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Determinants of Marital Satisfaction in Woldia Town, Amhara Region, EthiopiaMelkamu Dires Asabu¹ & Seblewongiel Ayenalem Kidanie^{2*}

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Abstract

Although marriage is one of the most important and fundamental human relationships, there are various elements affecting marital satisfaction. This study has examined the level and determinants of marital satisfaction in Woldia town, Ethiopia. Using a cross sectional study design, the data were collected from 406 randomly selected married couples (55.2% males and 44.8% females). Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to describe the socio-demographic characteristics and predict their effect on marital satisfaction. The key findings showed that the majority (67.7%) of spouses were satisfied with their marital relations. The multivariate binary logistic regression analysis showed that marital satisfaction has significant ($p < 0.05$) positive relationship with sex (AOR=4.64;95% CI: 1.16,18.62), first time marriage (AOR=9.03;95% CI:1.67,48.68), family monthly income (AOR=8.35; 95% CI:1.35,51.55), religious marriage (AOR=20.73;95% CI:1.14,375.85), and religious similarity (AOR=12.44;95% CI:2.32,66.68). On the other hand, duration in marriage (AOR=.11; 95% CI: .02, .57), premarital cohabitation (AOR=.08; 95% CI: 01, 0.67), and premarital sex (AOR=.03; 95% CI: .01, .20) showed negative significant relationship with marital satisfaction. Spouse's age, spousal age difference, level of education, having a child, and income provider of the family showed no statistically significant association ($p > 0.05$) with marital satisfaction. The study recommends that effective preventive and intervention strategies are needed for building healthy marriage and family environment.

Keywords: / Ethiopia /Factors/Family wellbeing/Marriage/Relationship/

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1. Introduction

People get married through formal or consensual union to find meaning in life and love (Kalantarkousheh & Hassan, 2010). The goal and dream of every couple are to be satisfied with a stable relationship based on mutual affection (Qari, 2014; Carandang & Guda, 2015). Many single and married people are seeking relationships that promote satisfaction and happiness (Villa & Del Prette, 2013). Marital satisfaction refers to a situation in which couples happily live together (Shakerian, 2010; Barongo, Okwara, Aloka, & Masoka, 2015). Marital dissatisfaction is one factor for marital dissolution (Addisu, Asabneh, Dereje & Nega, 2015) albeit there are marriages even without having marital satisfaction (Esmaeeli, Jofreh, & Shafiabady, 2016).

The concept of marital satisfaction is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept including psychological, socioeconomic and spiritual components. Marital satisfaction is influenced by many factors including compatibility on the style of relation, financial matters, child rearing styles, sexual relations, leisure time activities, home duties sharing, and external network (Zamani, Nasir, Hashim, & Yusof, 2012; Tazekand et al., 2013; Adigeb & Mbua, 2015). The nature of satisfactory things may change due to passage of time and some demographic factors such as age at marriage, number of children, religious beliefs, and health status (Alahveriani, Rajaie, Shakeri & Lohrasbi, 2010; Ziaee, Jannati, Mobasheri, Taghavi, Abdollahi, Modulo, & Behnampour, 2014).

Studies in Ethiopia have shown that the trends of marriage and family life are changing through time. Median age at first sexual intercourse is declining while age at first marriage rises. Almost half (45%) of all the first marriages end in divorce or separation within 30 years, and two-thirds of women divorce within the first five years of marriage. Premarital sex increases the numbers of unintended pregnancies with the increase in unsafe abortion (CSA & ICF, 2016). Few studies conducted to assess factors affecting marital satisfaction in Ethiopia (Addisu, Asabneh, Dereje & Nega, 2011; Seimegn, Belay, Asfaw & Danielsehay, 2014; Zewdu, 2016; Addisu, Dereje & Asabneh, 2017; Deressu & Girma, 2019). However, previous studies were mainly focused on descriptive analysis of few socio-demographic factors of marital satisfaction.

This study has analyzed additional determinants of marital satisfaction such as premarital sex and cohabitation, duration of the marriage, techniques of spouse selection, means of marriage, and marriage type among couples in Woldiya Town, Ethiopia. It is crucial to continue studying factors that contribute to marital satisfaction since marriage is dynamic where its trends are changing from place to place and from time to time. The study could play its part in understanding conditions that might influence well-being in marriage.

1.1. Study Objective

This study has examined the level and determinants of marital satisfaction in Woldia town, Ethiopia.

