

Impact of marital and family dynamics on college students' romantic and sexual identity attitudes

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how students' marital status and the marital circumstances of their parents influence their perspectives on romantic relationships, sexual identity, and prospective marriage. Rooted in attachment theory and social learning theory, this research examines the ways in which both experienced and observed familial interactions shape the formation of relational identity in the context of emerging adulthood. A descriptive survey methodology was used, employing questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather extensive data from college students. The sample of the study comprised 350 respondents, who were obtained through stratified, purposive and random sampling procedures. Independent-sample t-tests and one-way ANOVA were employed to evaluate the hypotheses by utilising the SPSS 16.0 program. Analysis revealed important links between parental divorce, marital conflict, and how open students were to non-traditional romantic paths and sexual identities. In contrast, students hailing from stable two-parent households demonstrated more traditional perspectives regarding romance and marital commitment. The results underscore the significant impact of familial context on shaping relational anticipations and the formation of identity in young adults. The discussion has implications for student counselling, relational education, and the formulation of inclusive policies in higher education.

Keywords: parents, college students, attitudes, romantic relationships, marital status

INTRODUCTION

Marriage and romantic relationships remain essential sociocultural constructions that profoundly influence psychological development, identity formation, and long-term well-being, especially throughout emerging adulthood (Cherlin, 2021; Furman & Collibee, 2022). Marriage in modern society is experiencing significant change due to globalisation, technological progress, evolving gender roles, and the diminishing prevalence of conventional family arrangements (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2024). Thus, the perspectives of young adults, particularly college students regarding romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marital commitment are increasingly influenced by intricate interactions among personal experiences, familial history, and sociocultural context.

The developmental stage of emerging adulthood, generally occurring between the ages of 18 and 29, is crucial for the

establishment of intimate relationships, as it involves significant identity discovery and the negotiation of relational expectations (Arnett, 2000, 2015). During this era, individuals commence the formation and consolidation of beliefs and values pertaining to love, sexuality, and enduring partnerships. These conceptions are not created in isolation; instead, they are profoundly shaped by familial modelling, attachment histories, and overarching society narratives. This study is theoretically based on three interconnected frameworks that together clarify the psychosocial dynamics influencing students' attitudes towards intimate relationships:

Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Hazan & Shaver, 1990) asserts that initial encounters with carers form internal working models of the self and others in relational contexts. Recent studies indicate that attachment-related anxiety and avoidance predict romantic instability and psychological suffering during university years (Helm et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022).

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Social learning theory (Bandura, 1977) underscores the significance of observational learning, positing that young adults assimilate attitudes and behaviours via exposure to familial models and peer interactions. Parental marital stability and peer discussions greatly influence students' expectations and emotional regulation in romantic relationships (Ode & Mkhwanazi, 2021).

Family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974) presents a systems viewpoint, asserting that individuals cannot be comprehended independently of their familial contexts. Empirical studies of this theory in sub-Saharan Africa indicate that disturbances in parental marital dynamics frequently result in disjointed relationship schemas in children, influencing their commitment orientation and sexual self-concept (Nkrumah & Adjei, 2023).

Recent empirical research in Ghana and other sub-Saharan regions offers essential insights into these dynamics. Agyei-Sarpong (2025) indicated that tertiary students in Tamale typically exhibit positive attitudes towards romantic and marital involvement; however, these attitudes considerably differ according to family structure and parental marital status. Amuasi and Alhassan (2024), utilising the stimulus-value-role model, established that emotional stability, religion, and family background are substantial indicators of mate selection preferences among Ghanaian students. Nkrumah and Adjei (2023) emphasised the mediating influence of family cohesion on students' marital ideologies and relationship preparedness, whereas Helm et al. (2020) associated insecure attachment styles with increased loneliness and reduced relational satisfaction during the transition to college.

Despite increasing academic interest, existing literature is still constrained in its examination of how students' marital status and their parents' marital conditions influence attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage, especially within the Ghanaian context. This empirical gap limits our comprehension of how societal expectations, personal relational experiences, and familial dynamics intersect to affect young adults' intimate lives.

This study aims to fill the gap by offering a detailed, theory-based, and contextually relevant analysis on marital status of students and marital condition parental/guardians impact on college students' attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientations, and marriage. The study enhances the evidence basis required for the creation of culturally responsive psycho-educational interventions, university counselling frameworks, and policy responses that foster healthy relational development among emerging adults in Ghana and similar contexts.

