

**PREVALENCE OF UNREALISTIC MARITAL EXPECTATIONS AMONG THE
PREMARITAL COUPLES FROM SELECTED CHURCHES IN NAIROBI COUNTY,
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ABSTRACT

Premarital programs have been a popular strategy to reduce divorce rates and improve post marriage couple's satisfaction. They also provide couples with the tools they need to improve communication and problem solving and reduce conflicts by addressing unrealistic expectations. The main objective of this study was to establish the prevalence of unrealistic marital expectations among the premarital couples from selected churches in Nairobi, Kenya. Prevalence of unrealistic marital expectations was also determined by use of frequency across various sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, year of education and dating period. Purposive sampling method was used to select participants of the study (n=118) who were screened for marital expectations at baseline. Data was collected using Marital Expectations Questionnaire (MEQ) which was a self-administered questionnaire. The findings of the study showed that 89 (75.4%) of the study's participants had high (unrealistic) marital expectations, followed by 23 (19.5%) who had realistic expectations and then 6 (5.1%) had low marital expectations. This portrayed that most respondents view marriage with idealistic or elevated hopes perhaps regarding love, support, happiness or partnership roles. This may have implications for marital satisfaction, counseling relationship or attitudes especially if those high expectations are not met in reality. Sociodemographic characteristics such as years of education and length of dating were found to have a significant association with marital expectations. Individuals with fewer years of education were more likely to hold realistic marital expectations. Participants who had been in a relationship for 1.2 to 3 years were also more likely to exhibit high or unrealistic expectations about marriage. These findings suggest that both educational background and dating period play important roles in shaping how individuals perceive and anticipate married life. The study recommended that premarital programs should focus not only on communication and conflict training, but also on helping couples develop realistic and balanced expectation about marriage.

KEYWORDS: Prevalence, Marital Expectations, Premarital Couples.**INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND**

Marriage is widely regarded as the beginning of the family life cycle (Manap et al., 2013). Marital expectations play crucial role in shaping individuals' commitment to marriage by influencing their beliefs about emotional, financial, and personal benefits of the union. These expectations significantly affect marital satisfaction and long-term outcomes (Arocho & Kamp

Dush, 2017; Casad et al., 2015; McNulty & Karney, 2004). Expectations reflect what individuals consistently seeks and anticipate from a marital relationship or a life partner (Olajumoke, 2018). Importantly, Marital expectations are not static, for they tend to change over time as individuals gain new relationship experiences and adapt to shifting personal and societal priorities, such as education and career

goals (Arocho, 2019 Barr, Simons, & Simons, 2015; Willoughby, 2010; Willoughby, Medaris, James, & Bartholomew, 2015). These expectations also provide valuable insight into how young people perceive family life, helping researchers forecast societal shifts in attitudes towards marriage and family structures (Arocho, 2021).

In early romantic relationships, individuals often experience heightened positive emotions due to intense feelings of love and opportunities for self-expansion, where partners begin to integrate each other's identities and perspectives (Aron et al., 2002; Fisher et al., 2016). During this phase, couples typically experience fewer conflicts and present idealized versions of themselves, which contributes to greater relationship satisfaction (Birditt et al., 2012; Barelds & Dijkstra, 2011). These experiences are often influenced by prevailing social norms that portray marriage as a desirable and fulfilling life goal (Dennett & Girme, 2024).

Studies on premarital relationships reveal that one of the leading causes of later marital conflict and relationship breakdown is the presence of unrealistic expectations (Cathy, 2013, Shibeshi, 2015). Research consistently shows that people who entered marriage with excessively high or unrealistic expectations are more likely to increased conflict, lower levels of marital satisfaction, and weakened commitment (Casad et al., 2015; Fowers & Olson, 1992; McNulty et al., 2018; Willoughby et al., 2021). These unrealistic beliefs about a partner's role or the nature of marriage are strong predictors of future relational challenges (Pollock Star et al., 2022). Young couples, in particular are often influenced by what Olajumoke (2018) calls "unfounded incongruities" or creative narratives that are idealized expectations formed by societal narratives. According to Connolly (2018), when these irrational expectations go unmet, individuals may emotionally withdraw from their partners. These emotional disconnections often stem from social influences such as fairy tales, family stories, television movies and idealized representations of marriage films and magazines Tartakorski (2017). These unattainable ideas can lead to miscommunication and unmet needs, placing significant strain on relationships.

