

Fondness and Admiration as Determinants of the Quality of Marriage among members of Karura Community Chapel in Nairobi City County, Kenya

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Abstract

Across the world, trends in marital quality highlight the significance of identifying relational factors that sustain healthy marriages. The present study investigated the extent to which fondness and admiration determine marital quality among members of Karura Community Chapel in Nairobi City County, Kenya. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The target population County comprised 375 married individuals in Karura Community Church. Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents. A total of 172 married individuals responded to the survey. Data was collected using structured questionnaire based on Gottman's Sound Relationship House. The data was analysed using SPSS Version 29. Both descriptive analysis and inferential statistics were generated. The results revealed a strong, significant positive correlation between fondness and admiration and marital quality ($r = .704, p < .01$). Hierarchical regression showed that gender, age bracket, and marriage duration jointly explained a small but significant proportion of variance in marital quality, $R^2 = .078, F(3, 164) = 4.60, p < .01$, with gender ($B = .308, p < .05$) and age bracket ($B = .236, p < .05$) emerging as significant predictors, while marriage duration was not significant ($p > .05$). However, the inclusion of fondness and admiration substantially improved the model, increasing the explained variance to 51.3% ($R^2 = .513, F(4, 163) = 42.85, p < .01$), indicating a strong predictive contribution. It was concluded that fondness and admiration function as core relational assets that sustain marital relationships irrespective of demographic differences. Premarital counselling should cultivate fondness and admiration, teaching couples to express affection and appreciation for one another regularly.

Keywords: Fondness, Admiration, Marital Quality, Sound Relationship House

1. Introduction and Background to the Study

The institution of marriage forms the bedrock of family life and provides emotional support, companionship, and stability for individuals and communities (Osafo et al., 2021; Sim & Sim, 2020). It represents one of the most emotionally essential relationships in the life of an adult, shaping personal identity, psychological well-being, and social functioning (Gallagher & Stokes, 2021). A healthy and satisfying marital relationship strengthens family cohesion and enhances both physical and psychological health (Baghkasi et al., 2020). As married partners spend significant time together, sharing experiences, responsibilities, and aspirations, the quality of their interactions plays a critical role in shaping their personal relational outcomes (İnce & Işık, 2022). For this reason, making sense of the factors that sustain high-quality marriages remains an important concern in prevailing marital research.

Marital quality is defined as the degree of satisfaction, intimacy, communication, and emotional connection experienced by spouses within a marital relationship (Gottman & Silver, 2015). It is influenced by multiple interpersonal and intrapersonal factors that shape how couples perceive and evaluate their relationships (Rozita & Arjang, 2021). Scholars have emphasised that the quality of marriage is determined largely by everyday relational processes such as emotional responsiveness, mutual understanding, and positive interaction patterns (Chonody et al., 2020). Interpersonal factors of marital quality have therefore attracted significant scholarly attention because of their strong link to mental health, psychological functioning, and holistic well-being (Oyoo, 2020; Chonody & Gabb, 2019; Fakari et al., 2022). This growing body of literature underscores the importance of examining relational attributes that nurture emotional intimacy and marital bliss.

Among the interpersonal factors shaping marital quality, fondness and admiration have emerged as a central pillar of successful marital relationships. Fondness within marriage is characterised by emotional intimacy, trust, and companionship, which collectively enhance communication and conflict resolution (Chonody & Gabb, 2019; Gottman & Silver, 2017). Fondness and admiration foster positive perceptions of one's partner, reinforcing emotional bonds and strengthening relational commitment (Lee et al., 2021; Gottman & Silver, 2017). Thus, fondness and admiration function as critical emotional mechanisms through marital partners enhance their marital quality.

Empirical evidence indicates that poor marital quality has significant negative consequences for individuals and families. Unhappy marriages are linked to substance abuse, psychological distress, and even longevity (Gottman & Silver, 2015; Eslami et al., 2020). Marital disillusionment often leads to emotional detachment, marital affairs, and social disconnect within the family system (Filiz & Elif, 2023; Salih & Chaudry, 2023). Conversely, positive relational dynamics such as fondness and admiration contribute to life satisfaction and overall well-being (Kaufman et al., 2022; Malm et al., 2022). These findings suggest that cultivating fondness and admiration within marital relationships may serve as protective factors against relational breakdown, resulting in high marital quality.