Statement of the Problem

The changing dynamics of romantic and marital relationships among young adults have garnered increasing academic interest, especially concerning the psychosocial factors that influence perceptions of intimacy, sexual orientation, and commitment. Within the realm of higher education, college students are progressively engaging with these areas during a pivotal developmental phase characterised by the exploration of identity, the pursuit of autonomy, and experimentation with relationships (Furman &

Collibee, 2022). However, a common issue in research is the gap between what students hope for in romantic relationships and what they actually experience, this gap has been linked to higher levels of anxiety, depression, emotional conflict, and problems in their relationships.

Empirical research highlights the significance of familial background factors such as the marital status of parents, as crucial indicators of relational beliefs and behaviours during the transition to adulthood. Students who are raised in environments characterised by parental divorce, marital discord, or single-parent households often demonstrate elevated levels of relational distrust, apprehension regarding commitment, and uncertainty in their exploration of sexual identity (Nkrumah & Adjei, 2023; Ode & Mkhwanazi, 2021). Simultaneously, the marital status of students, a variable frequently overlooked in educational psychology studies can profoundly influence their relational viewpoints, as those who are married or have been married contribute personal experiences and distinct role expectations to their understandings of romance and marital stability.

In the context of Ghana and the wider sub-Saharan African region, research is indeed developing, yet it continues to lack cohesion. For example, Agyei-Sarpong (2025) discovered that the perceptions of love and marriage among students in the Tamale Metropolis are influenced by cultural narratives and familial upbringing, exhibiting notable differences associated with the marital backgrounds of their parents. In a similar vein, Amuasi and Alhassan (2024) discerned that emotional compatibility and religious orientation—elements frequently conveyed through familial structures serve as pivotal factors influencing mate preference among undergraduates. Simultaneously, Nkrumah and Adjei (2023) illustrated a significant relationship between family cohesion and the marital readiness and optimism of students. Furthermore, extensive qualitative studies throughout the region indicate that patriarchal frameworks, patterns of generational divorce, and religious doctrines persist in shaping the romantic ideals of young adults (Owusu & Boateng, 2022).

Notwithstanding these contributions, there appears to be a lack of comprehensive research within Ghana that systematically investigates the interplay between students' marital status and the marital circumstances of their parents or guardians, particularly in relation to their perspectives on romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage. This gap in the literature is especially significant in relation to Tamale, a city experiencing rapid sociocultural change driven by modernisation, migration, and the growth of educational opportunities.

As a result, this research is both pertinent and essential. This project seeks to fill the gap by carefully studying how family and personal marriage factors affect college students' views on relationships, using solid theories and being mindful of cultural differences. The results are anticipated to provide significant understanding for university counselling centres, family therapy professionals, and policymakers aiming to cultivate emotionally intelligent and relationally adept student communities.

Table 1. Target population of college institutions in Tamale Metropolis: 2020/2021 academic year (Field Work, 2021/2022)

No	Name of educational institutes	Number of students in the second year
1	University for Development Studies (Tamale Campus)	180
2	Tamale Technical University	2,173
3	Tamale Nursing Training College	230
4	Tamale College of Education	283
5	Bagabaga College of Education	276
Total		3,142

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyse marital status of students and marital condition parental/guardians impact on college students' attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientations, and marriage.

Specifically, the study was designed to:

1. Investigate if there is no significant difference between married and single college students with regard to their attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientations, and marriage.
2. Assert whether there is no significant difference in college students' attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientations, and marriage based on the state of their parents or guardians' marriage.

Hypotheses of Study

To address the issue of romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marital attitudes among college students in Tamale City, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested:

1. H_0 . There is no significant difference between married and single college students with regard to their attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientations, and marriage.
2. H_0 . There is no significant difference in college students' attitudes towards romantic relationships, sexual orientations, and marriage based on the state of their parents or guardians' marriage.

METHOD

The research utilised a descriptive survey methodology to examine college students' views on love, sexual relationships, and marriage. Descriptive survey research is esteemed for its capacity to collect data that offers a comprehensive overview of existing attitudes, behaviours, and opinions within a designated community (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). This methodology is especially successful in practical contexts, as it enables inductive and methodical observation of occurrences to obtain nuanced insights.

