV items were scored on a four-point scale with 0 = *N/A, lived with only one parent*, 1 = *never*, 2 = *occasionally*, and 3 = *often*. During analyses, 0 will be recorded as missing, and the four items summed on a three-point scale such that higher scores implied higher childhood exposure to intimate partner violence. The four-item scale was highly reliable. Cronbach alpha for this sample was  $\alpha = .81$ .

**Other marriage/family-related questions.** The authors asked three additional questions to augment the questions asked. They were (1) Participant's overall marital satisfaction and (2) rate of emotional health of their marriage. The overall marital satisfaction question was scored on the same scale as positive behaviors. The emotional health questions were scored on a five-point scale with 0 = not at all emotionally healthy and 4 = very emotionally healthy.

**Demographics.** Demography questions for this married sample include age, sex, childhood family structure, nationality, education, country, and area (city vs. countryside vs. suburban) of current residence.

## Results

Correlational and regression analysis were conducted to assess the hypotheses of the study. [Table 1](#) presents the means and descriptives of the sample. Bivariate correlation analyses between the key variables for this study were run and show that age was significantly and negatively associated with negative behaviors in marriage ( $r = -.15$ ), country of residence ( $r = -.16$ ), avoidant attachment ( $r = -.17$ ), positively associated with education ( $r = .17$ ), gender (male;  $r = .36$ ), and secure attachment ( $r = .21$ ). In other words, younger participants were more likely to exhibit more negative behaviors in marriage, live abroad, and exhibit more avoidant attachment styles, while older participants were more likely to be male, live in Ghana, and report being securely attached. In addition, higher negative behaviors in marriage were significantly associated with poor marital health ( $r = -.37$ ), fewer positive behaviors in marriage ( $r = -.32$ ), less secure attachment ( $r = -.18$ ), and more anxious attachment ( $r = .21$ ). The reverse patterns were seen with positive behaviors too. Exposure to verbal parent intimate partner violence during childhood was significantly and negatively associated with current emotional health ( $r = -.22$ ). Besides age, gender did not significantly predict any other variables. See [Table 2](#) for correlations across all variables.

### *Positive and Negative Behaviors associated with Marital Satisfaction*

Regression analyses ([Table 3](#)) were conducted to test the three main hypotheses. To examine which behaviors were associated with marital satisfaction, stepwise linear regressions were conducted where both positive and negative behaviors were regressed on marital satisfaction. Since three covariates—age, gender, and education—did not significantly predict marital satisfaction, they were excluded in all models. Results showed that for the married sample, four positive behaviors and one negative behavior were positively associated with increased marital satisfaction. They were affection ( $\beta = .39, p < .001$ ), companionship ( $\beta = .25, p = .01$ ), commitment to the family ( $\beta = .15, p = .01$ ), financial support ( $\beta = .13, p = .02$ ), and physical abuse/slaps ( $\beta = .25, p < .001$ ). Overall, the eleven positive behaviors examined accounted for 63% of variable in marital satisfaction ( $\text{Adj}R^2 = .626, SE = .52, p = .023$ ). Second, three negative behaviors—annoying habits ( $\beta = -.29, p < .001$ ), selfishness ( $\beta = -.23, p = .00$ ), and disrespect ( $\beta = -.28, p = .00$ )—were associated with lower marital satisfaction (i.e., dissatisfaction). All eight

negative behaviors examined accounted for 34% of variable in marital satisfaction ( $\text{Adj}R^2=.335$ ,  $SE=.695$ ,  $p=.001$ ).

To address hypothesis two, which examined marital satisfaction for those who lived in Ghana versus those who lived abroad, independent samples t-tests were run for (a) the positive and negative behaviors associated with marital satisfaction and (b) overall marital satisfaction. Results showed that there was no significant mean difference in marital satisfaction reported between those living in Ghana and those living abroad. However, with regards to positive and negative behaviors, the only behavior with significant difference was physical abuse/beatings/slaps. The average rate of physical abuse/beatings/slaps reported by those living in Ghana was .91 versus .54 for those who live abroad. Thus, those abroad reported significantly lower abuse/slaps/beatings as being associated with marital satisfaction compared to those living in Ghana ( $t = -2.30$ ,  $df=197.8$ ,  $p=.02$ ).