Across the world, trends in marital quality highlight the significance of identifying relational factors that sustain healthy marriages. For instance, divorce statistics from the United States reveal that approximately 37% of marriages end in divorce, with higher rates observed among older adults (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Studies in Iran and Turkey further demonstrate that stressors and negative interaction patterns significantly affect marital quality, while spousal affection enhances satisfaction and stability. In Africa, marriage remains a central cultural institution, yet marital challenges persist across diverse social contexts (Tasew et al., 2021). Studies in Ethiopia and Ghana reveal significant rates of marital dissolution and highlight the adverse health and socioeconomic consequences of poor marital quality (Asfaw & Alene, 2023). These findings demonstrate that African couples require relational interventions that address emotional and interpersonal dimensions of marriage. However, despite the recognition of friendship and admiration as important relational resources, limited studies have explicitly examined how specific emotional components such as fondness and admiration shape marital quality in African contexts.

In Kenya, trends of marital instability have raised concerns about the quality of marital relationships. National statistics reveal that approximately 17% of marriages end in divorce, with rising cases of marital conflict and violence reported in recent years (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Evidence shows that physical and sexual violence within marriage is prevalent, particularly in urban settings such as Nairobi, highlighting the fragility of marital relationships and the need for deeper understanding of relational dynamics. Although studies in Kenya have explored factors such as premarital counselling and spiritual-based marriage enrichment programmes, they have not adequately examined fondness and admiration (Keverenge et al., 2020; Wanyeki, 2023). There is limited empirical evidence on how specific emotional dimensions such as fondness and admiration function as determinants of marital quality within faith-based communities in Kenya. The research problem addressed in this study is the lack of empirical evidence on the extent to which fondness and admiration determine marital quality among members of Karura Community Chapel in Nairobi City County, Kenya.

2. Literature Review

Globally, marital quality has been widely examined as a function of emotional, cognitive, and behavioural processes within spousal relationships. Extant literature underscore the notion that successful marriages are anchored in deep affection and emotional closeness between partners (Baghkasi et al., 2020). Central to this friendship are fondness and admiration, which manifest through affectionate expressions, positive regard, and appreciation of one's partner (Navarra & Gottman, 2018). While some studies conceptualise these attributes as independent relational qualities, others view them as interconnected processes that collectively strengthen marital bonds and enhance relational stability. A comparison of research across cultures demonstrate that respect, affection, and appreciation are core ingredients of marital success. Gottman and Silver (2015) argue that fondness and admiration are foundational to mutual respect and serve as buffers against relational depreciation. Similarly, research among Muslim couples in Indonesia shows that the absence of admiration fosters contempt and emotional disengagement, thereby weakening marital quality (Puspitasari & Gayatri, 2022). Conversely, evidence from China indicates that diminished affection and admiration may escalate into

intimate partner violence, suggesting that emotional deficits in relationships can produce severe relational outcomes (Zhu & Yu, 2021). While these studies converge on the importance of fondness and admiration, they differ in their emphasis on whether these factors primarily prevent conflict or actively promote marital quality.

Research examining gender dynamics provides nuanced insights into how fondness and admiration operate within marriages. Wang and Umberson (2023) found that women in same-sex marriages displayed higher levels of admiration and collaborative support than women in heterosexual unions, whereas women partnered with men reported receiving less admiration. These findings contrast with earlier studies suggesting that admiration is reciprocally expressed in most marital contexts, highlighting gendered variations in emotional expression. Similarly, Vu (2021) reported that women exhibit stronger needs for affection and emotional closeness than men, who often suppress emotional expression. While these studies reveal gender-based disparities, Yoo and Joo (2021) found no significant gender differences in the perception of love and affection.

Fondness has been conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing warmth, affection, positive regard, and appreciation of a partner's unique qualities (Gottman & Silver, 2015). Empirical studies indicate that fondness fosters emotional security, intimacy, and relational stability by reinforcing positive perceptions between spouses (Yilmaz et al., 2023; Malm et al., 2022). However, Farimah et al. (2020) observed disparities in the expression of affection among younger couples, suggesting that fondness may fluctuate across life stages. While some scholars view fondness as a stable emotional resource, others argue that it is dynamic and context-dependent, shaped by developmental and relational factors. This divergence underscores the complexity of fondness as a determinant of marital quality.