The study employed questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to gather extensive data, recognised as effective instruments for descriptive research (Bryman, 2022). Questionnaires facilitated a standardised method for acquiring quantitative data, whereas semi-structured interviews permitted the necessary flexibility to explore the qualitative aspects of participants' experiences. These methodologies allowed the researchers to delineate the traits of prevailing attitudes and define standards for comparison studies.

Table 2. Frequency distribution of respondents from selected college institutions in Tamale Metropolis (Field Work, 2021/2022)

Schools	Frequency	Percentage (%)
UDS	70	20.0
NTCT	70	20.0
TCE	70	20.0
BCE	70	20.0
TaTU	70	20.0
Total	350	100

Moreover, the triangulation of data collection methods improved the validity and dependability of the results.

Population

The target group for this research comprises students enrolled at the University of Development Studies (UDS), Tamale Technical University (TaTU), Nursing Training College Tamale (NTCT), Bagabaga College of Education Tamale (BCE), and Tamale College of Education (TCE). **Table 1** displays the target population of tertiary educational establishments used in the investigation.

Sample and Sampling Procedure

The sample size for the research consisted of 350 students, as previously stated. This number was chosen based on the "table for determining sample size from a given population" published by Krejcie and Morgan (1970), as referenced by Sarantakos (1993, p. 149). According to the Krejcie and Morgan sample size chart, a sample size of 346 is considered sufficient for conducting research when the population size is 3500. Based on the findings of Agyei-Sarpong (2010, 2025), it is postulated that a sample size of 350 students, randomly selected from a population of 3,142 second-year students across five tertiary educational institutes during the 2020/2021 academic year, would provide a substantial and equitable representation. In order to address the potential impact of uneven variances, a sample size of 70 students was chosen from each of the five tertiary educational institutions. This decision was made based on the recognition that the effects of unequal variances are not significant when the sample size is equal (Walpole & Myers, 1985).

Table 2 displays the different educational institutions that were included in the study, together with the corresponding number of participants chosen from each institution. The data shown in **Table 2** indicates that an equal number of participants were chosen from each of the five tertiary educational institutions that were included in the research. A total of seventy participants were recruited from a specific group of tertiary educational institutions.

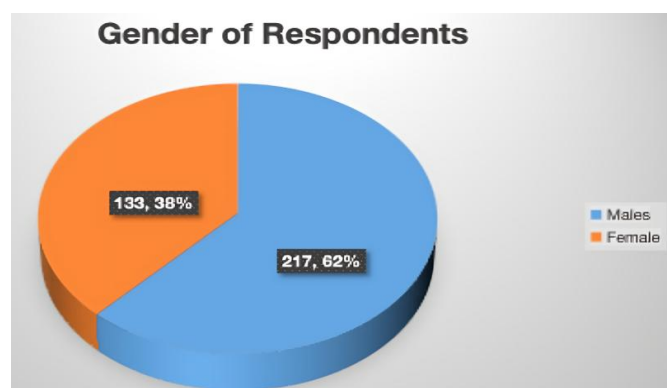


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents by gender (Source: Author's own elaboration)

The study used stratified, purposive, and random sampling methods to select a sample of second-year students from five higher institutions in the Tamale Metropolitan Region. The sample was categorized into four strata based on education level, religious affiliation, marital status, and residence type. Purposive sampling was used to select participants based on specific characteristics or expertise. The study excluded first-year students due to their lack of acclimation to campus life and third-year students due to test preparations. The researchers aimed to maintain consistency and comparability by focusing on second-year students to ensure a broad and representative sample.

Instruments

The study collected data through a systematic questionnaire designed to align with participants' responses. The questionnaires were organized into two sections: Part I, which addressed demographic characteristics, and Part II, which focused on participants' perspectives on love, sexual relationships, and marriage. The questionnaires were organized in a comprehensible manner, with a Likert scale of five points. The researcher was physically present at each school to ensure unbiased responses. The questionnaires were organized into sections A, B, and C.

The assessment of instrument validity

The instruments' validity was proved by their submission to experts in research, namely professors from the Educational foundation departments of the University of Cape Coast and the Counselling Centre. The instruments were modified via the process of correction, deletion, and the introduction of more suitable alternatives. Subsequently, the questions underwent a rigorous evaluation process, whereby they were carefully examined and endorsed by the supervisors to ensure their appropriateness and validity in terms of substance and face value. Furthermore, the instrument underwent a pilot test at the University of Cape Coast.

Reliability

The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was utilized to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, as it was the most suitable measure for assessing internal consistency. Given that a significant proportion of the questions were scored using a multiple-choice format, particularly with a five-point Likert scale.