For hypothesis three, we expected that exposure to parents' intimate partner violence, and lower emotional health of family in childhood, would be associated with insecure adult romantic attachment styles, and lower marital satisfaction (i.e., dissatisfaction). Results showed that of the various types of IPV, only exposure to maternal physical abuse of father was significantly associated with lower participant's marital satisfaction ( $\beta = -.23$ ,  $p = .03$ ). Second, higher emotional health was positively associated with secure romantic attachment style ( $\beta = .21$ ,  $p = .02$ ) and higher marital satisfaction ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $p = .00$ ). Finally, when romantic attachment styles were regressed on marital satisfaction, anxious romantic style was significantly associated with lower marital satisfaction ( $B = -1.18$ ;  $\beta = -.33$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Discussion

This study examined the effect of positive and negative behaviors, childhood attachment, and exposure to intimate partner violence on marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction among Ghanaians. The study also sought to examine if the behaviors associated with marital satisfaction varied by cultural input (i.e., living in Ghana vs. abroad). Results from the online survey showed that four positive behaviors (affection, commitment to family, companionship, and financial support) and one negative behavior (physical abuse/slaps) were positively associated with increased marital satisfaction. The negative behaviors that were significantly associated with lower marital satisfaction (dissatisfaction) were annoying habits, selfishness, and disrespect. Additionally, the only behavior with a significant difference in responses between Ghanaians living in Ghana and those abroad was physical abuse/beatings/slaps. In other words, Ghanaians who lived abroad reported significantly lower levels of abuse/beatings in their marital relationship compared to those who lived in Ghana. One interesting observation noted was that although there

was a significant difference in reporting, the mean difference was numerically small. Overall, the significant positive and negative behaviors identified support results from studies among couples in different countries that have found similar behaviors to be associated with marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction, respectively (Abane, 2003). This finding also lends support to the idea of universal positive and negative factors associated with marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Schmitt et al., 2014). Future studies should probe further if the nature and levels of these behaviors are similar or different across cultures.

The three significant negative behaviors associated with lower marital satisfaction (dissatisfaction) were annoying habits, selfishness, and disrespect. These behaviors are consistent with other results (Carstensen et al., 1995; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019) and from a Ghanaian study of divorce cases (Osafo et al., 2021). The authors found that among reasons for divorces, females reported disrespect from husband and rigid masculine roles as negative behaviors that led to initiating a divorce. It was interesting that dishonesty, infidelity, angry outburst, and intimidation were not also significantly associated with marital dissatisfaction in this sample. It may be that although they prevailed in some relationships, they were not predominant in occurrence among this sample. Second, it is also possible that although these negative behaviors prevail in relationships, (e.g., Osafo et al., 2021), they were not endorsed because culturally, these behaviors can be underplayed and perceived as normal behaviors or forgivable in marital relationships (Osei-Tutu et al., 2019). This assertion is plausible because infidelity and angry outburst by males in a marriage, for instance, are common in the Ghanaian society. In addition, socially/culturally accepted norms include notions such as extra-marital affairs are normal, and not worth a divorce, particularly when there are children in the marriage (e.g., Abane, 2003; Osei-Tutu et al., 2019; Sedziafa, Tenkorang, & Owusu, 2019).

Regarding companionship as a positive behavior, conclusions from the current study are consistent with existing studies showing that married couples who are friends are happy and satisfied with their marriage (Ariyo & Mgbeokwii, 2019; Firat & Okanlı, 2019). Relatedly, commitment to family and marital satisfaction as positive behaviors also resonate with other studies which indicate that commitment to family and in some cases commitment to spouse strongly predicts marital satisfaction, love and adjustment, and a negative relationship with marital problems (Clements & Swensen, 2000). Commitment is one factor that significantly predicts marital satisfaction among married couples around the globe (see Clements & Swensen, 2000; Givertz et al., 2016). Furthermore, financial support has a key role in marital satisfaction. Consistent with findings from our study, Archuleta et al. (2011) also noted that couples who are satisfied with finances have stability in their relationships. Providing financial support in marriage has proven crucial

to the quality of marital relationship (Britt & Huston, 2012). Couples who argued about their finances tended to have higher levels of negative communication and conflict, which resulted in lower relationship quality and increased thoughts or discussion about divorce (Dew et al., 2012; Stanley et al., 2002). With this in mind, marriage and family therapists should recognize the financial histories of couples and how that can affect communication about their finances and ultimately lead to a better marital relationship (Baisden et al., 2018).