Admiration is closely linked to gratitude and appreciation, which play critical roles in sustaining positive marital interactions. Leong et al. (2019) demonstrated that gratitude predicts both individual and partner marital satisfaction, though its effects differ depending on whether it is experienced as a disposition or a mood. This finding contrasts with earlier research suggesting that admiration uniformly enhances relational quality, indicating that emotional processes operate differently across individuals. Moreover, Gottman and Silver (2015) contend that gratitude counteracts negativity and strengthens relational bonds through verbal affirmations and recognition of a partner's contributions. These findings collectively suggest that admiration functions both as an emotional disposition and a behavioural practice, though its impact on marital quality varies depending on relational context and individual differences.

Theoretical perspectives rooted in Gottman's Sound Relationship House model emphasise that fondness and admiration operate within a broader system of interspousal friendship, alongside love maps and turning towards behaviours (Gottman & Gottman, 2017). However, Tavakol et al. (2020) observed that couples often become less intentional about nurturing these relational processes over time, leading to reduced emotional closeness. While empathy and emotional responsiveness have been shown to strengthen marital bonds (Puspitasari & Gayatri, 2022), empirical evidence remains inconclusive regarding the relative contribution of fondness and admiration compared to other friendship components. Empirical studies consistently show that the presence of fondness and admiration enhances marital quality, while their absence predicts relational decline. Navarra and Gottman (2018) identify contempt – often arising from diminished admiration – as a major predictor of divorce. Yuan et al. (2022) further demonstrate that mutual respect and appreciation sustain relational stability even during conflict. In contrast, Kochuparambil (2021) reports that marital quality tends to decline over time due to reduced passion and harmony, with longer marriages exhibiting lower relational satisfaction than newer ones.

Cross-cultural studies reveal both universal and context-specific patterns in the relationship between fondness, admiration, and marital quality. While respect and emotional closeness consistently predict marital satisfaction across cultures (Bradbury & Bodenmann, 2020; Osafo et al., 2021), the expression of these emotions varies across social and religious contexts. For instance, studies in Islamic marital settings highlight respect as a central determinant of marital well-being (Wazir et al., 2020; Turner-Zwinkels & Spini, 2020), whereas Western studies emphasise emotional expressiveness and affectionate communication as key predictors of satisfaction (Shrout et al., 2023). These differences indicate that cultural norms shape how fondness and admiration are expressed and experienced within marriage, thereby influencing marital quality in diverse ways.

In the African context, research highlights respect, honour, and care as critical predictors of marital stability. Oyoo (2020) found that respect significantly predicts marital stability in Homabay County, Kenya, though no single factor was deemed sufficient to explain marital quality. Similarly, Osafo et al. (2021) reported that inadequate affection, admiration, and emotional intimacy contribute to abuse, infidelity, and divorce. However,

many African studies focus broadly on relational determinants without isolating the specific roles of fondness and admiration. Consequently, there remains a contextual gap in non-western scholarship regarding the precise influence of fondness and admiration on marital quality, hence the present study.

3. Methodology

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. This research design was appropriate for capturing relationships among variables at a single point in time and facilitating comparative and correlational analysis of the study constructs (Wellington & Szczerbinski, 2007). The target population comprised 375 married individuals in Karura Community Church. Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample size of 194 respondents was determined. Purposive sampling was employed to select respondents (Saunders et al., 2019; Cash et al., 2022). Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires. The questionnaire was based on Gottman's Sound Relationship House model and measured the dimension of fondness and admiration (Gottman & Silver, 2015). The Gottman assessment tool provided standardised measures of fondness and admiration, allowing for systematic evaluation of spouses' emotional and relational experiences. Marital quality was assessed using Likert-scale items capturing emotional intimacy, communication, and relationship satisfaction.

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 29. Descriptive statistics, Pearson's correlation, t-tests, ANOVA, and regression analysis were used to determine the relationships and predictive effects of fondness and admiration on marital quality (Treiman, 2009; Denis, 2020). Ethical considerations included informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation.

4. Findings

The study assessed respondents' agreement with statements regarding fondness and admiration in their relationships. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents who agreed with the statements as true.