The decision to use the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was based on the perspective put forward by Ary et al. (1990), which suggests that Cronbach's alpha is appropriate for measures that include multiple-scored items. According to McDaniel (1994), the alpha coefficient has the potential to be used in several types of assessments, including traditional exams with binary answer choices (i.e., "right" or "wrong") as well as assessments with response options such as "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," and "strongly disagree." The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the instruments yielded a value of 0.62, indicating a satisfactory level of reliability for the instrument.

The procedure for data collection

The data collection process for the study took place from May to August 2022, adjusting for academic calendars. The researcher contacted leaders and administrators from various institutions to facilitate the survey administration. Students were assembled in lecture halls, provided with objectives and research instruments, and encouraged to work independently. The researcher communicated with respondents and provided direct supervision to promote autonomous work. Questionnaires were collected on the same day for a 100% return rate.

Data Analysis

The research used SPSS 16.0 to analyse data, including percentages, means, standard deviation, independent-samples t-tests, and one-way ANOVA. The independent-sample t-test was used to compare the means of two distinct groups, focusing on marital status and was used to analysed hypotheses 1. ANOVA was used to examine hypotheses 2, which involved multiple independent variables such as single mother or father, divorce, and married. A scoring rubric was developed to assess responses in surveys, with a unique code number assigned to each questionnaire. A five-point Likert questionnaire was used, with mean scores assigned to each statement. Participants with a mean score of 2.6 or above were considered to have a good attitude, while those with a score of 2.4 or below were considered to have a negative attitude. The study aimed to determine participants' attitudes towards love, sexual relationships, and marriage.

RESULTS

Analysis of Results of Demographic Data About Respondent

The study involves a sample of 350 respondents from five selected college schools in the Tamale Metropolis. Details of frequencies and percentages for the personal information of the students are used and the data is presented in graphs. **Figure 1** shows the distribution of respondents according to their gender.

Figure 2 displays the distribution of participants based on the kind of certificate sought throughout their educational journey, namely degree, higher national diploma, and diploma. Among the whole sample of 350 participants, it was found that 20% ($n = 70$) were enrolled in degree courses, another 20% ($n = 70$) were pursuing upper national diploma

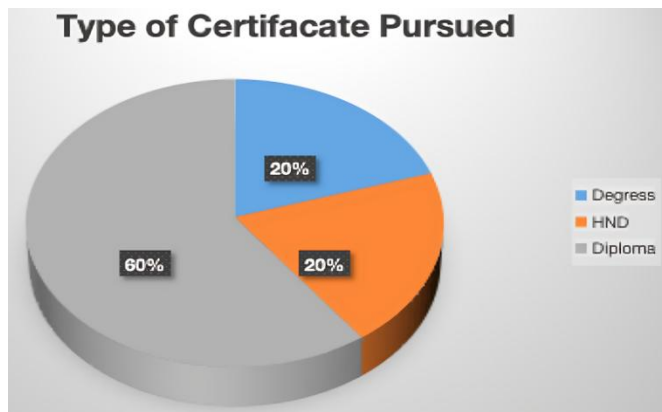


Figure 2. Distribution of respondents by certificate pursued (Source: Author's own elaboration)

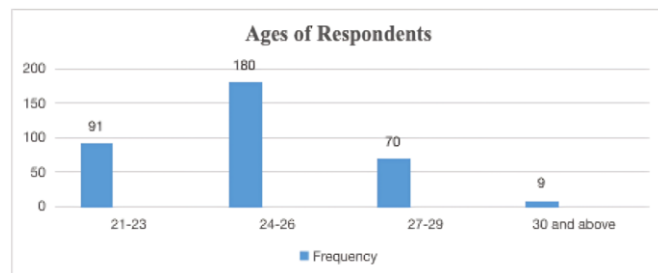


Figure 3. Distribution of respondents by ages (Source: Author's own elaboration)

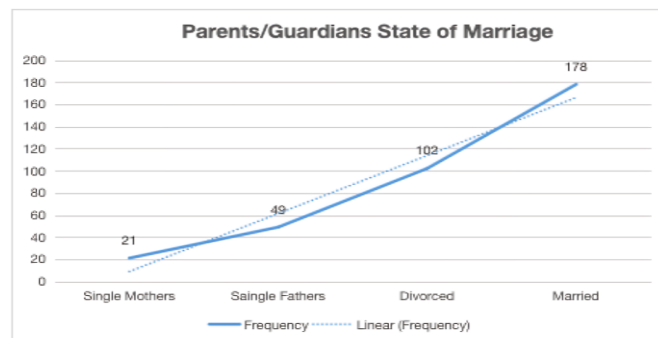


Figure 4. Distribution according to respondents' parents'/guardians' state of marriage (Source: Author's own elaboration)

programmes, and the remaining 60% (n = 210) were engaged in diploma programmes.