The specific study objectives were:

- To assess the status of couples' marital satisfaction in Woldia Town.
- To identify determinants that are associated with marital satisfaction in Woldia Town

2. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Based on a literature review, the conceptual framework of the study has been developed. The factors contributing to marital satisfaction could be broadly categorized as personal or sociocultural. The relationship between the dependent variable (marital satisfaction) and independent variables (age, sex, educational status, spouses' age difference, number of children, premarital cohabitation, premarital sex, duration of the marriage, family income level, family income provider, techniques of spouse selection, means of marriage, marriage type, and religious background of spouses) has been shown in the conceptual framework below (Fig.1). Factors which have either positive (+) or negative (-) potential effects on marital satisfaction are summarized below.

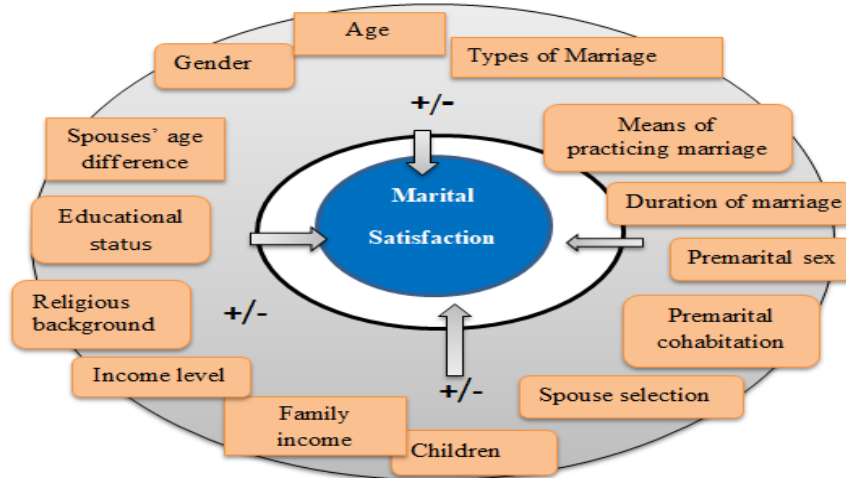


Figure: 1. Conceptual framework

Source: Researchers' literature review

3. Research Methods

Sample size. The study employed a quantitative research approach with a cross-sectional design. The population of the study was married couples in Woldia town. The sample size was determined using a single population proportion formula ($n_o = (Z\alpha/2)^2 pq/d^2$) (Cochran, 1963 cited in Raj, 1965). At a 95% confidence level ($X = 1.96$), population proportion (50%), and $\pm 5\%$ margin of error/ confidence interval and by adding 10% non-response rate the proposed total sample size was 423 respondents. Simple random sampling technique was used to select respondents. Eventually, a total of 406 survey questionnaires were filled and returned.

Instrument for data collection. The study used the adapted version of ENRICH marital satisfaction scale developed by Fowers and Olson (1993). The scale has 10 marital satisfaction items representing the diverse areas of the marital relationships. The ENRICH instrument was chosen because it has proven reliability and validity in adult populations from different sociocultural backgrounds. To ensure reliability, the instrument was piloted with 21(5%) respondents, and the Cronbach Alpha coefficient was 0.94 and had high reliability.

Variables. The dependent variable of this study was marital satisfaction. Satisfaction was rated using a five point scales (1= strongly disagree, 2= moderately disagree, 3= undecided, 4= moderately agree, and 5= strongly agree). The sum of valid responses was divided into the numbers of items. Using the average score (3), the responses were dichotomized as maritally satisfied (equal or above 3) or dissatisfied (below 3). About

14 independent variables were identified and analyzed: age, sex, educational status, spouses' age difference, number of children, premarital cohabitation, premarital sex, duration of the marriage, family income level, family income provider, techniques of spouse selection, means of marriage, marriage type, and religious background of spouses. The inclusion criteria were being married, living in Woldia town, and be volunteer to be part of the study.

Data analysis. Data were entered and analyzed using SPSS-PC version 20.0. Descriptive statistics was used to describe the socio-demographic characteristics of respondents. A binary logistic regression model was used to predict the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable because; the dependent variable (marital satisfaction) was dichotomized into satisfied and dissatisfied (Muchabaiwa, 2013). The Hosmer-Lemeshow test value for this study was 1.00 (Hosmer & Lemeshow, 2000). Moreover, the likelihood ratio test of the model is $-2LL=80.05$, significant $\chi^2=430.58$ $df=22$, $p<.000$; it shows independent variables significantly predicted the dichotomized dependent variable.