Table 1 Distribution of Responses to Fondness and Admiration

Fondness and admiration statements	Percentage True
My partner really respects me.	89.0%
I feel loved and cared for in this relationship.	87.8%
When I come into a room, my partner is glad to see me.	85.5%
My partner appreciates the things I do in this relationship.	82.6%
Romance is something our relationship definitely still has in it.	73.3%
Fondness and Admiration aggregate score	83.6%

The results in table 1 indicate that 89.0% of respondents felt respected by their partner, and 87.8% reported feeling loved and cared for in their relationship. This finding is consistent with the work of Zoppolat et al. (2019), who highlight respect as a cornerstone in maintaining high-quality marital relationships, suggesting that respect fosters better communication and relational well-being. Additionally, 85.5% of respondents noted that their partner was glad to see them when they entered a room, while 82.6% felt appreciated for their contributions to the relationship. This finding aligns with Gottman and Silver (2017), who emphasize the importance of showing affection and warmth, as such gestures reinforce the emotional connection and intimacy between partners. It also mirrors Leong et al. (2019) who found that appreciation that is often expressed through gratitude, enhances marital satisfaction by reinforcing positive interactions and recognition of each other's contributions. A smaller percentage, 73.3%, agreed that romance was still a part of their relationship. This finding resonates with Tobore (2020), who argues that sustaining romantic affection through mutual respect and admiration is crucial for maintaining marital vitality and satisfaction. The aggregate score for fondness and admiration was 83.6%, indicating generally high levels of positive regard and affection among the couples in the study. The expression of fondness further characterizes such a relationship through small, everyday gestures and a keen attunement to each other's needs and desires (Navarra & Gottman, 2018). This high score reflects the importance of fondness in marriage, as noted by Gottman and Silver (2015), who define fondness as a key element in fostering a deep emotional bond and maintaining marital satisfaction. Figure 1 summarizes the classifications of fondness and admiration as strong, marginal, and needs improvement.

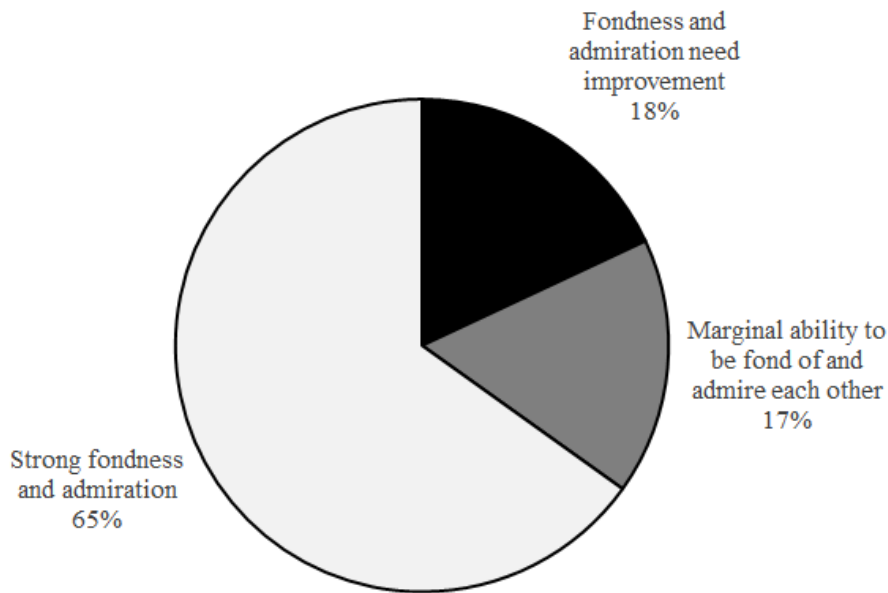


Figure 1 Distribution of Respondents by Fondness and Admiration Classification

Figure 1 shows that 65% of the respondents experienced strong fondness and admiration in their marriage. This finding supports the research by Wang and Umberson (2023), which stresses that mutual admiration is critical in sustaining positive emotional connections and contributing to relationship quality. However, 17% of the respondents reported only marginal ability to be fond of and admire each other, while for 18% of the respondents, fondness and admiration needed improvement. This finding underscores the importance of addressing gaps in emotional connection, as Gottman and Silver (2015) emphasize the role of admiration in preventing contempt and sustaining marital happiness. This result highlights the potential risks identified by Osafo et al. (2021), who suggest that a lack of affection and admiration can lead to marital dissatisfaction and increase the risk of divorce. Moreover, displaying affection, respect, and admiration within the marital context and engaging in consistent positive interactions are underscored as pivotal to fostering a successful and fulfilling relationship (Tavakol et al., 2020). Correlation analysis was performed to explore the relationship between marital quality and fondness and admiration. Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient at $p < .01$.

