

Demographic Criteria for Marriage Readiness and Implications for Future Marital Satisfaction among Some University-Level Emerging Adults in Cameroon

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Abstract

The decision to marry is often influenced by marriage readiness factors which provide the bases for whom to marry, when to marry, why one must marry, and even future marital behavior. Current research focuses on internally-driven, subjective and psychological marriage readiness indicators among today's youth with fewer studies on the importance of demographic criteria. This paper presents descriptive data on demographic criteria for marriage readiness and implications for future marital satisfaction among some university-level emerging adults in Cameroon. A sample of 124 emerging adults, aged 18-30 in the University of Buea in Cameroon responded to the Criteria for Marriage Readiness questionnaire whose reliability was 0.848. Demographic criteria defined in the instrument were isolated, analyzed and checked against their relevance and level of importance for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction. Findings showed that 59.33% of emerging adults agreed that the demographic criteria defined were necessary, even though contested by 40.67% who felt that they were no longer necessary criteria for marriage readiness. Again, a significant 36.7% of participants said the demographic criteria were very important for future marital satisfaction. Meanwhile, 20.9%, 22.8% and 19.6% respectively felt that the demographic criteria defined were quite important, only slightly important and not at all important. Additionally, some important shifts emerged from the findings. For example, while participants considered leaving home as necessary and important for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction, they did not consider homeownership as a necessary and important criterion for marriage. A common pathway to marriage after leaving home was independently renting an apartment home, especially for men. Again, while it is an appropriate financial behavior and a requirement for men to be financially viable to support their marriage and the success of it in the future, it is not a necessary and important criterion for women who are largely not perceived as financial providers in the marriage relationship. Finally, the cohabitation paradox, suggesting that cohabitation before marriage is not a necessary and important criterion for marriage and future marital success was also found. These findings align with previous ones which found demographic criteria as still necessary and important indicators of marriage readiness and pathways to future marital satisfaction, especially in collectivistic cultures. Other studies also found social and economic changes that rendered some traditional factors no longer important, or far less important than they have always been. It was concluded that while social changes have led to more subjective criteria for marriage readiness among emerging adults today, demographic criteria are still widely held up in some non-Western societies and should not be neglected.

Key words: Marriage readiness, Demographic criteria, Marital satisfaction, Emerging adults, University-level.

Introduction

Marriage is still highly regarded as an important institution in most societies, but especially in non-Western collectivistic traditional societies. Most likely to occur during or shortly after adolescence, the decision to marry in many cultures is often influenced by marriage readiness indicators. These indicators are important because they provide the framework for decisions about whom to marry, when to marry, why one must marry, and even future marital behavior and expectations (Larson & Lamont, 2005).

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Common marriage readiness indicators include age, marriage and family life preparedness, socioemotional intelligence, family life knowledge, and marital competence (Ningrum, Latifah & Krisnatuti, 2021; Badger, 2005). Ghalili *et al.* (2012) characterized these readiness indicators into physical, mental, financial, moral, emotional, contextual-social, interpersonal and marital life skills readiness. Meanwhile marriage itself readiness has been exemplified as a concrete collateral for future marital quality, well-being, and overall life satisfaction among married adults. Several studies have shown that marriage readiness reduces the risk of divorce among couples; and that it is a significant predictor of later marital satisfaction (e.g., Ningrum, Latifah & Krisnatuti, 2021; Karunia & Rahaju, 2019; Ghalili *et al.*, 2012). While still strongly held as an important life event in most societies, the average age at first marriage has risen significantly among most young people today. Many young people are delaying marriage and marrying much later than compared to previous generations (Lo-oh, 2023). Apparently, it takes longer today to get ready for marriage, and marriage readiness indicators have significantly shifted away from previously held readiness factors.

Decades ago, entry into marriage was relatively short and young people emerged from childhood or adolescence with fewer marriage readiness factors and immediately transitioned to marriage and marital life. Readiness factors were largely demographic and simply required in most cases, the attainment of some adult roles such as school completion, employment, financial independence, and exit from parental residence. In some situations, age or age-related factors were the only determinants. It sufficed to have attained a certain age, to have acquired an age-related characteristic such as growing to full height or developing an adult-looking physical appearance, then one was judged to be ready for marriage. Because fewer marriage readiness factors existed, threats to marital quality, future well-being, and overall life satisfaction for married people in adulthood were also fewer. The demands that accompanied marriage were fewer and marriages lasted longer, with more married people looking happier in their marriages than they do today. Even though marriage readiness factors have become diverse and more complex than they used to be, only few young people consider readiness to marry as an important issue to address prior to marriage. Problems of marital dissatisfaction are therefore not only a consequence of not having attained certain marriage readiness indicators at the time of marriage but also a product of not having asked and answered the right questions prior to marriage.

Even though the transition to adulthood has become more subjective with fewer consideration for demographic criteria, the criteria for marriage readiness is still largely determined by demographic factors in most non-Western traditional societies. Perhaps that is why the delay of marriage today is seen as more or less an intentional aspect of marriage preparation (Arnett, 2000) during which period, young people work towards meeting established structured demographic criteria for marriage readiness. For instance, dating, cohabitation and high-quality intimate relationships have become more common today in replacement of early marriage (Lo-oh, 2023), and it has become commonplace to extend the years of education or schooling for higher degrees to secure a better life before marriage, find a well-paying job and date before settling down in marriage. In some societies, like among the Kom of the northwest, Cameroon, not only are young Kom men expected to marry, but it is more dignifying to do so after having exited from the parental household, and even more exalting after having constructed or built one's own homestead, a compound. It, therefore, becomes a common marriage readiness factor among young Kom men to not only exit from parental residence and maybe rent, but also to own their own homesteads, built by themselves before deciding to marry. If marriages work in these societies, they do because young people met certain demographic criteria prior to their marriage; and if they fail, then certain criteria may not have been met or certain demographic-related questions were not asked, talk less answering. Many studies show that the lack of readiness to marry has an impact on future marital satisfaction, with incidents of marital discord and disharmony, risks of separation and divorce, financial and economic problems, questionable marital skills and behaviors and stagnated forms of childcare (e.g. Ningrum *et al.* 2021; Sari *et al.*, 2016). This paper examines demographic criteria for marriage readiness and their implications for future marital satisfaction among emerging adults in the University of Buea in Cameroon.