4. Results

4.1 Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

From a total of 406 respondents, 55.2% males and 44.8% females took part in the study. The average age of respondents was 38 years. Half (49.3%) of the respondents were older than 38 years. More than half (66.5%) of respondents were Christians and 33.5% were Muslim. Regarding educational status, only 24.1% had first degree or above. The vast majority (96.3%) had at least one child. More than half (55.7%) of respondents were earning less than an average monthly income (3,500 ETB or \$105) (Table 1).

Table 1: Description of Respondents' Background

Background Characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	224
	Female	182
Religion	Muslim	136
	Protestant	43
	Orthodox	218
having child	No child	15
	Yes	391
Spouse's Age	<38	180
	Average (38)	26
	>38	200
Total Family Income	<3500ETB	226
	Average (3500ETB)	35
	>3500ETB	145
Educational Status	Secondary Education & Below	147
	Certificate	76
	Diploma	85
	BA./BSc and Above	98

Source: The researchers' survey

4.2 Determinants of Marital Satisfaction

The cross tabulation results regarding the determinant factors of marital satisfaction are presented in Table 2. The majority (67.7%) of respondents had marital satisfaction while 32.3% had not. The majority of respondents who were 38 years and above (88.5% and 76.5%, respectively) were satisfied with their marital relationships. An average age differences of spouses was six years. Majority of respondents (82.3%) who had less than six years age differences were satisfied with their marital relationships. More than half of respondents (56.9%) with more than 6 years age differences were maritally dissatisfied.

In terms of sex, 87.9% of males were satisfied with their marital relationships whereas 57.1% of females were dissatisfied in their marriage. The majority (81.6%) of respondents who had a first degree and above were satisfied whereas 42.9% of respondents who had completed secondary school were dissatisfied with their marital relationships. Two third (78.5%) of respondents, who had a similar religious background with their spouses, reported satisfied; whereas 65.7% of respondents with different religious background spouse reported dissatisfaction.

Concerning family income, 38% of respondents with a family income of below the average (3500ETB or \$105) reported marital dissatisfaction whereas 75.9% respondents who had a family income of greater than the average were satisfied with their marital relationships. The majority (92.4%) of respondents who were dual income generators (both husbands and wives earn) were satisfied with their marital relationships. In contrast, the majority (78.3%) of those of whom the husband is the only income provider of the family reported dissatisfaction.

The majority (84.4%) of respondents with first marriage and 19.2% of remarried respondents were satisfied with their marital relationships. An average duration of marriage was 9 years. The majority 96.1% and 77% of respondents with marriage duration of 9 years and above respectively were satisfied with marriage. This shows a positive relationship between marital satisfaction and the length of marital duration. Regarding their type of marriage, 88.3% of respondents who had a religious marriage were satisfied. More than half (55.7%) of those who had a traditional marriage and 52% those who had married via municipality registry were dissatisfied. Regarding techniques of spouses' selection, 69.6% of respondents with a marriage arranged by their family or others and 65.8% of those who had selected their own partner were satisfied with their marital relationships. The majority (83.3%) of respondents who had no premarital cohabitation experience were satisfied with their marital relationships. Regarding premarital sex, 94.5% of the respondents who had no premarital sexual experience were satisfied. More than half (69.57%) of the respondents who had one or two children were more satisfied with their marital relationships. Inversely, 93.3% of respondents who had no child were dissatisfied.

Table 2: Cross tabulation results of determinant variables with marital satisfaction status (Source: The researchers' survey)