Respondents' ages were further analysed. **Figure 3** looks at the distribution of respondents according to ages.

Figure 3 shows that the modal age group is 24-26. One hundred and eighty students representing 51.4% falls within this category. This indicates that most of the respondents were in the early adult years. Only 9 (2.6%) were above 30 years.

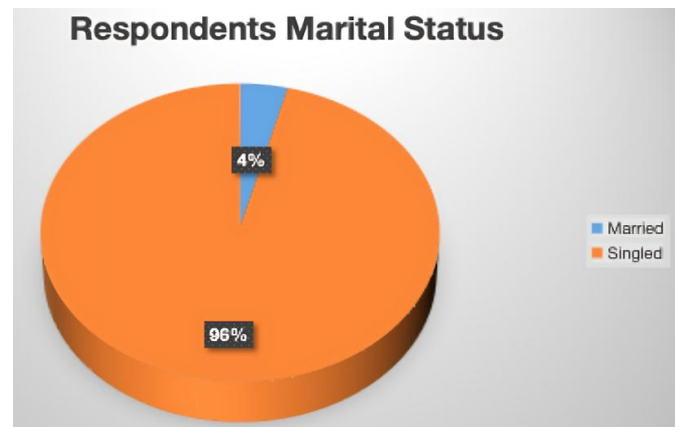


Figure 5. Distribution according to marital status respondents (Source: Author's own elaboration)

The study sought to find the marital state of respondents' parents/guardians. The responses reveal that most parents/guardians were married. From **Figure 4**, 178 (50.9%) were still married, 49 (14%) were single fathers, 21 (6%) were single mothers and 102 (29.1%) were divorced.

Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of respondents based on their marital status. The vast majority, comprising 96% of the sample, were identified as single, while the remaining 4% were reported as being married.

Analysis of Results of the Main Data

Testing of hypotheses

Hypothesis one: The purpose of the research hypothesis 1 was to find out whether marital status of respondents was a determining factor for the development of attitude towards love, sexual relations and marriage. It sought to find out whether there was any statistically significant difference between those that are married and those that are not, regarding their attitude towards love, sexual relations and marriage.

The independent-sample t-test was employed because the hypothesis raised required the need to compare the means of two groups (married and singles). To determine if significant difference existed between married and single respondents. To recapitulate, the null hypothesis tested was stated as follows:

H₀. There is no significant difference between married and single tertiary students with regard to their attitude towards love, sexual relations and marriage.

Table 3 shows the p-value to be 0.019 which is less than 0.05, the conventional marker of significant results. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Hypothesis two: The second null hypothesis tested was,

H₀. There is no significant difference in tertiary students' attitude towards love, sexual relations and marriage based on the state of parents'/guardians' marriage.

Table 3. Mean comparison of independent sample t-test on married and single college students' attitude towards romantic relationships', sexual orientation, and marriage (Field Work, 2021/2022)

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Standard deviation	df	t-value	Significance
Marital status	Married	14	1.5857	17.2078	348	-2.363	.019
	Single	336	1.7457	25.0628			

Table 4. ANOVA test results for respondents' attitude towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage based on state of parents'/guardians' marriage (Field Work, 2021/2022)

Variable	Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
State of parents	Between	5,722.611	3	1,907.537	3.113	.026
Guardian marriage	Within	211,994.604	346	612.701		

The concern of this hypothesis was to determine whether the state of parents/ guardians marriage was a key factor in determining respondents' attitude towards love, sexual relations and marriage. The hypothesis was tested on an alpha level of 0.05. One-way ANOVA was used to test this hypothesis because there were more than two groups of responses as shown in **Figure 5**. The results of the one-way ANOVA test are presented in **Table 4**. **Table 4** shows the p-value to be 0.026, which is less than 0.05, the conventional marker of significant results. As a result, the null hypothesis is rejected. It can therefore be concluded that the differences in the state of parents'/ guardians' marriage and students' attitude towards love, sexual relations and marriage is significant.