One intriguing finding of this study was the positive relationship between a negative behavior - physical abuse/slaps/beatings - and marital satisfaction. Often times, research establishes that intimate partner violence, with physical abuse as a component, strongly predicts dissolution in couple relationships (e.g., Zlotnick et al., 2006). However, consistent with our findings, studies are showing that many couples that experience IPV including physical abuse do not separate. This corroborates with a study by Williams and Frieze (2005) who found that violent couples were still relatively satisfied in their relationship. The current finding is both interesting and thought provoking and may be an indication that physical abuse/slaps/beatings in some cases may not be perceived as abuse, due to the prevalence and normalization of physical abuse/slaps/beatings in the culture. For example, there has been a persistent acceptance of wife beating in many cultures, including those in Ghana. According to the Ghana Demographic and Health survey (Ghana-DHS 2015), 28% of women and 13% of men justify wife beating as a form of discipline for reasons such as “if the wife burns the food,” “leaves the house without permission,” or “refuses to have sex with husband.” Overall, there seems to be an ongoing decline in these attitudes in Ghana (e.g., 37% of women vs. 22% men in 2008, to 28% women vs. 13% of men in 2014; Ghana DHS, 2014).

Another behavior that may also lead to the normalization of slaps/beatings in marriage is the increased prevalence of physical punishment of children. For example, according to the 2017/18 Ghana Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (Ghana MICS), 76% of children between the ages of 1 and 14 years experienced physical punishment which included shaking, hitting, or slapping on the hand/arm/leg, hitting on the bottom or elsewhere on the body with a hard object, and spanking or hitting on the bottom with a bare hand, while 17% of children aged 1–14 experience severe physical punishment which includes hitting or slapping on the face, head or ears, and beating over and over as hard as possible. Such parenting behaviors on children coupled with childhood exposure to wife beating perpetuate such negative behaviors as normal, typical, and acceptable (Gámez-Guadix et al., 2012), as proposed by the bioecological framework of human development and intergenerational patterns of behavior framework (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Hwang et al., 2019; Islam et al., 2014; Yoshida & Busby, 2012).

Therefore, physical abuse/beatings/slaps should not be endorsed as an acceptable form of modifying behavior for children or wives (wife beating) as experiencing or witnessing these forms of violent discipline can lead to the normalization of physical abuse/beatings/slaps in future relationships and marriages. These findings are intriguing and provide a basis for further research into IPV, potential mediating and interacting factors, and relationship satisfaction. For example, while education and awareness have generally been viewed as mediating factors in reducing IPV, this sample, a very educated sample (61% with degrees above bachelors/first degree education), was not exempt of abuse/beatings/slaps in marriage. Future mixed-methods research would therefore be necessary to examine correlates further, with the hope of contextual intervention.

Concerning effects of general and romantic attachment styles on marital satisfaction, findings from the present study revealed that persons with secure attachments are more satisfied with their adult romantic relationships and more likely to be in a relationship than those in avoidant-fearful attachment style (Gleeson & Fitzgerald, 2014; Vorria et al., 2007). The percentages of individuals who identified with the three types of attachment support the cross-cultural notion that in any culture, there are more securely attached individuals compared to all the types of insecure attachment (Schmitt et al., 2004). Narratives from participants in different studies have shown that persons who described their parents as caring and affectionate had secure relationships compared to those who described their parents as cold and distant (Holland & Roisman, 2010). In the current study, the positive association between anxious childhood attachment and avoidant-anxious romantic relationships corroborates existing research which indicates that such relationships result from inconsistent, unfair, and distrust parental relationships (Vorria et al., 2007).

Last, in the current sample, only childhood exposure to maternal physical abuse of father was associated with lower marital satisfaction as adults. Maternal physical abuse of father is against the norm in many societies including Ghana. Such occurrences will typically be associated with a high degree of disorder and turbulence which would have a negative effect on the offspring in the household. The reverse (i.e., paternal physical violence of mother) is however normalized to an extent in many cultures including Ghana (as indicated by the Ghana DHS data). Such societal norms therefore emphasize a lower (unequal) status for women and may explain why exposure to physical violence of father on mother showed non-significant associations with marital satisfaction. It also explains why intimate partner violence is transmitted down generations (Abane, 2003; Margolin & Gordis, 2004).