Beyond the psychological impact, such expectations may also contribute to broader societal trends in relationship stability. For example, Schweizer (2018) divorce rate of 16.1 per 1,000 married women age 15 years or older, while Payne (2018) reported that the rate for first marriages is slightly lower at 15.4%. These figures vary across race, income, and education levels, highlighting the complex interplay of social factors in marital outcomes. Contemporary young adults often hold more ambivalent attitudes toward marriage. While many still value and aspire to be married, they increasingly view it through a lens of

personal autonomy (Clyde et al., 2019). This shift can create internal conflict, as individuals struggle to transition from a self-focused mindset "me" to the relational "we" orientation essential for a successful marriage (Clyde et al., 2019). One such kind of interpersonal interaction that has been significantly impacted by societal shifts is the premarital relationship. Consequently, premarital interactions now include essential conversations about topics that were previously reserved for marriage (Bhandari, 2019). For example, many couples choose to live together instead of getting married have also become more common, and it is now generally accepted for couples to have children outside marriage. Understanding the premarital era is crucial in light of these societal shifts (Bhandari, 2019). Religion continues to influence how couples should act in premarital relationships despite societal shifts that have affected these relationships (Christian, 2019). According to Christian, this is not to say that all religious couples are completely governed by their beliefs in their relationships. In this case, premarital counseling is a time when couples discuss important topics like how to manage their future home, how many children they should have and how to raise them and the roles they play as working individuals (Cobbinah, & Osei-Tutu, (2019). Most importantly, couples should attempt to comprehend one other's true identities, expectations, and traits at this time (Odero, 2019). Furthermore, Skurtu (2016) asserts that if a couple chooses to be married, the success of their marriage depends on how well they handled their expectations during their premarital relationship. This was further supported by Su and Ledermann (2023), that premarital counseling has been recognized as crucial for managing marital expectations.

The duration of a relationship significantly influences commitment evolution, as unmet expectations and poor communication can lead to entrenched dysfunction and dissatisfaction (Lundberg & Pollak, 2015). Longer relationships often result in a greater decrease in commitment due to unmet expectations (Lavner & Bradbury, 2010). In addition, Relationship length can amplify expectations and dysfunction effects (Abreu-Afonso et al., 2022; Karney & Bradbury, 2020; Schoebi et al., 2012). Relationship duration and unrealistic expectations in couples can intensify issues, necessitating early intervention in communication and conflict resolution skills to mitigate the negative effects of dysfunctional beliefs (Lavner et al., 2020).

Thus, this study aimed at establishing the prevalence of marital expectations among premarital couples in Nairobi, Kenya. Evangelical churches in Kenya serve as both a place of worship and a potent force for social change. These churches believe in value of holistically preparing couples for marriage, which is seen in the prevalence of premarital counseling but there is scarce information on prevalence of marital expectation

among premarital couples. It would be important then to document the prevalence so that churches can prepare premarital couples for marriage to prevent divorce, separation and lack of marital satisfaction in marriage. This is crucial because couples can be helped to better understand and manage their expectations.

METHODOLOGY

The study used cross-sectional research design through use of quantitative data collection. The study involved both male and female couples in selected churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. Included were engaged couples with wedding date at least six months away. The study involved 59 premarital couples (118 individuals) who were screened at baseline. Data was collected using self-administered questionnaire that was used to capture sociodemographic characteristics of the study population. The study participants were further screened for determining their marital expectations using Marital Expectation Questionnaire (MEQ). Three categories were used to classify marital expectations. That is, high, realistic and low marital expectations. The tool's internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha value above .7, is within an acceptable margin (Pallant, 2007). It is a self-report test to which premarital couples responded using five-point Likert scale (SD=Strongly disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly agree). Higher

scores indicated higher (unrealistic) marital expectations. Sociodemographic questionnaire which captured participant's characteristics such as age, gender, occupation, year of education and dating period was also administered.

The sociodemographic questionnaire and MEQ were administered to premarital couples after approvals from Daystar University Institutional Scientific Ethics Research Committee (DU-ISERC), School of Applied Human Sciences (SAHS), National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Clearances were also sought from selected churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. The researcher then booked an appointment with the help of Premarital Counseling Department Coordinator to meet premarital couples who had registered for premarital counseling and their wedding date was at least six months after commencement of the study. On the first and consecutive days of screening, the premarital couples sat at the church halls where recruitment was done. Data gathered from sociodemographic questionnaire was double checked for completeness and precision before leaving the designated halls. It was then coded, cleaned, and double entered by the researcher before being analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 31. Descriptive statistics were conducted and results were presented in tables.