DISCUSSION

Discussions of Demographic Data About Respondent

The study involves a sample of 350 respondents from five selected college schools in the Tamale Metropolis. Details of frequencies and percentages for the personal information of the students are presented in graphs.

Respondents according to their sexes

The sex distribution as given in **Figure 1** shows clearly that, 217 (62%) of the respondents were males and 133 (38%) of females were involved. This is to be expected in that, in 2005/2006 academic year the male to female enrolment ratio was 65:35 for the universities and 70:30 for the polytechnics (now converted to technical universities) (Kwapong, 2007). Numerous studies (Agyei- Sarpong, 2025; Compura, 2003; Evans, 1995; Plummer, 2004; Przymus, 2004) proved this ratio with the findings that societal perception of women and their productive and reproductive roles affect their participation in formal education. Society perceives women as homemakers and child minders therefore any activity that takes them away from such normal schedules are frowned upon. As a result women find it difficult to embark on further studies, especially at their adult stage when they have begun building families.

Analysis distribution of respondents according to type of certificate pursued in school

The distribution of respondents according to type of certificate pursued in school (that is, degree, higher national diploma, and diploma) is shown in **Figure 2**. Out of the total respondents of 350, 70 (20%) were on degree programmes, 70 (20%) on higher national diploma programmes and 210 (60%) pursued diploma programmes.

Analysis of distribution of respondents by ages

Respondents' ages were further analysed. **Figure 3** looks at the distribution of respondents according to ages. **Figure 3**

shows that the modal age group is 24-26. One hundred and eighty students representing 51.4% falls within this category. This indicates that most of the respondents were in the early adult years. Only 9 (2.6%) were above 30 years.

Analysis of distribution according to respondents' parents'/guardians' state of marriage

The study sought to find the marital state of respondents' parents/guardians. The responses reveal that most parents/guardians were married. From **Figure 4**, 178 (50.9%) were still married, 49 (14%) were single fathers, 21 (6%) were single mothers and 102 (29.1%) were divorced.

Analysis of distribution according to marital statuses of respondents

Figure 5 shows distribution according to marital status of respondents. The majority 96% were single, while 4% were married.

Discussion of the Main Data

The present discourse revolves on the examination and analysis of several hypotheses.

Hypothesis one

The Marital Status of Students and Their Relational Attitudes: The initial hypothesis examined the extent to which the marital status of college students influences their perspectives on romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and the institution of marriage. An independent-samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference ($p = .019 < .05$), resulting in the rejection of the null hypothesis. This discovery suggests that one's marital status, be it married or single, significantly influences tertiary students' views on intimacy and commitment.

This finding corroborates previous observations that married students frequently encounter the simultaneous demands of academic and familial obligations, thereby influencing their perceptions and expectations regarding relationships (Clark, 2014). The data aligns with family systems theory (Minuchin, 1974), which conceptualises each individual as an integral component of a broader relational framework. The institution of marriage necessitates a series of systemic modifications—emotional, psychological, and structural—that shape students' perspectives on relationships (Nkrumah & Adjei, 2023). Married students generally exhibit more practical and sophisticated perspectives on love, sexuality, and the dynamics of marital roles, as they frequently manage adult responsibilities at an earlier stage than their unmarried counterparts.

Based on attachment theory, it seems that married students are likely to have healthier ways of forming close relationships shaped by their past or current romantic experiences compared to single students, who are still figuring out their identities and how to feel secure in relationships. Recent research indicates that a secure attachment in early adulthood contributes positively to relationship satisfaction, whereas attachment anxiety or avoidance often observed in unmarried students may result in ambivalence within intimate relationships (Helm et al., 2020; Lee et al., 2022).

This study reinforces the notion that the experience of marriage serves as a foundational structure through which relational attitudes are cultivated, transformed, or validated. Marriage, fundamentally, transforms into a dynamic process of experiential learning, resonating with the principles of social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), in which behaviours and beliefs are solidified through first-hand encounters.

Hypothesis two

The influence of parental marital status on students' relational perspectives: The second hypothesis investigated the extent to which the marital status of students' parents or guardians exerts a significant influence on their attitudes regarding romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage. The one-way ANOVA produced a significant outcome ($p = .026 < .05$), leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. The assertion suggests that the relational viewpoints of students are influenced not solely by their individual experiences but also by the marital interactions they witnessed during their formative years.