### *Implications of Findings*

These findings have a variety of implications. First, with increasing multi-cultural marriages, it is important to understand the nuances of positive behaviors, for example, affection, and negative behaviors (e.g., abuse and beatings) and the cross-cultural meanings/bearings associated with them. Second, although positive behaviors (e.g., affection) and negative behaviors (e.g., abuse/beatings) may co-occur, and the marital relationship may be deemed satisfactory, there is still a negative effect on the overall emotional health of the family, as witnessed by children.

Furthermore, findings about physical abuse/beatings/slaps as being prevalent among Ghanaians regardless of location show the continuity of culturally acceptable behaviors even when far from one's country of origin. Such findings buttress the importance of understanding clients' cultural and family background on affection and other behaviors brought into therapy. It is also important to understand how the beliefs and values of the dominant culture the couple resides in may or may not align with the couple's perceptions of marriage, satisfaction, and behaviors, prior to providing effective care.

Last, findings provide insight into views associated with marital satisfaction and provide a foundation for further discussions on culture or social norms and the promotion of healthier behaviors exhibited by both males and females for better marital satisfaction and well-being.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

The limitations of this study open opportunities for future studies. A limitation of this study is the self-reported nature of data collection. Future studies should use in-depth interviews and further examine the cultural nuances associated with marital satisfaction, specifically the mechanism through which physical abuse/beatings/slaps are associated with satisfaction. Another limitation was the non-distinction between physical abuse/slaps/beatings in the study. Although the latter two constructs fall broadly under the abuse, future studies should examine the types and severity of abuse and also distinguish by gender and other demographic variables including ethnicity. Another limitation was not asking participants if their spouses were also Ghanaian. Although responses and findings were associated with Ghanaian participants, future studies should examine if spouses of the same or diverse cultural backgrounds show variability in responses. On the debriefing page of the survey, participants were not provided referrals for counseling centers per the questions asked in the survey. Future studies should consider providing such services. Finally, a larger sample of Ghanaians living in Ghana and abroad may help us understand further the similarities and differences in marital behaviors despite living in different cultures.

## Conclusion

In summary, positive and negative factors associated with marital satisfaction and dissatisfaction, respectively, were similar to behaviors of people in other countries. However, beatings/slaps were one unique negative behavior associated with marital satisfaction in this sample. Based on existing national data, we believe this finding is linked to cultural acceptance of beatings and abuse in relationships and may indicate cultural perceptions in how people view marital satisfaction in the midst of negative behaviors. Second, childhood exposure to parent's marital conflict and poor emotional home environment was associated with insecure adult romantic attachment and marital dissatisfaction. With current understanding of the intergenerational transmission of behaviors, it is essential that we continue to pursue the education and promotion of emotionally healthy family environments and strengthening of marriages as they will in turn benefit the well-being of the next generation.

**Table 1.** Descriptives of Married Sample (N = 231).

Variable Name	Variable Label	Frequency	Percent, %
Ghanaian	Yes	224	97.0
	No	2	.8
	Missing	5	2.2
Gender	Male (0)	93	40.3
	Female (1)	136	58.9
	Missing	2	.8
Education	Junior/secondary school	3	1.3
	Tertiary (polytechnic/ college/university)	86	37.4
	Graduate level (masters or doctorate)	141	61.3
	Missing	1	.4
Country of residence (Ghana = 1; abroad = 0)	Ghana (1)	148	64.1
	USA	44	19.0
	UK	18	7.8
	Others*	21	9.09
Region of country	Urban/city	131	56.7
	Suburban/residential	89	38.5
	Rural/countryside	7	3.0
	Missing	4	1.7

(continued)