Table 2 Correlation between Fondness and Admiration and Marital Quality

		Marital Quality	Fondness and Admiration
Marital Quality	Pearson Correlation	1	.704**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	172	172
Fondness and Admiration	Pearson Correlation	.704**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	172	172

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The results revealed a strong, significant positive correlation between fondness and admiration and marital quality ($r = .704$, $p < .01$). This suggests that higher levels of fondness and admiration within a relationship are strongly associated with higher levels of marital quality. This relates with the work of Shrout et al. (2023), who indicate that mutual admiration is strongly correlated with higher marital satisfaction and relational stability. Marital quality was further regressed on fondness and admiration after accounting for demographic factors. Table 3 presents the output.

Table 3 Regression Analysis

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.279 ^a	.078	.061	.90749
2	.716 ^b	.513	.501	.66173

a. Predictors: (Constant), Marriage Duration in Years, Gender, Age bracket

b. Predictors: (Constant), Marriage Duration in Years, Gender, Age bracket, Fondness and Admiration Score in Percent

ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11.366	3	3.789	4.601	.004 ^b
	Residual	135.059	164	.824		
	Total	146.426	167			
2	Regression	75.051	4	18.763	42.849	.000 ^c
	Residual	71.375	163	.438		
	Total	146.426	167			

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Quality Composite Mean Score

b. Predictors: (Constant), Marriage Duration in Years, Gender, Age bracket

c. Predictors: (Constant), Marriage Duration in Years, Gender, Age bracket, Fondness and Admiration Score in Percent

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.201	.276		11.589	.000
	Gender	.308	.149	.165	2.064	.041
	Age bracket	.236	.106	.282	2.221	.028
	Marriage Duration in Years	-.102	.066	-.194	-1.539	.126
2	(Constant)	1.857	.230		8.066	.000
	Gender	.174	.109	.093	1.587	.115
	Age bracket	.106	.078	.126	1.349	.179
	Marriage Duration in Years	-.057	.049	-.107	-1.164	.246
	Fondness and Admiration Score in Percent	.022	.002	.675	12.060	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Marital Quality Composite Mean Score

Table 3 presents the results of a hierarchical regression analysis examining the contribution of demographic variables and fondness and admiration to marital quality. In Model 1, gender, age bracket, and marriage duration jointly explained a small but significant proportion of variance in marital quality, $R^2 = .078$, $F(3, 164) = 4.60$, $p < .01$, with gender ($B = .308$, $p < .05$) and age bracket ($B = .236$, $p < .05$) emerging as significant predictors, while marriage duration was not significant ($p > .05$). In Model 2, the inclusion of fondness and admiration substantially improved the model, increasing the explained variance to 51.3% ($R^2 = .513$, $F(4, 163) = 42.85$, $p < .01$), indicating a strong predictive contribution. Fondness and admiration was a significant positive predictor of marital quality ($B = .022$, $t = 12.06$, $p < .01$), while the effects of gender, age bracket, and marriage duration became non-significant in the final model. These findings demonstrate that fondness and admiration was a dominant predictor of marital quality, overshadowing the effect of age, gender, and marriage duration combined. The strong association between fondness and admiration, and marital quality underscores the role of

positive regard in sustaining marital satisfaction as discussed by Navarra and Gottman (2018). This finding aligns with Gottman's theory that admiration and fondness buffer against negativity and contempt, which Yuan et al. (2022) identify as key predictors of marital dissatisfaction and divorce. By consistently expressing respect, couples build a positive foundation that strengthens their relationship, enabling them to manage conflicts more effectively and maintain long-term marital happiness.

5. Conclusion

Fondness and admiration function as a core relational asset that sustains and deepens marital relationships irrespective of demographic differences. This indicates that marital quality is fundamentally anchored in the quality of emotional meaning that spouses construct around each other, not merely in shared experiences or demographic similarities. The study findings point to the primacy of relational processes over demographic determinants in explaining marital outcomes. Fondness and admiration emerge as interpretive lenses through which couples negotiate differences, manage tensions, and sustain commitment, thereby shaping the trajectory of marital relationships over time. The study contributes to theory affirmation by reinforcing the view that enduring marital quality is grounded in sustained positive emotional engagement. Premarital counselling should cultivate fondness and admiration, teaching couples to express affection and appreciation for one another regularly. Counsellors can also offer interventions to deal with common marital challenges and teach couples how to maintain intimacy and affection despite external pressures. For couples who struggle with affection, therapists can work with them to strengthen fondness and admiration by focusing on the positive aspects of their relationship. Practical exercises in gratitude and mutual appreciation can help couples express affection regularly.

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