Literature review

According to Holman & Lee (1997) readiness is a state of preparation beyond action that forms and directs action, behavior and even attitudes. It is a state of preparedness or stability to undertake a particular task. With readiness, an individual has acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, resources, and mindset to effectively engage in a specific endeavour. This means that readiness is a determinant factor and would predict the type of behavior that would happen if readiness were reactivated prior to the action considered. It can be observed in various contexts, such as personal development, education, career advancement, or life transitions such as marriage. Related to marriage, Larson (1988) defined marriage readiness as a subjective evaluation of one's own preparedness to take on the responsibilities and challenges of marriage.

It is a state of being emotionally, mentally, and practically prepared to enter into a committed marital relationship. Rahmah&Kurniawati (2021) summarize marriage readiness as age readiness and the accumulation of physical, financial, mental, emotional, social, moral, interpersonal, intellectual, and marital life skills that work for marriage. To Holman and Lee (1997), marriage readiness is one's ability of mate selection which is abundantly relevant to avert future marital dissatisfaction and incidents of marital discord, disharmony, separation and divorce, economic problems, questionable marital behaviors that hurt high-quality satisfying marriages. Thus, marriage readiness is a key indicator for future marital behavior, and the timing of the transition into marriage is given by one's perceived readiness to marry (*Ghalili et al., 2012*). According to Rahmah&Kurniawati (2021), unprepared marriage can lead to domestic violence which is a risk factor of divorce. Meanwhile, Larson & Holman (1994) found that background and context, including demographic characteristics and events, individual traits and behaviors, and couple traits and interactions predict how happy and stable one's marriage becomes.

There is a clear distinction between demographic and subjective psychological criteria for marriage readiness, with differing implications on future marital quality, well-being, and overall life satisfaction among married adults. Even though subjective than demographic criteria are becoming more important, research has shown that it somehow takes demographic factors to pursue and achieve or attain subjective criteria (e.g. Furstenberg, 2010). For example, it may take age, educational attainment, employment and socio-economic status, financial independence and overall adult role attainment to become responsible, emotionally and socially mature and stable to sustain long-term intimate relationships, survive marriage and raise a family that is happy, visionary and prosperous. Paying attention to the importance of demographic characteristics, Holman & Lee (1997) found that socio-demographic characteristics such as income, education, and age are strongly related to self-perceived readiness for marriage, and those who meet these criteria prior to marriage exhibit marital behaviors and attitudes that suggest that their marriages are thriving. Recognizing these claims, Badger (2005) also noted the importance of demographic factors and argued that individuals who are older and who have a certain level of educational experience, financial security, and a strong support base, and who report the quality of the relationship with their partner as good are more likely to feel ready to marry.

Several studies now show that for both men and women, education is positively associated with marriage readiness, marital quality, wellbeing and satisfaction since education has become a characteristic of young adult earning potential and cultural attractiveness on the marriage market (e.g., McClendon et al., 2014; Cherlin, 2004; Goldstein & Kenney, 2001). Education has been extended to later years among emerging adults with higher education tightly connected to social class, economic standing and access to the marriage market. Finishing education or school as a marriage readiness factor therefore means completing some degree of higher education for most young people. That is why Goldin & Katz (2008) argued that university-educated young adults are on a different economic and social trajectory from their less-educated peers. They have different friends, work at better jobs, and live in wealthier and more-highly educated cities and neighborhoods; and are not only more attractive on the marriage economy but also have greater access to potential spouses that share their preferred characteristics (McClendon et al., 2014; Domina, 2006). For most young people today, therefore, school completion or finishing education, and most likely, higher education (and possibly earning a graduate degree) is a key factor of marriage readiness. According to McClendon et al. (2014), education improves both men's and (now) women's chances of attracting a partner and getting married. According to Thornton et al. (1995), higher education has become a crucial component of a successful transition to adulthood and, as a result, acts as an inevitable prerequisite for marriage for many young adults. A university degree can also indirectly affect marriage readiness through its influence on earnings, job quality, and job security (Fussell, 2002) thereby ensuring future marital quality, wellbeing and satisfaction. According to McClendon et al. (2014), education is also presently viewed as a major component of a person's attractiveness on the marriage market economy with most emerging adults willing to marry someone who is better educated (and has higher income) than themselves (except for some men who may be more willing to marry someone with less education).

Economic and financial independence and long-term financial security are also highly regarded as inescapable demographic factors for marriage readiness with implications for future marital satisfaction and wellbeing. Especially in the context of cohabitation, which is also highly prevalent today, Kennedy & Bumpass (2011) found that job insecurity and economic uncertainty were important for men and women's decisions to marry or cohabit as well as to when (or if) to transition from cohabitation to marriage. In this regard, Raley&Bratter (2004) had young men and women who reported being least willing to marry a partner without or who cannot hold a steady job.

Prior to their marriage today, most emerging and young adults want to be convinced about their partner's long-term economic and financial standing, source of income to sustain the relationship and raise and support a family. That is why financial earnings are now positively associated with marriage readiness for both men and women and have become increasingly important for women's overall position in the marriage market (Sweeney, 2002). Nobody wants to marry a liability and each person wants to enter into marriage with the expectation of a strong, supportive relationship in which each partner is responsible, dependable, and capable of contributing to the well-being of the marriage.