**Table I.** (continued)

Variable Name	Variable Label	Frequency	Percent, %
Attachment	Secure	165	71.4
	Anxious	13	5.6
	Avoidant	46	19.9
Family structure	Single parent, divorced	29	12.6
	Single, never married	3	1.3
	Parent/relative in domestic partnership	14	6.1
	Two parent, remarried	33	14.3
	Married 2 biological parent	151	65.4
	Missing	1	.4
Exposure to mother's verbal abuse toward father	Never	134	58
	Occasionally/very often	78	33.8
	N/A lived in a single parent home	19	8.2
Exposure to father's verbal abuse toward mother	Never	132	57.1
	Occasionally/very often	81	35.1
	N/A lived in a single parent home	18	7.8
Exposure to mother's physical abuse toward father	Never	198	85.7
	Occasionally/very often	13	5.6
	N/A lived in a single parent home	19	8.2
Exposure to father's physical abuse toward mother	Never	178	77.1
	Occasionally/very often	33	14.3
	N/A lived in a single parent home	18	7.8
	Missing	2	.9

Note. \*Others = participants from 7 other countries were Australia, Belgium, Finland, Germany, New Zealand, Nigeria, and Portugal.

**Table 2.** Correlations Among Variables.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Age	-	-.36*	.17*	-.16*	-.10	.12	-.15*	-.09	-.07	.11	.02	.04	-.17**	-.10	.21**	-.02
2. Female		-	.02	.07	.06	-.04	-.07	.09	.05	.10	.02	.02	-.11	-.05	.13	-.05
3. Education (graduate)			-	-.02	-.06	.07	.01	.01	.01	.09	.07	.10	-.01	-.08	.05	.00
4. Live in Ghana				-	.26**	-.23**	.11	.04	.03	.06	-.03	-.09	.04	.11	-.09	-.00
5. City <sup>b</sup>					-	-.94**	.12	.03	.01	.06	-.09	-.10	-.01	.10	-.05	-.01
6. Suburban						-	-.14*	-.01	.01	-.06	.04	.10	.04	-.12	.03	.03
7. Negative behaviors <sup>d</sup>							-	-.32**	-.37**	-.01	-.01	-.07	.08	.21**	-.18**	-.35**
8. Positive behaviors <sup>d</sup>								-	.81**	.22**	-.03	-.07	.00	-.30**	.16*	.77**
9. Marital health									-	.23**	-.05	-.12	-.08	-.26**	.21**	.85**
10. Emotional health										-	.22**	-.09	-.12	-.16*	.20**	.28**
11. Verbal IPV											-	.67**	-.03	.06	-.01	-.08
12. Physical IPV												-	.04	.07	-.08	-.13
13. Avoidant													-	-.13	-.85**	-.06
14. Anxious														-	-.42**	-.31**
15. Secure															-	.22**
16. Marital satisfaction																-
Mean	40.90	.59	.61	.64	.58	.39	6.77	23.20	3.13	2.52	2.67	2.06	.21	.06	.74	3.15
SD	.65	.49	.49	.48	.50	.49	6.33	7.12	.99	1.08	1.27	.83	.40	.23	.44	.85

**Table 3.** Regression Analyses Examining the Associations Between All Predictors on Marital Satisfaction (N = 231).

Predictor	B	SE	p-Value
<i>Positive Behaviors</i>			
Affection	.39	.07	<.001
Sexual fulfillment	.08	.06	.18
Physical attractiveness	.05	.04	.32
<b>Companionship</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Admiration	.15	.05	.11
Fun together	.09	.06	.21
Honesty and openness	.10	.05	.10
Help with household	-.001	.06	.98
<b>Financial support</b>	<b>.13</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.02</b>
Financial accountability	.04	.05	.59
<b>Commitment to our family</b>	<b>.15</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>.00</b>
<i>Negative behaviors</i>			
<b>Annoying habits</b>	<b>-.29</b>	<b>.09</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
<b>Selfishness</b>	<b>-.23</b>	<b>.08</b>	<b>.003</b>
<b>Disrespect</b>	<b>-.28</b>	<b>.07</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>
Dishonesty	-.00	.07	.32
Infidelity	-.06	.08	.45
Angry outbursts/insults	-.10	.06	.48
Intimidation and fear	-.3-04	.07	.35
<b>Physical abuse/beatings/slaps</b>	<b>.25</b>	<b>.05</b>	<b>&lt;.001</b>

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### ORCID iDs

Esther K. Malm  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5798-6128>

Mabel Oti-Boadi  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5892-9021>

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