This discovery reinforces the core principles of social learning theory, which suggest that individuals assimilate relational behaviours demonstrated by significant figures, especially parents (Bandura, 1977; Ode & Mkhwanazi, 2021). Students hailing from intact or stable marital environments may have observed the dynamics of conflict resolution, expressions of affection, and enduring commitment, thereby shaping their aspirations. Conversely, individuals hailing from divorced or disrupted familial backgrounds may exhibit caution, scepticism, or ambivalence regarding romantic involvement.

The findings correspond with attachment theory, which underscores the notion that early familial connections—profoundly influenced by the consistency of parental relationships—establish the framework for adult romantic encounters (Lee et al., 2022). The dissolution of parental unions, extended disputes, or a lack of emotional support can undermine the formation of secure attachments, thereby heightening susceptibility to anxieties or avoidance concerning intimacy.

Moreover, the family systems theory emphasises that a destabilised family system, such as one affected by divorce or conflict, leads to disruptions within its subsystems, including the child-parent dyad. The systemic imbalances evident in childhood significantly shape future relational dynamics, affecting perceptions of love, trust, and commitment (Nkrumah & Adjei, 2023).

This aligns with previous scholarly works. Falter (1992) illustrated that the various family structures—intact, single-parent, or blended have a direct impact on the perspectives of young adults regarding marriage and divorce. Individuals who have been nurtured in reconstituted or tumultuous familial environments frequently demonstrate distinct anticipations and levels of relational contentment when contrasted with their counterparts from more stable households.

Integration and conceptual consequences

The results derived from both hypotheses indicate a convergence of personal experiences and familial influences in

moulding students' perspectives on intimacy, sexuality, and expectations surrounding marriage. When examined from a diverse theoretical perspective:

1. Attachment theory clarifies the ways in which early relational connections and present romantic encounters influence emotional regulation and frameworks of intimacy.
2. Social learning theory emphasises the significance of observational modelling, particularly from parental figures, in shaping attitudes towards love and commitment.
3. The theory of family systems elucidates the ways in which overarching familial dynamics shape relational preparedness and stability.

This study significantly contributes to and expands upon the developing body of literature pertaining to sub-Saharan Africa. Although the research conducted by Agyei-Sarpong (2025), Amuasi and Alhassan (2024), and Nkrumah and Adjei (2023) investigated romantic beliefs and familial influences separately, this study offers a unique perspective by concurrently analysing the marital status of students along with the marital conditions of their parents an approach that has rarely been explored in local or regional studies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section summarises the major findings of the study and draws conclusion. It then makes recommendations and suggest areas for further research.

Summary of Research Findings

The study—Romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marital attitudes among college students in Tamale City: A case study in the Tamale Metropolis, Northern Region of Ghana was conducted specifically to study the correlations between romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marital attitudes among college students.

The following null hypotheses were also tested:

1. H_0 . There is no significant difference between married and single college students with regard to their attitude towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage.
2. H_0 . There is no significant difference in college students' attitude towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage based on the state of parents'/ guardians' marriage.

The sample of the study comprises of 350 respondents selected from five tertiary educational institutions in the Tamale Metropolis of Ghana. Respondents were obtained through stratified, purposive and random sampling procedures.

Main Findings

The research revealed a number of findings in respect of the tertiary students' attitude towards love, sexual relation and marriage. These findings which have significant implications are summarized in this chapter.

The main findings of the two null hypotheses were as follows:

1. The first hypothesis unveiled the existence of significant difference between married college students and single college students regarding their attitude towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage. The indication is that marital status of students' is a key factor in determining attitude towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage.
2. The results of the second hypothesis led to the fact that the state of parents/guardians' marriage is a key factor in determining students' attitude towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage. The indication is that the state of college students' parents'/guardians' marriage (for example either, single fathers, single mothers, still married or divorce at the time of the research) serve as reference in attitude formation towards romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage of college students.