Years gone by, men preferred to have their spouses stay at home and looked after the children and managed the household while they worked to feign for their families. In many traditional societies, men often took on the role of the primary breadwinners while women were expected to stay at home, in the private sphere, where they engaged in invisible, undervalued and unpaid care work such as taking care of the children, and managing the household (Adisa et al., 2019, Maunganidze, 2020). In these societies, men, on the other hand, dominated the public sphere as breadwinners and decision-makers working for a wage. This traditional division of labour was rooted in cultural norms, social expectations, and economic realities that prevailed for much of human history. Today, young men and women are least willing to marry a partner without a steady job or who cannot hold one. In particular, the economics of marriage have changed tremendously. In the past, when relatively few wives worked, marriage enhanced the economic status of women more than that of men but in recent decades, the economic gains associated with marriage have been greater for men than for women (Fry & Cohn, 2010). Consequently, there is a greater consideration among men of their partners' or spouses' employment status, job security, and long-term economic and financial stability. Full-time employment or an established career orientation prior to marriage is an important signal to potential partners of an individual's economic prospects (Sweeney, 2002). Sometimes, other demographic achievements such as level of education may serve as pointers to future economic and financial wellbeing, especially for young people who have not yet established long-term labor market positions.

Not too different from the necessity for work and job security, financial and economic independence is also exemplified as an important marriage readiness factor and pathway to a lasting satisfying marriage life. Many studies show that financial and money-related disputes cause a lot of tension in marriages and relationships, and most divorces are a consequence of these disputes (e.g., Aronson, 2008). But many other studies also show that a strong financial standing and relative economic and financial stability is a concrete guarantee for marriage readiness and future marital and familial satisfaction and well-being (e.g., Diah & Ismail, 2020). As a readiness factor, financial independence brings to partners the assurance that their partner will have the ability to pay for their own living expenses with their income or wealth, without depending on others (Amberger, 2022); and that of course, they might become a support base to each other should they marry. In fact, knowing that someone is financially capable and ready for marriage helps to predict the future economic and financial behavior of the partner and gives a sense of hope that the future is bright, secure, and one can comfortably partner with the other in a marriage project that is endowed with several financial and economic options and prospects. Rodgers (2011) notes that the ultimate tool for solving future financial tensions in marital relationships is financial independence and prospective couples want to ascertain this at the onset of their marriage. For most young people today, financial and economic concerns are among the reasons for delaying marriage (Muraco & Curran, 2012); and achieving economic and financial freedom is an important factor of marriage readiness among most young people. Among the several marriage preparation paradoxes are dating and cohabitation. According to Carroll (2018), marriage preparation paradoxes are behaviors believed to increase one's chances of marriage success, which actually, on average, rather diminish the chances of having a loving and lasting marriage relationship. Sadly, the many promoted pathways to marriage and presumed marriage readiness indicators that many young adults today are pursuing in order to be better prepared or ready for a lasting marriage is actually yielding the reverse of what they wish. According to Carroll (2018), the best example is the cohabitation paradox in which most young people, and their parents and families, consider cohabitation prior to marriage as a "test drive" that would lessen the risk and chance of a later divorce. Unfortunately, just the opposite is phenomenal as cohabitation before marriage is rather historically associated with greater odds of divorce, and no study to show cohabitation as a protective factor of divorce (Carroll, 2018). Sadly, Badger (2005) found that the culture of marriage among young people today subscribes to a tendency towards divorce avoidance, rather than marriage readiness and they believe that they should experience a longer period of singlehood before marriage to be able to establish a high-quality relationship later. Again, yielding to a longer single life before marriage, which means unnecessarily delaying marriage until the later years only suggests another marriage readiness paradox that rather prepares the individual for a marriage that is doomed than a successful and fulfilling marital experience in the future. While there are benefits to waiting for the right time to get married, there are also potential risks associated with unnecessary delays.

For example, for individuals who want to have children, waiting too long to get married can increase the risks associated with fertility and pregnancy complications. It can also become harder to find a compatible partner and potentially lead to higher divorce rates if individuals settle for a partner who does not meet their needs. Finally, for some individuals, delaying marriage can lead to feelings of uncertainty or insecurity about the future of the relationship.

Another important variable around these marriage preparation and readiness paradoxes is dating. The question is whether to date before marriage or not. While dating is great and allows for interpersonal understanding among partners, young people are also unfortunately misconceiving it and rather “sowing wild oaths” in quite an uncontrolled manner. That is, they are rather unfortunately investing in far too many sexual relationships during their youth. No doubt, many young people and their parents refer to the emerging adult and young adult time of life as a time of sexual experimentation with a variety of sexual experiences with several people (Carroll, 2018). According to them, young people need to sexually experiment in order to “get it out of their system” so that they will be ready to “settle down” in marriage. Unfortunately, again, Carroll (2018) notes that just the opposite is happening and instead of settling down, they are rather getting worked up. This line of research concludes that sexual experimentation before marriage does nothing to stabilize the individual; rather it gets something awkward into the individual’s system. Several studies show that individuals with greater patterns of sexual promiscuity and multiple sexual partners actually have higher, not lower, chances of divorce when they marry (Khazan, 2018; Paik, 2011; Alvare, 2004). These individuals may develop trust issues, unrealistic expectations, communication problems, and may even carry emotional baggage from past relationships that can affect their ability to fully engage in and trust their current marriage.