RESULTS

Table 1: Prevalence of marital expectations.

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Low marital expectations	6	5.1%
Realistic marital expectation	23	19.5%
High (unrealistic) marital expectations	89	75.4%

As shown in Table 1, 118 premarital individuals (59 couples) were screened for marital expectations. This study established that majority of respondents had high (unrealistic) marital expectations at 89 (75.4%), followed by realistic marital expectation 23 (19.5%) and the low marital expectations 6 (5.1%). This finding implies that premarital couples from the selected Nairobi churches have higher expectations for their marriages. Depending on how these expectations

interact with personal experiences, social norms, and religious beliefs, these expectations may have both positive and negative effects. The results may further imply that the small group of respondents who reported low marital expectations may have a more pessimistic view of marriage probably due to past experiences, cultural beliefs or observations of failed relationships.

Table 2: Distribution of sociodemographic characteristics and marital expectation classifications.

2. Distribution of sociodemographic characteristics and marital expectation classifications.							
Variables	Total	Marital expectations			Chi-square Test		
		Low	Realistic	High	χ^2	df	Sig.
Participant's age							
≤ 29 years	45 (40.2)	2 (1.8)	12 (10.7)	31(27.7)	5.455	3	.487
30-35 years	48 (42.9)	3(2.7)	9(8.0%)	36(32.1)			
36-40 years	15 (13.4)	1(0.9)	0(0.0)	14(12.5)			
≥ 41 years	4 (3.6)	0 (0.0)	1 (0.9)	3 (2.7)			
Participant's gender							
Male (Husband)	59(50.0)	3(2.5)	15(12.7)	41(34.7)	2.681	1	.262
Female (Wife)	59 (50.0)	3(2.5)	8(6.8)	48(40.7)			
Participant's years of education							

≤ 20 years	99(86.8)	6(5.3)	19(16.7)	74(64.9)	19.961	1	.018
≥ 21 years	15(13.2)	0 (0.0)	3(2.6)	12(10.5)			
Participant's dating period							
≤ 1 years	16(13.7)	0(0.0)	1(0.9)	15(12.8)	14.192	2	.038
1.1 -3 years	74(63.2)	5(4.3)	15(12.8)	54(46.2)			
≥ 3 years, 1 month	27(23.1)	1(0.9)	7(6.0)	19(16.2)			

As presented in Table 2, analysis showed that the prevalence of marital expectations by key sociodemographic characteristics. Regarding participant age and low marital expectations, the results indicates that participants aged 30-35 years had a higher frequency of unrealistic marital expectations 36 (32.1%), compared to those aged ≤ 29 years who had 31(27.7%), those aged 35-40 manifest high (unrealistic) expectations at 14(12.5%) and those who are above 41 years also having shown high marital expectations at 3 (2.7%). The distribution of participants' ages and marital expectations groups did not change significantly, according to the chi-square test ($p=0.487$). The implication of higher marital expectations among participants aged 30–35 is that this age group often sits at a unique intersection of developmental, cultural, and psychological factors, which tend to elevate their expectations of marriage. Likewise, realistic marital expectations were more common among participants aged 29 years or younger 12 (10.7%) compared to those aged 30–35 years 9 (8.0%) and 41 years or older 1(0.9%). None of the participants aged 36-40 years (0.0%) reported having realistic marital expectations. Regarding low marital expectations, the results showed that the frequency of low marital expectations was highest among participants aged 30–35 years (2.7%), compared to those aged 29 or younger (1.8%), 36–40 years (0.9%), and 41 years or older (0%). These findings showed that there is no statistically significant relationship between participants age and their level of marital expectations. This means that marital expectations whether low, realistic or high do not vary significantly across age groups in this sample.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 2, the distribution of marital expectations was analyzed based on gender. Among males, 2.5% reported low marital expectations, 12.7% had realistic expectations and 34.7% reported high (unrealistic) expectations. Similarly, 2.5% of females reported low expectations, 6.8% had realistic expectations and a slightly higher proportion of 40.7% reported high expectations. Although women were more likely to report high expectations compared to men, a P-value of 0.262 showed that there was no statistically significance difference between gender and marital expectations. This suggests that gender was not a meaningful factor in determining marital expectations in the current study. Both male and female participants showed similar likelihood of holding low, realistic or high expectations regarding marriage.