Conclusions

The aforementioned findings led to the following conclusions:

1. There exists a statistically substantial disparity in the opinions about romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage between married and single college students.
2. There is a statistically significant disparity in the attitudes of college students regarding romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and marriage, based on the marital status of their parents or guardians.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and theoretical implications of this study, the subsequent recommendations are put forth to improve psychosocial support systems for emerging adults in both academic and familial contexts:

1. Support from Institutions and Programs for Relational Well-Being: Higher education institutions ought to create support systems that cater for students' developmental requirements regarding romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and aspirations related to marriage. It is essential that these frameworks encompass counselling services, peer support groups, and psycho-educational workshops, particularly emphasising the needs of students hailing from family backgrounds characterised by parental divorce, separation, or single parenthood. Interventions rooted in culturally pertinent counselling methodologies can alleviate the negative impacts of relational instability and promote emotional resilience.
2. Engagement of Parents and Guardians via Psycho-educational Approaches: It is essential for parents and guardians to be made aware of the lasting impact that their marital status and related behaviours have on the relational attitudes of their children. It is advisable to establish psycho-educational initiatives that are rooted in community engagement and collaboration with

schools, aimed at equipping parents with the essential knowledge and resources to exemplify healthy, respectful, and emotionally balanced relationship dynamics. Modelling across generations, highlighted by social learning theory, plays a crucial role in fostering secure attachment and cultivating positive relational expectations in young adults.

Implications for Counselling

The results of this research carry significant consequences for counselling practitioners, especially in relation to higher education and the psychosocial growth of youth. They emphasise the necessity of a sophisticated, theoretically grounded, and culturally attuned methodology in relational counselling for emerging adults.

1. Assessment informed by cultural and developmental contexts: Counsellors should be acutely aware of the complex interaction between students' marital status and that of their parents or guardians, understanding these as significant psychosocial elements that influence perspectives on romantic relationships, sexual orientation, and the concept of marital commitment. Utilising attachment theory and family systems theory, it is essential for practitioners to incorporate family history and present relational dynamics into thorough intake assessments, thereby revealing foundational relational narratives and emotional regulation patterns. This methodology cultivates more accurate, tailored interventions.
2. Collaboration among family counsellors and the provision of psycho-education across generations are crucial for effective family support: Considering the influential role of parents and guardians, as indicated by social learning theory, it is imperative for counsellors to engage in family-centred outreach and psycho-educational initiatives. Involving parents and guardians through seminars, digital resources, or school-centred family initiatives can deepen their comprehension of the ways in which their marital interactions influence their children's beliefs about relationships and the formation of their identities. Through enhanced parent-child communication and the demonstration of effective relational behaviours, counsellors can play a pivotal role in disrupting the perpetuation of dysfunctional or avoidant patterns across generations.
3. Integration of institutions and focused initiatives: Counsellors are required to engage in collaborative efforts with institutions of higher education to establish comprehensive programming focused on relational and sexual wellness. It is essential that these programmes encompass workshops, support groups, and peer mentoring platforms that are specifically attuned to the needs of students hailing from divorced, single-parent, or conflict-ridden family environments. It is essential that these interventions are customised to confront relational ambivalence, identity confusion, and a fear of commitment, as these issues tend to be more pronounced in students who have experienced disrupted family systems. Engaging with academic

units, residential life staff, and student affairs personnel is essential for ensuring that counselling services are both accessible and contextually relevant.

4. Promotion and strategic guidance for policy development: Outside of the clinical environment, counsellors are tasked with the important responsibility of advocating for institutional policies that promote and sustain relational diversity among the student body—including married students, those with children, and individuals hailing from non-traditional family structures. These objectives could encompass adaptability in campus accommodations, availability of family counselling, and support services that are sensitive to the relational challenges distinctive to emerging adults.

Potential Areas for Further Research

This study offers important details about how students' marital status and their parents' marital conditions affect relational attitudes while simultaneously paving the way for further academic inquiry. Future enquiries may build upon the existing findings by integrating a broader array of demographic and psychosocial factors, including socioeconomic status, religious affiliation, ethnicity, and regional cultural norms, which could interplay with relational development and sexual identity among university students. Investigating these elements will yield a more nuanced and contextually rich comprehension of romantic and marital perspectives in sub-Saharan Africa.

Furthermore, it is advisable for future research to focus on the development, implementation, and assessment of intervention frameworks specifically designed for college students, as well as their parents and guardians. These initiatives ought to focus on improving relational skills, nurturing secure attachment styles, and encouraging inclusive viewpoints regarding sexual orientation and relationship frameworks.

Ultimately, subsequent investigations ought to consider the constraints inherent in this cross-sectional analysis, such as possible biases stemming from self-reporting and the restricted geographic range. Comprehensive and multi-faceted studies will be essential for exploring the developmental pathways of students' relational beliefs and the enduring effects of familial and personal marital experiences. This endeavour would enhance both the theoretical and practical advancements within this field of study.

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