Closely related to the sexual experimentation paradox is the “sexual chemistry” paradox by which the current dating culture emphasizes that the partners test their “sexual chemistry” before committing to each other. This validates romantic intimate relationships prior to marriage in the hope of testing sexual compatibility. Sexual chemistry may refer to a strong and often magnetic attraction between two people that is specifically related to their sexual desire and compatibility. It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses a range of factors, both physical and emotional, that contribute to a heightened sexual connection between individuals. Couples who do not test their sexual chemistry prior to marriage are often seen as putting themselves at risk of getting into a relationship that will not satisfy them in the future thereby increasing their chances of later marital dissatisfaction and possible divorce (Carroll, 2018). But some studies rather show that sexual involvement before marriage might establish emotional barriers that may make it difficult to end a bad relationship, putting the partners at higher risk of unhealthy emotional relationships (e.g., Rhoades et al., 2011). Rather, sexual restraint involving the exercise of self-control and discipline when it comes to sexual desires and behaviours and in which commitment precedes sexual activity creates the most effective pattern of reducing the risk of future relationship failure. Sexual restraint involves making conscious choices to delay or limit sexual activity for various reasons, which can include personal values, religious beliefs, emotional considerations, and health concerns but which ultimately have implications for future marital success or failure.

There are therefore possible links of demographic criteria for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction among emerging and young adults. Carroll et al. (2009) already found that marriage readiness is viewed by emerging adults as a process of developing interpersonal competencies, making life-long commitments, and acquiring capacities to care for others; and these are typical determinants of a thriving and successful marriage in the future. Therefore, educational attainment, independent living, employment, financial independence and dating are thought to be important demographic pathways to building quality relationships that lead to successful marriages. If marriages work, they do because some of these demographic criteria are met prior to marriage; and of course if they fail, then some of the criteria were probably not met at the time of marriage. We have seen many studies which suggest that the lack of readiness to marry, especially with respect to having met demographic criteria have impacts on future marital quality and overall satisfaction with the marriage (e.g. Ningrum et al. 2021; Sari et al., 2016). These studies cited incidents of marital discord, risks of separation and divorce, economic problems and questionable marital skills, attitudes and behaviors as resulting from not being demographically ready for marriage at the time of marriage. This paper presents descriptive data on demographic criteria for marriage readiness and implications for future marital satisfaction among some emerging adults in Cameroon. Demographic criteria for marriage readiness can encompass various factors that individuals or couples may consider before entering into marriage. Among them might age, cultural and religious background, level of education, nature of work and career, home ownership, financial independence and behaviour, childbirth, etc.

Methods

Sample

Table 1: Sample description

Demographic data		Frequency	Percentage
Age range	Less than 21	27	21.8
	21-25	72	58.1
	26-30	25	20.1
Gender	Male	37	29.8
	Female	87	70.2
How would you describe yourself as a Cameroonian?	Anglophone/Highlander	65	54.6
	Francophone/Highlander	2	1.7
	Anglophone/Coastal peoples	44	37.0
	Francophone/Coastal peoples	2	1.7
	Francophone/Forest peoples	1	.8
	Anglophone Muslim	3	2.5
	Other	2	1.7
What year of university or graduate school are you in?	1 st year of university	17	13.7
	2 nd year of university	54	43.5
	3 rd year of university	48	38.7
	4 th year of university	1	.8
	5 th year of university	3	2.4
	1 st year of graduate school	1	.8
Religion	Conservative Christian	4	3.2
	Roman Catholic	31	25.0
	Baptist Christian	22	17.7
	Presbyterian Christian	37	29.8
	Pentecostal Christian	26	21.0
	Muslim/Islam	4	3.2
Current marital status	Single (Never married)	103	83.1
	Cohabiting	9	7.3
	Married (First marriage)	11	8.9
	Married but separated	1	.8

Instrument

The *Criteria for Marriage Readiness* questionnaire (Badger, 2005) was used and demographic criteria for marriage readiness defined, isolated, administered, analyzed and cross-examined against their relevance for marriage readiness and level of importance for future marital satisfaction among university-level emerging adults in the University of Buea in Cameroon. Demographic characteristics that were considered include age, gender, sociocultural background, year or level of university studies, religion and current marital status. Meanwhile, the demographic criteria for marriage readiness were defined by finishing education (and professional school), enrollment into professional school with recruitment possibility, exit from parental residence, renting or owning a house, fulltime employment and settling into a long-term career, financial independence, capacity to support the family (for men and women), dating, cohabitation, being able to pay for one's wedding, fully experiencing the single life, and childbirth. Against each demographic criterion defined, respondents were expected to first state whether it was necessary for marriage readiness or not. Then, depending on their response, they further stated the level of importance of the said criterion for future marital satisfaction. Against necessary demographic criteria for marriage readiness, participants ticked "Yes" or "No" that the item cited was a necessary criterion, or that the item cited was not a necessary criterion. The level of importance of the criteria for future marital satisfaction was defined by *very important*, *quite important*, *slightly important*, and *not important at all* and participants identified with any of the measures.

Table 2: Reliability of instrument

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

A good level of consistency was observed in participant appreciation of necessary criteria for marriage readiness (0.794); and the level of importance of the said criteria (0.848). The instrument was not just judged worthy but also reliable in addressing questions of necessary demographic criteria for marriage readiness.

Data analysis

The EpiData version 7.0 for entering data was used to enter the data and ran for missing data, consistency and minimization of any data entry errors. The data were further subjected to descriptive statistics to generate frequencies, percentages and mean distributions. Frequencies, percentages and mean distributions were mainly used to statistically appreciate the necessary demographic criteria for marriage readiness, measured by *Yes* or *No* that the demographic criterion was necessary. They were also used to appreciate the level of importance of the defined demographic criteria for future marital satisfaction.