Determinant variables		Marital Satisfaction Status	
		Dissatisfied	Satisfied
Sex	Male	27(12.1%)	197(87.9%)
	Female	104(57.1%)	78(42.9%)
Spouse's Age	<38	81(45%)	99(55%)
	Average (38)	3(11.5%)	23(88.5%)
	>38	47(23.5%)	153(76.5%)
Spouses' age Difference	<6yrs	43(17.7%)	200(82.3%)
	Average (6)	14(42.4%)	19(57.6%)
	>6yrs	74(56.9%)	56(43.1%)
Having Child	No child	14(93.3%)	1(6.7%)
	Yes	119(30.43%)	272(69.57%)
Educational status	Secondary & below	63(42.9%)	84(57.1%)
	Certificate	22(28.9%)	54(71.1%)
	Diploma	28(32.9%)	57(67.1%)
	Degree and above	18(18.4%)	80(81.6%)
Income provider	Both	20(7.6%)	244(92.4%)
	Husband	108(78.3%)	30(21.7%)
	Wife	3(75%)	1(25%)
Total family income	<3,500ETB	88(38.9%)	138(61.1%)
	Average (3,500EB)	8(22.9%)	27(77.1%)
	>3,500ETB	35(24.1%)	110(75.9%)
Duration of marriage	<9yrs	91(47.9%)	99(52.1%)
	Average (9yrs)	2(3.9%)	49(96.1%)
	>9yrs	38(23%)	127(77%)
Means of practicing marriage	Traditional	93(55.7%)	74(44.3%)
	Religious	25(11.7%)	189(88.3%)
	Civil/municipality	13(52%)	12(48%)
Types of Marriage	First Marriage	47(15.6%)	255(84.4%)
	Remarriage	84(80.8%)	20(19.2%)
Religious Background	Similar	66(21.5%)	241(78.5%)
	Difference	65(65.7%)	78.5(34%)
Techniques of Spouse Selection	by Family/other	62(30.4%)	142(69.6%)
	by self-selection	69(34.2%)	133(65.8%)
Premarital Cohabitation	Yes	77(92.8%)	6(7.2%)
	No	54(16.7%)	269(83.3%)
Premarital Sex	Yes	117(76.6%)	36(23.5%)
	No	14(5.5%)	239(94.5%)

A multivariate binary logistic regression model was used to predict the effect of the independent variables on marital satisfaction (Table 3). Spouse's age, spousal age difference, level of education, having a child, and income provider of the family showed no statistically significant association ($p > 0.05$) with marital satisfaction of the respondents. A significant relationship was found between sex ($p < 0.05$), family monthly income ($p < 0.05$), duration of marriage ($p < 0.01$), means of income ($p < 0.05$), means of marriage ($p < 0.05$), type of marriage ($p < 0.01$), spouse's religious background ($p < 0.05$), premarital cohabitation ($p < 0.05$), and premarital sex ($p < 0.01$).

Spouses who had stayed in marriage for less than 9 years were less likely satisfied than those who had stayed for more than 9 years (AOR=.11;95% CI:.02, .57). Respondents who had a religious marriage were 20.73 times more likely satisfied than those who were married through government municipality units (AOR=20.73; 95% CI:1.14, 38.85). This study found that husbands were 6.344 times more likely satisfied than wives (AOR=4.64; 95% CI: 1.16, 18.62). Respondents with first marriage were 9.03 times more likely satisfied than remarried spouses (AOR=9.03; 95%CI: 1.67, 48.68). Couples within similar religious background were 12.44 times more likely satisfied than those with different religion (AOR=12.44; 95%CI: 2.32, 66.68). Spouses who had premarital cohabitation experiences were by 92% less likely satisfied than those who had no premarital cohabitation experiences (AOR=.08; 95%CI: .01, .67). The odds of marital satisfaction decreases by 97% for spouses who had premarital sexual experiences than those who had no premarital sexual experience (AOR=.03; 95%CI: .01, .20).

Table 3: Relationship between different variables with marital satisfaction using binary logistic regression analysis

Variables		COR(95%:CI)	AOR(95% CI)
Sex	Male	9.73(5.91,16.01)***	4.64(1.16,18.62)*
	Female®	1	1
Spouse's Age	<Average	.38(.24,.58)***	.60(.14,2.57)
	Average age (38)	2.36(.68,8.19)	5.83(.083,407.55)
	>Average®	1	1
Spouses' age difference	<Average	6.15(3.81,9.92)***	1.98(.48,8.20)
	Average age (6)	1.79(.83,3.88)	9.91(.45,219.36)
	>Average®	1	1
Family income/month	<Average	.50(.31,.79)***	8.35(1.35,51.55)*
	Average (3500birr)	1.07(.45,2.58)	1.57(.10,24.92)
	>Average®	1	1
Duration of marriage	<Average	.33(.21,.52)***	.11(.02,.57)**
	Average (9year)	7.33(1.70,31.55)**	.61(.04,8.37)
	>Average®	1	1
Having Child	No	.34(.042,2.73)	.41(.02,6.783)
	Yes ®	1	1
Educational status	Secondary & below	.30(.16,.55)***	.54(.07,4.07)
	Certificate	.55(.27,1.13)	.86(.11,6.66)
	Diploma	.46(.23,.91)*	1.51(.19,12.02)
	Degree & above®	1	1
Income provider of the family	Both	36.60(3.64,368.22)**	2.21(.02,225.92)
	Husband	.83(.08, 8.30)	.05(.00,4.81)
	Wife®	1	1
Means of marriage	Traditionally	.86(.37,2.00)	1.40(.10,18.89)
	Religiously	8.19(3.37,19.92)***	20.73(1.14,375.85)*
	Municipality®	1	1
Types of marriage	First	22.79(12.78,40.64)***	9.03(1.67,48.68)**
	Remarriage®	1	1
Spouses' religious background	Similar	6.98(4.25,11.47)***	12.44(2.32,66.68)*
	Different®	1	1
Techniques of spouses selection	By others	1.19(.783,1.802)	.25(.06,1.13)
	By self®	1	1
Premarital cohabitation	Yes	.02(.01,.04) ***	.08(.01,.67)*
	No®	1	1
Premarital sex	Yes	.02(.01,.04)***	.03(.01,.20)***
	No®	1	1