Furthermore, the distribution of participants' years of education in relation to marital expectation distribution shows that those with 20 years of education or less were more likely to have realistic marital expectations 19(16.7%) compared to those with 21 years or more 3(2.6%). Similarly, participants with 20 years or less of schooling were also more likely to have high marital expectations 74(64.9%) than those with 21 years or more 12 (10.5%). The p-value of 0.018 shows that there was a statistically significant relationship between years of education and marital expectations. Participants with more than 21 years of education were more likely to have high marital expectations and none reported low expectations. In contrast, those with 20 years or less had a larger distribution, including some with low and realistic expectations. These results implied that people with higher levels of education may have higher marital expectations for their marriage because they have been exposed to a wider range of viewpoints, critical thinking and self-reflection skills that help them define what they think a satisfying relationship should entail.

Similarly, the data indicates that the prevalence of unrealistic marriage expectations was higher among individuals who had dated within 1 and 3 years (46.2%) than among those who had dated for 1 year or less 15(12.8%) and for more than 3 years 19(16.2%). According to a statistical test, the distribution of participants' dating period and marriage expectations differed significantly ($p=0.038$). Higher marital expectations are significantly correlated with the length of dating period, which illustrates how romantic relationship time influences not only emotional ties but also preconceived notions about what a marriage should be.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to determine the prevalence of marital expectations among premarital couples in selected churches in Nairobi County, Kenya. In this study, Findings revealed that majority of participants 89 (75.4%), had high (unrealistic) marital expectations. This suggests that many held idealized views of marriage likely influenced by personal values, cultural norms and religious beliefs. A total of 23 participants (19.5%) had realistic marital expectations, reflecting a balanced perspective on marriage. Only 6 participants (5.1%) reported low marital expectations, signifying minimal or even or pessimistic views about marriage. Notably, the study categorized both low and high marital expectations as unrealistic, accounting for

80.5% of participants. These results point to a concerning trend, as unrealistic marital expectations whether overly idealistic or pessimistically low can significantly impact relationship quality and stability.

Depending on how those expectations interact with personal experiences, religious beliefs and societal pressures, their effects can be both positive and negative. Within many Christian communities, marriage is often regarded as a sacred covenant, not merely a legal contract. In this context, high marital expectations may reflect a strong commitment to fidelity, emotional intimacy and spiritual growth. These ideals can foster conflict resolution, professional help seeking and resilience in marriage especially when supported by shared faith and community values. However, when expectations are unrealistically high, they may set standards that are difficult to achieve in every day marriage life. This can lead to disappointment, relational stress and reluctance to seek help due to stigma or fear of judgement particularly in tightly knit religious communities.

This aligns with Tartakovski (2017), who found that unrealistic expectations can lead to discord and emotional detachment, undermining marital satisfaction. Similarly, Connolly (2018) emphasized that when expectations around love and marriage go unmet, individuals often disengage from the relationship. Vaterlaus et al. (2017) also observed that unmet expectations, especially during life transitions, are a leading source of marital strain. Furthermore, Rasheed et al. (2021) noted that holding a spouse to irrational standards can result in dysfunctional interpretations of normal relational challenges. Unrealistic expectations can cause couples to become intolerant of any dispute that arises in a relationship, particularly when those conflicts contradict their ideals of love or marriage. These pressures increase the risk of marital dissatisfaction, disconnection and ultimately divorce. Clyde et al. (2020). Reinforce this by noting unrealistic expectations from both partners can escalate interpersonal problems. When one partner fails to meet other's expectations, it can result in negative interaction patterns including coercive behaviors as observed by (Najarpourian et al., 2019). In addition, Connolly (2018) identified that couples with irrational premarital expectations are not only less likely to transition successfully into marriage, but even when they do, their risk of separation increases especially if no formal commitment is made to align expectations. Generally, these findings affirm the importance of addressing unrealistic marital expectations during the premarital phase. Failure to do so may place couples at greater risk for marital dissatisfaction and instability especially in communities where spiritual and cultural expectations around marriage are deeply rooted.

The results in Table 2 illustrated the relationship

between participants' sociodemographic characteristics and their marital expectation classifications. A key highlight of the study is that the consequences of unrealistic expectations may vary across different sociodemographic factors. Previous research primarily focused on gender, leaving gaps regarding other factors such as age, gender, year of education and duration of dating. The current study addresses this by examining these additional variables. A chi-square test was conducted to examine the association between age and marital expectation categories. The findings show that participants aged 30–35 years constituted the largest age group in the sample (42.9%), followed closely by those aged 29 years or younger (40.2%). Smaller proportions were observed among those aged 36–40 years (13.4%) and 41 years and above (3.6%). When marital expectations were analyzed across age groups, those aged 30–35 years had the highest frequency of low marital expectations (2.7%), whereas realistic expectations were common among participants aged 29 years or younger (10.7%). High marital expectations were most prevalent in the 30–35 (32.1%) and ≤ 29 age groups (27.7%), with relatively few older participants reporting high expectations. Despite these observable differences in distribution, the chi-square test ($\chi^2 = 5.455$, $df = 3$, $p = .487$) indicates that the association between age and marital expectation classification was not statistically significant. This suggests that age, in this sample, was not a strong predictor of whether an individual held low, realistic, or high marital expectations.