Findings

Table 3: Demographic criteria for marriage readiness

Demographic criteria for marriage readiness	Necessary for marriage readiness		Level of importance for future marital satisfaction				Mean
	Yes	No	Very important	Quite important	Slightly important	Not important at all	
Finishing education/school	47 (37.9%)	77 (62.1%)	29 (23.8%)	28 (23.0%)	42 (34.4%)	23 (18.9%)	2.25
Enrolment into professional school (with recruitment)	52 (41.9%)	72 (58.1%)	17 (13.8%)	15 (12.2%)	42 (34.1%)	49 (39.8%)	1.88
Finishing professional school	48 (39.0%)	75 (61.0%)	21 (17.1%)	23 (18.7%)	44 (35.8%)	35 (28.5%)	1.96
Exiting parental residence	97 (78.2%)	27 (21.8%)	70 (56.5%)	29 (23.4%)	15 (12.1%)	10 (8.1%)	3.36
Independently renting a house	98 (81.7%)	22 (18.3%)	58 (46.8%)	34 (27.4%)	24 (19.4%)	8 (6.5%)	3.06
Building one's own house	59 (47.6%)	65 (52.4%)	33 (26.8%)	29 (23.6%)	39 (31.7%)	22 (17.9%)	2.59
Gaining full-time employment	78 (63.4%)	45 (36.6%)	45 (36.9%)	37 (30.3%)	27 (22.1%)	13 (10.7%)	2.76
Joining the public service as civil servant	67 (54.0%)	57 (46.0%)	30 (24.4%)	21 (17.1%)	33 (26.8%)	39 (31.7%)	2.34
Gaining financial independence from parents and others	99 (80.5%)	24 (19.5%)	86 (69.9%)	22 (17.9%)	12 (9.7%)	3 (2.4%)	3.54
If a man, capable of	115	4	96	21	2	1	3.68

supporting a family financially	(96.6%)	(3.4%)	(80.0%)	(17.5%)	(1.7%)	(0.8%)	
If a woman, capable of supporting a family financially	105 (87.5%)	15 (12.5%)	37 (30.3%)	47 (38.5%)	35 (28.7%)	3 (2.5%)	2.71
Dating	87 (71.3%)	35 (28.7%)	55 (44.7%)	20 (16.3%)	25 (20.3%)	23 (18.7%)	3.01
Cohabitation	23 (18.9%)	99 (81.1%)	30 (25.0%)	19 (15.8%)	22 (18.3%)	49 (40.8%)	2.52
Being able to pay for one's own wedding & marriage expenses	85 (68.5%)	39 (31.5%)	52 (41.9%)	22 (17.7%)	31 (25.0%)	19 (15.3%)	2.93
Having fully experienced the single life	94 (77.0%)	28 (23.0%)	48 (39.0%)	33 (26.8%)	33 (26.8%)	9 (7.3%)	2.87
Having had a child	10 (8.1%)	114 (91.9%)	12 (9.8%)	10 (8.3%)	21 (17.5%)	77 (64.2%)	1.74
Aggregate	1164 (59.33 %)	798 (40.67 %)	719 (36.7%)	410 (20.9%)	447 (22.8%)	383 (19.6%)	2.70

n=124

The demographic criteria investigated in this study were school completion, employment, financial independence, exit from parental residence, and dating and cohabitation. Findings showed that finishing school is generally no longer a necessary criterion for marriage readiness. Against this criterion, 62.1% of respondents felt that school completion is not necessary for marriage readiness. However, 37.9% of respondents still held up to finishing school as a necessary factor prior to marriage. We also investigated if either enrollment into or completion from a professional school that grants direct recruitment into the public service in Cameroon was a good enough reason to enter or consider entering marriage. While 41.9% said enrolling in a professional school with recruitment was a necessary criterion for marriage readiness, 39% felt that finishing from such a school was a necessary factor for marriage. However, 58.1% respondents did not see enrollment into a professional school with recruitment as a necessary indicator of marriage readiness. Also, 61% respondents did not consider finishing professional school as a necessary factor. When checked against marital satisfaction, among those who felt that finishing school (37.9%), having been enrolled into a professional school (49.1%) or completed from it (39%) was necessary for marriage readiness, 23.8% felt that finishing school was very important, 23% said this was quite important, 34.4% said doing so was only slightly important while 18.9% saw the criterion as not important at all for future marital satisfaction. Of those who thought that enrollment in a professional school was enough reason to get married, only 13.8% thought that this was a very important criterion. Meanwhile 12.2% thought that enrollment in a professional school was quite important, while 34.1% said it was slightly important, and 39.8% thought that this was not important at all for future marital satisfaction. Again, only 17.1% felt that completing from a professional school was a very important criterion for future marital satisfaction. Meanwhile 18.7% saw it as quite important, 35.8% as slightly important and 28.5% as not at all important for future marital satisfaction.

Exit from parental residence has been typified in most cultures and societies as a veritable social marker of adult attainment and marriage readiness. In this marriage readiness and marital satisfaction study, exit from parental residence which was further measured with renting one's own house or building one's own house showed that 78.2% agreed that leaving parental residence was a necessary criterion for marriage readiness while 21.8% did not see it as necessary at all. On where they go to after exiting from parental home, whether renting or owning their own home, a significant 81.7% said that renting was the next option whereas 52.4% refused that building or owning one's own house was a necessary criterion. However, 18.3% refused that renting a house was a necessary criterion for marriage while 47.6% felt that building or owning one's own house was rather a necessary criterion for marriage readiness. On the importance of exit from parental residence as a criterion for future marital satisfaction, 56.5% felt that this was a very important marriage readiness indicator whereas 23.4% thought that this indicator was quite important and 12.1% and 8.1% respectively saw it as slightly important and not at all important. Independently renting a house upon exiting from parental home was very important (46.8%), quite important (27.4%), slightly important (19.4%) and not important at all (6.5%) as a criterion for future marital satisfaction. Meanwhile building, constructing or owning one's own house or home and not renting was perceived as a very important (26.8%), quite important (23.6%), slightly important (31.7%) and not important at all (17.9%) for future marital satisfaction.