Source: The researchers' survey.

Notes: * $p=0.05-0.01$; ** $p=0.01-0.001$; *** $p<0.001$, ® reference category, AOR= Adjusted Odds Ratio, COR= Crude Odds Ratio, CI= Confidence Interval, OR= Odds Ratio, S.E= Standard Error.

5. Discussion

This study revealed that 67.7% of married respondents had marital satisfaction. Previous studies reported different levels of marital satisfaction in different socio-demographic contexts. Meaza (2014) studied marital conflict and satisfaction among couples in Addis Ababa and reported that 50.6% of spouses were satisfied in marriage.

This study found no significant relationship between spouses' age difference and marital satisfaction. In most traditional societies, women are expected to marry older men (Daniel, 2014; Esubalew, 2015; Angusamy Kuppusamy, Anantharaman & Syafiqah, 2017). Better marital gains were reported in older husband-younger wife pairs (Lee & McKinnish, 2018) and in similar age couples as well (Choo & Siow, 2006). On the contrary, Addisu *et al.* (2017) found a reverse relationship between the two variables.

This study found that husbands were more likely satisfied than wives. Regarding gender differences, previous research findings have mixed results. Addisu *et al.* (2017) found no statistical difference between gender and marital satisfaction while others reported husbands are more satisfied than their wives (Fiker, 2015). Xie, Shi, and Ma (2017) argued that husband's dissatisfaction in marriage is linked to their wives' less availability for them due to wives' engagement in work outside of home. This implies changes in females' work roles created an impact on marital satisfaction. On the other hand, women report dissatisfaction due to the continuing gender biases existing within the marital setup, including the division of domestic labour, autonomy, and decision making. Family lifestyles have changed when dual-career marriages are increasing in number. In dual-career marriages, women have endured a double burden in housework and job outside the home which contributes to dissatisfaction (Atta, Adil, Shujja, & Shakir, 2013).

This study revealed no significant relationship between education and marital satisfaction. The finding agrees with some studies elsewhere (Barongo, et al., 2015; Fiker, 2015; Angusamy, et al., 2017) which reported that educational status had no effect on marital satisfaction. However, the finding contrasts a study by Addisu *et al.* (2017) which uncovered the existence of a significant difference in marital satisfaction across different educational categories. Some studies argue higher educational status might be correlated with higher job commitments and less devotion at home which could cause dissatisfaction. According to Zaheri, Dolatian, Shariati, Simbar, Ebadi, and Azghadi (2016), marital dissatisfaction is high amongst highly educated women. Women are increasingly pursuing goals and ambitions beyond the traditional female roles and their commitment to their careers may be a contributing factor to their dissatisfaction with the marriage system.

This study found that spouses who had less family income were more likely satisfied than those who earn more incomes. The finding is shared by other studies (Daniel, 2014; Angusamy, et al., 2017) which reported insignificant statistical difference between family income and marital satisfaction. Similarly, whoever is the income provider of the family, this study found no significant relationship with marital satisfaction.

Regarding spouses' religious backgrounds, couples with similar religious background were more satisfied than those who had different religious background spouse. Serkalem (2006) identified having a different religious and ethnic background as one major cause of divorce. Another study reported that marital satisfaction varies across inter and intra-cultural spouses (Renalds, 2011). Cultural background differences cause marital dissatisfaction due to a lack of shared values that could tie the couples.