Accessing the labour market and securing fulltime employment is also highly exemplified as an important demographic indicator of marriage readiness and offer orientations for future marital satisfaction. Findings in this study showed that 63.4% participants saw fulltime employment as a necessary demographic factor of marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction. Meanwhile 36.6% felt that this criterion was not necessary at all. Even though majority of respondents thought that fulltime employment was necessary, only 36.9% felt that it is very important while 30.3%, 22.1% and 10.7% respectively saw accessing fulltime employment in the labour market as quite important, slightly important and not important at all for future marital satisfaction. We further checked whether joining the public service as a civil servant is a necessary factor of marriage readiness and 54% felt that this was necessary while 46% did not see it as necessary.

Checked against level of importance for future marital satisfaction, 24.4% said becoming a civil servant was an important criterion for future marital satisfaction with 17.1% perceiving it as quite important. However, a significant 26.8% of respondents saw joining the civil service as only slightly important while a whopping 31.7% thought that the criterion was not important at all for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction.

Marriage readiness has been traditionally linked to financial independence in most societies so much so that the variable has become more demographic and societal. In this study, financial independence was also verified and the findings showed that 80.5% of respondents felt that financial independence from parents and others was a necessary criterion for marriage readiness. But 19.5% did not see it as a necessary criterion. Checked against its level of importance for future marital satisfaction, a significant proportion of respondents (69.9%) said financial independence was a very important criterion and 17.9% thought that it was quite important. Meanwhile, 9.7% and 2.4% respectively saw financial independence as only slightly important and not at all important for future marital satisfaction. When the financial capacity of each of the partners to support a family was verified, findings showed that for men, financial viability was a necessary criterion for future marital satisfaction (96.6%) while for women, 87.5% maintained that financial capacity to support the family was a necessary criterion. But while 80% felt that financial viability to support the family was very important for men as a criterion of future marital satisfaction, only a meagre 30.3% thought that it was very important for women to be financially viable to support the family in order to secure future marital satisfaction. For the rest of the measures, 17.5% felt that financial viability was quite important for men while 38.5% thought it was quite important for women. While 1.7% and 0.8% respectively said financial capacity to support the family was slightly important and not at all important for men, 28.7% and 2.5% respectively said this was slightly important and not at all important for women. Finally, on financial capacity and wellbeing, findings showed that 81.7% of the sample saw the financial ability of emerging adults to support their parents as a necessary criterion for marriage readiness. But 18.3% did not consider financial ability to support parents as a measure of marriage readiness. On how important this criterion was for future marital satisfaction, 46.8% saw it as very important, 27.4% as quite important, 19.4% as slightly important and 6.5% as not important at all.

Dating, cohabitation and related factors such as the ability to pay for one's own wedding and marriage expenses, having lived together with the partner prior to marriage, having fully experienced the single life, and having already had a child were also investigated. On dating, 71.3% thought that dating was a necessary marker of marriage readiness amongst whom, 44.7% thought that it was very important for future marital satisfaction. Some 16.3% thought that dating was quite important while 20.3% and 18.7% respectively saw dating as only slightly important and not at all important for future marital satisfaction. A significant 81.1% refused that cohabitation was a necessary indicator of marriage readiness while among the 18.9% who thought that it was necessary, only 25% and 15.8% respectively saw it as very important and quite important for future marital satisfaction. A whopping 18.3% and 40.8% respectively considered cohabitation as only slightly important and not at all important for future marital satisfaction. We further investigated the ability to pay for one's own wedding and marriage expenses as a criterion for marriage readiness and found that while 68.5% thought that this was a necessary criterion, 31.5% did not see it as a necessary factor. But 41.9% further judged the ability to pay for one's wedding as very important while 17.7% thought that the criterion was quite important. On the down side, 25% and 15.3% respectively saw the criterion as just slightly important and not important at all. Again, having fully experienced the single life was considered by 77% of the sample as a necessary criterion for marriage readiness but only 39% felt that this was a very important criterion for future marital satisfaction. Another 26.8% saw it as quite important, 26.8% as slightly important and 7.3% as not important at all for future marital satisfaction. Finally, on having had a child prior to marriage as a criterion for marriage readiness, a whopping 91.9% did not see this as necessary while of the 8.1% that saw the criterion as necessary, only 9.8% rated having a child prior to marriage as very important for future marital satisfaction. Another 8.3% saw the criterion as quite important while to 17.5%,

the criterion was only slightly important. A significant 64.2% saw having a child before marriage as not important at all in the decision to marry and to securing future marital satisfaction.

Discussions

The findings in this paper showed that 58.6% of emerging adults agreed that the defined demographic criteria for marriage readiness were necessary, even though 41.4% felt that they were not necessary criteria for marriage readiness. When the criteria were checked for their level of importance for future marital satisfaction, the majority of emerging adults, 36.2% who had argued that the criteria defined were necessary said these criteria were very important for future marital satisfaction.

Meanwhile, 21.1%, 23% and 19.7% respectively felt that the demographic criteria defined were quite important, only slightly important and not at all important for future marital satisfaction. These findings are consistent with previous studies which have maintained that demographic criteria are still largely necessary and important as indicators of marriage readiness and pathways to future marital satisfaction and wellbeing (e.g., Loh, 2023; Rahmah&Kurniawati, 2021; Badger, 2005; Holman & Li, 1997). While Badger (2005) agreed to this phenomenon, she argued that such demographic criteria were mostly still largely necessary in non-Western collectivistic cultures. Evidently, in these societies, sociological and demographic markers continue to be strongly held as necessary markers of marriage readiness. Arguably, young people are expected to attain or meet these criteria to be considered to be ready for marriage and future marital satisfaction hangs on whether these criteria were met at the time of marriage. Though with variations, finishing school, leaving home, accessing fulltime employment, gaining financial independence, and meeting certain marriage-related decision-making factors have been shown as either necessary or not necessary and important criteria for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction among university-level emerging adults in Cameroon. Of the demographic criteria studied, only finishing school was largely seen as not necessary and largely unimportant for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction. This is consistent with Arnett (1997) who found that finishing school is no longer a necessary criterion that young people must meet before taking up certain adult roles such as marriage. However, endorsing leaving home, accessing fulltime employment, gaining financial independence and marriage were strongly held as necessary and important criteria, different from Arnett (1997) whose participants in an American sample rejected entering the labor force, marriage, and parenthood as necessary criteria for adulthood.