The technique of spouses' selection had no significant effect on marital satisfaction. This finding was comparable to another study (Myers, Madathil, & Tingle, 2005). Serkalem (2006) found no significant association of divorce rate with arranged and love marriage. A study reported a statistically significant difference in marital satisfaction between love and arranged marriages (Addisu, *et al.*, 2017).

Marriage through religious institutions found to have a better positive effect on marriage satisfaction than a union through a municipality registration system. Melkamu (2019) argues that those who prefer to go for religious marriage might not perceive marital satisfaction from the mere fulfillment of worldly needs point of view. They might consider fighting for their marriage and enduring marital challenges as part of their spirituality mission.

The marital satisfaction of spouses who entered into a marriage for the first time is better than spouses those who have remarried. Other studies revealed that there is a significantly higher divorce rate within remarried couples than those in the first marriage (Bramlett & Mosher, 2002; Serkalem, 2006). This might be due to spouses who enter into marriage for the second or more times have unresolved psychological issues from the previous marriage.

This study found spouses who had premarital cohabitation experiences are less likely to be satisfied in their marital relationship. Premarital cohabitation has been associated with an increased risk of subsequent marital dissatisfaction (Kulu & Boyle, 2010; Reinhold, 2010). In this study, having premarital sexual experience also decreased the level of couples' marital satisfaction. Consistently, other researchers (Ogunsola, 2012) reported that premarital sex is positively associated with the high risk of marital dissatisfaction. In a conservative society like Ethiopia, premarital sex and losing virginity before marriage, particularly for women and girls, is considered a dishonoring and deviation from the tradition. The stigma associated with pregnancy out of wedlock made many parents prefer marrying off their daughters before they engage in premarital sex.

In this study, spouses who had stayed in the marriage for less than 9 years were less likely satisfied than those who stayed for more than 9 years. Another study found a positive relation between marital duration and satisfaction (Zamani, et al., 2012). Other studies (Daniel, 2014; Fiker, 2015) had found no marital satisfaction difference with the duration of stay in marriage, and another study found negative correlations between duration and marital satisfaction (Esubalew, 2015).

In this study, having a child had no significant relationship with marital satisfaction. This finding is consistent with other studies (Daniel, 2014; Fiker, 2015; Angusamy, et al., 2017). Studies in Ethiopia (Esubalew, 2015; Zewdu, 2015) reported that infertility leads to marital dissatisfaction and subsequent divorce. Rostami, Ghazinour, and Richter (2013) found a reverse relationship between marital satisfaction and the number of children. Other studies reported that the presence of children (Orathinkal & Vansteenwegen, 2007) and the number of children (Addisu, et al., 2017) contributed to the increment of marital satisfaction.

6. Conclusion

The finding of the study revealed that 67.7% of spouses are satisfied with their marital relationships. Marital satisfaction is determined by different factors such as duration of the marriage, gender, means of marriage, types of marriage, spouses' religious background, premarital cohabitation, and premarital sex. Whereas other variables such as age, spouses' age difference, number of children, total family income per month, an income provider, educational status, and techniques of spouse's selection did not add significantly to the model.

Limitations of the study. This study has few limitations. First, the study used cross-sectional design; the result might reflect only a subjective evaluation of respondents during data collection. The findings of the study might be different if it was conducted using a longitudinal design. Secondly, since the study was conducted at Woldia town in Amhara Regional State, the result might not represent other couples from different geographical and socio-cultural backgrounds.

7. Recommendations

Future studies need to qualitatively explain why some of the factors have a positive contribution to marital satisfaction while others contribute to dissatisfaction or show no relationship at all. The link between cultural and traditional components with marital adjustment needs depth understanding with various local contexts. Studying the dynamics of long-lived married couples will be a lesson to newly married couples. In addition, marriage and family wellbeing is an area which needs particular attention for practitioners and policymakers as well. Premarital and marital counseling services need to be the focus area of social service providers. Involving helping professionals, religion and community leaders, and non-governmental organizations to work on the provision of necessity prevention and intervention services for married couples is essential. The government should give due emphasis on designing family conflict management strategies and policy directions that could help to keep families intact before they are falling apart.

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Availability of data and materials

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Competing interest

There is no competing interest

Authors' contributions:

Melkamu Dires Asabu has contributed substantially to the conception and design of the study, the collection of data, the analysis, and to the manuscript preparation. Seblewongiel Ayenalem Kidanie has contributed for the conception of the design, the analysis of the data, the manuscript preparation and critical revision of the article. Both authors reviewed, approved the final version of the manuscript, and are agreed to be accountable for any questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work.

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