Compared with most Western samples which largely valorize intangible, gradual, psychological, and individualistic criteria for adulthood (Arnett, 1998, 2001, 2003; Mayseless& Scharf, 2003; Nelson & Luster, 2015), this study shows that tangible, sharp, objective and demographic markers such as accessing the labor force, financial independence, leaving home, and marriage are still held as important criteria for marriage and full adulthood. Accessing the labor force and achieving financial independence prior to marriage is consistent with Gibson-Davis et al. (2005) who stated that financial concerns have an important place among the challenges before marriage. Pretty earlier, Russell & Lyster (1992) attributed high rates of marital dissatisfaction, marriage breakdown, and family dissolution to marriage preparation factors such as financial viability. Meanwhile Sassler&Goldscheider (2004) determined that there is a relationship among young men between having a job and getting married and Shafer & James (2013) also showed that having full-time employment increases the likelihood of marriage for both men and women compared to being unemployed. In the same light, Kalmijn (2011) found that the likelihood of employed men getting married is higher, and that men with a temporary job are less likely to opt for marriage than those who have a permanent job. Therefore, fulltime employment and financial independence as found in this study are necessary and important criteria for marriage readiness, and even further predict future marital satisfaction and wellbeing.

However, while employment and financial independence appeared to be very necessary and important for men who have to financially support their family and their parents, it was not much the same for women for whom financial independence was a necessary criterion for marriage but not a very important factor of future marital satisfaction. In line with this, Shafer & James (2013) in their study concluded that the increase in the income of men increases the likelihood of marriage, while in women there is no significant relationship between income, marriage and marital satisfaction. Killewald (2016) also found associations between husbands' lack of full-time employment and higher risk of divorce, but found no associations between wives' full-time employment and the risk of divorce. This means that with the profound social and economic changes that have occurred, financial and money related questions have become important to both men and women today. Young women are as aspiring as their male counterparts to get employed in a job that is good enough to provide financial stability and allow them contribute to the stability of their families. It is no longer just the responsibility of the man but a joint venture whose goals are collective, with both partners working so hard to make the marriage work.

While most of the main demographic criteria were perceived as still necessary and important for marriage readiness and the future success of marriage, participants also dismissed some of the specific measures of traditional demographic markers. For example, while they considered leaving home as necessary and important for marriage readiness for future marital satisfaction, they dismissed the fact of having to own, build or construct one's own house or "homestead" to be ready for marriage. Worthy of note is the fact that home ownership before marriage is a condition, traditionally held up as important for men in some cultures (like among the Kom of Cameroon). But what most participants endorsed as a pathway to marriage after leaving home was independently renting an apartment home, especially for men. No doubt, difficult school-to-work transitions, strenuous labour market realities, and rising financial and economic uncertainties have made it laborious to access the opportunities that can facilitate home ownership soon after young people leave home.

Some important disagreements emerged against the relevance of financial independence and financial behaviour. While all participants endorsed financial independence as a necessary criterion for marriage readiness, they however mostly dismissed the fact of equal importance between men and women of the financial behaviour of being able to financially support the family in order to secure marital satisfaction. This finding emphasizes the fact that in this society, it is still largely the place of the husband or male partner to provide financial assistance and support to the home or family. Women do not need to possess such financial behaviour to guarantee the success of their marriage and family in the future. This orientation depicts traditional gender roles in family life and seems to survive in most societies, including even developed Western societies. For example, according to Parker & Stepler (2017), in a Pew Research Center survey, about seven-in-ten American adults (71%) think that it is very important for a man to be able to financially support a family in order to be a good husband or partner. In comparison, only 32% say it is very important for a woman to do the same to be a good wife or partner. Therefore, in American society, men are especially likely to place greater emphasis on their role as financial providers. This survey also found that while an equal share of men and women are likely to say a man needs to be able to provide for his family (72% and 71% respectively), men are less likely than women to say the same about women.

However, women have made significant strides in the workforce and are increasingly contributing to their family's finances. Gender equality in the workplace has improved over the years, and it is not uncommon for both spouses to work and share financial responsibilities. In many modern families, there is a growing trend towards greater gender equality when it comes to earning income and sharing financial responsibilities. In some families, wives may be the primary breadwinners, while in others, husbands may fulfill that role. There are also families where both partners share financial responsibilities equally. This trend reflects evolving social attitudes, changes in the workplace, and shifts in economic dynamics. Firstly, there is a greater acceptance of women in the workforce and an understanding that both partners in a family can and should contribute to financial responsibilities. Secondly, the workplace has seen changes in increased opportunities for women in various industries, more flexible work arrangements, and a greater recognition of the value of diversity and inclusion in the workforce. Meanwhile economic factors like inflation, the cost of living, and housing expenses have increased the financial burden on families so that many families find it necessary for both partners to work to maintain their desired standard of living.

Secondly, it is no longer a financial requirement to only marry when one is capable of supporting their parents financially. Certainly, it used to be a concern of parents to support their child getting married only when they are certain that the said child will or is able to continue to support them financially. In many traditional societies, the idea of children financially supporting their parents was a form of intergenerational support and responsibility. Parents might have wanted assurance that their child's marriage would not lead to financial hardship for the family as a whole. In some cases, parents may have played a role in arranging marriages, considering the financial stability and social status of potential spouses. As we have seen in the data, these cultural and historical expectations have evolved and continue to do so in many parts of the world. In modern times, factors like individual financial independence, personal choice, and changing family dynamics have reshaped how people approach marriage and financial support for their parents (Xiao, 2014; Conger et al., 2010). Today, not all parents expect or require financial support from their children, and many individuals make marriage decisions based on a variety of factors beyond just financial considerations.

Finally, while most participants felt that dating is a necessary and important criterion for marriage readiness and future marital satisfaction, cohabitation was rejected as a necessary and important criterion. In other words, participants suggested that emerging adults prefer to date and marry rather than date and cohabit before marriage. Like in most literature, it is valuable to date and marry; and dating prior to marriage also predicts future

marital success, but there are also doubtful links of cohabitation and future marital success (e.g., Karney, 2021; Teachman, 2003; Lillard et al., 1995; Teachman&Polonko, 1990). While some studies have suggested a link between premarital cohabitation and higher divorce rates, other research has found no significant difference in divorce rates between couples who lived together before marriage and those who did not. For example, Manning& Smock (2002) and Galston (2008) found that cohabiting unions are increasingly common and that many couples are choosing to live together without marrying, talk less marital satisfaction and Carroll (2018) suggested a cohabitation paradox, which suggests that cohabitation rather leads to risk of marital disharmony, discord, or divorce rather than marital satisfaction.

However, links between cohabitation and marital outcomes are complex and can vary depending on factors such as the reasons for cohabitation, individual characteristics, relationship dynamics, and cultural norms. The reasons for cohabitation can shape the dynamics of the relationship and its ultimate outcomes. Some may choose to cohabit as a precursor to marriage, viewing it as a step toward commitment and a way to test compatibility. Others may cohabit for practical reasons, such as financial convenience or housing. According to Carroll (2018), personal attributes, values, and experiences of each partner can influence how cohabitation affects their relationship and eventual marriage and factors such as education, previous relationship history, and cultural background can play a fundamental role. Meanwhile, positive relationship dynamics, characterized by effective communication and problem-solving skills, tend to contribute to greater satisfaction and stability. Cultural and societal expectations regarding cohabitation and marriage can vary widely. In some cultures, cohabitation may be more socially accepted and integrated into pathways to marriage, while in others, it may still carry stigma or be less common. These complexities suggest that what works for one couple may not work for another, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach to relationships that lead to marriage or to marriage itself.

Conclusion

The last two decades have seen the emergence of extensive research on the subjective, individualistic and psychological aspects or inner side of the transition to adulthood in general and to marriage in particular. That research dug into the changes that characterize Western and post-independent African societies today and their corresponding impacts on youth life courses. In particular, the research maintained that social changes have led to the increasing importance of internal, personal, psychological facets of the transition to adulthood with little or no importance of traditional demographic transition markers of adulthood. This paper has shown that somehow, traditional demographic criteria for marriage readiness in particular and for the transition to adulthood are still generally necessary and important in some societies. This confirms previous views that these pathways are still largely relevant in non-Western cultures, while they have disappeared or are disappearing in some Western-industrialized societies (e.g. Galanaki&Leontopoulou, 2017; Badger et al., 2006; Goldscheider&Goldscheider, 1999). In contrast to several previous studies, especially from Western cultures, we found that emerging adults in Cameroon still hold dear the relevance of some traditional demographic markers. This is similar to findings in most collectivistic cultures in Africa and Southeast Asia (e.g., Zhong & Arnett, 2012; Lo-oh, 2012; Seiter & Nelson, 2011). Although finishing school, either general or professional school, was not perceived as a necessary and important criterion for marriage readiness and future marital success, other demographic criteria were largely perceived as still necessary and important. For example, leaving home (parental residence), accessing the labor market and gaining fulltime employment, achieving financial independence, and developing forms of intimate relationship with marriage-related behaviors (e.g., dating and cohabitation) were largely endorsed by participants as necessary criteria for marriage and for the success of it.

Of course, there were some specific traditional demographic criteria that participants dismissed as no longer necessary for marriage readiness. For example, while they considered leaving home as necessary and important for marriage readiness, they dismissed the fact of having to build or construct one's own house or "homestead" to be ready for marriage, a condition traditionally held up as important for men in some cultures (like among the Kom of Cameroon). What most participants endorsed as a pathway to marriage after leaving home was independently renting an apartment home, especially for men. Secondly, while it is an appropriate financial behavior and a requirement for men to be financially viable to support their marriage and the success of it in the future, it is not a necessary and important criterion for women. This is normal in a society that is still traditionally segmented in terms of gender roles, most of which ascribe financial responsibility to males and not to female partners. Finally, our findings align with and subscribe to the cohabitation paradox literature, suggesting that cohabitation before marriage is not a necessary and important criterion for marriage and future marital success. Rather, as suggested in the literature, cohabitation hurts marriage readiness and the future of marriage.

True to speak, social changes have imposed significant effects in the life courses of young people today such that among emerging adults, there are exaggerated tendencies to succumb to more subjective, personal and psychological dimensions of marriage readiness than the traditionally held demographic criteria. However, demographic criteria are still important, and to some researchers, they act as drivers in the transition process and provide the framework for achieving many of the subjective, personal, psychological and individualistic dimensions that are highly acclaimed today (Andrew et al., 2006). It might be more rewarding to focus attention on the connections between traditional demographic criteria and internal, psychological and individualistic dimensions of marriage readiness rather than just dismissing them.

It might be interesting to know what achieving legal adulthood, leaving the parental household, finishing education, entering the labor market with full-time work, and marrying, and/or becoming parents does to the individual's internal, subjective and psychological reasoning that permits them to make independent and responsible decisions about marriage and married life to not only marry but also achieve marital satisfaction and success in the future.

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