Existing literature shows a broader consensus that age at first marriage is inversely related to the likelihood of divorce. Those who marry younger tend to face greater marital instability (Lee, 1997). Additionally, Cheema and Malik (2021) also emphasized that while romantic relationships can develop at any life stage, adolescence is critical period for forming such relationships (Giordano et al., 2006, as cited in Cheema & Malik, 2021). Historically seen as transient or superficial, adolescent relationships are now understood to be important in shaping expectations for marriage and future partnerships.

As shown in Table 2, the distribution of marital expectations was also analyzed based on participants' gender. The sample was evenly split, with 59 males (50%) and 59 females (50%) participants. Among males, 2.5% reported low marital expectations, 12.7% reported realistic expectations, and a majority, 34.7%, reported high expectations. Similarly, among females, 2.5% had low expectations, 6.8% had realistic expectations, and 40.7% reported high marital expectations. Although a slightly higher proportion of females reported high expectations (40.7%) compared to males (34.7%), and males were more likely to report realistic expectations (12.7%) versus (6.8%), the chi-square test result ($\chi^2 = 2.681$, $df = 1$, $p = .262$) indicates

that these differences were not statistically significant. This suggests that gender was not significantly associated with marital expectation classifications in this sample. Both male and female participants showed similar likelihoods of holding low, realistic, or high expectations regarding marriage.

While the current study found no significant gender differences, prior research has shown that gender can play an important role in shaping marital ideals. For example, Keshavarz *et al.* (2013) argue that irrational romantic expectations, particularly among men, can lead to dissatisfaction in marriage. Similarly, Mansfield (2007) found that both men and women often enter marriage with unrealistic expectations and misconceptions about marital life.

However, some studies have reported nuanced gender-based differences. Fallahchai and Fallahi (2019), along with Ogletree (2015), emphasize the importance of examining how men and women differ in their expectations of marriage and partners. Baber and Tucker (2006) found that women tend to hold more egalitarian views and exhibit more conservative sexual attitudes than men. Bumpass *et al.* (2009) observed that men were more likely than women to believe that women can lead fulfilling lives without marriage, while gender differences on the same belief about men were smaller. Blakemore *et al.* (2005) found that more women than men expressed a desire to marry, whereas Servaty and Weber (2011) found no significant gender differences in general marital attitudes, although women more strongly endorsed the idea of marrying for love. Therefore, even if the current study did not find significant gender differences, literature shows that men and women have distinct expectations for marriage, often influenced by cultural norms (Karney, 2021; Rhoades *et al.*, 2010; Waller & McLanahan, 2005)

Regarding participants' years of education, the study found a significant association between Participants' education level and their marital expectations ($\chi^2 = 19.961$, $df = 1$, $p = .018$). The majority of participants (86.8%) had 20 years of education or less, while a small proportion 13.2% had 21 years or more. Among those with 20 years or less of education, 5.3% reported low marital expectations, 16.7% reported realistic expectations, and a large majority (64.9%) had high expectations. In contrast, none of the participants with 21 years or more of education reported low expectations; only 2.6% had realistic expectations, while 10.5% had high expectations. These findings suggest that participants with fewer years of formal education were more likely to exhibit both high and realistic marital expectations, whereas those with more advanced education were less likely to report high marital expectations overall. This may reflect differences in life experience, exposure to diverse relationship models, or variations in

expectations shaped by academic, cultural, or social learning. The significant p -value (.018) emphasizes that educational attainment plays a meaningful role in shaping how individuals approach marital commitment and expectation. Supporting this, Heaton (2002) found that higher levels of education could potentially predict greater marital satisfaction, probably due to improved communication skills and emotional intelligence. Uzuncakmak and Yilmaz (2020) discovered that higher educational levels in couples lead to increased marital harmony. Similarly, recent cross-sectional studies indicate that individuals with higher education are more likely to marry than their less educated counterparts (Kalmijn 2013; Lundberg, Pollak, and Stearns 2016). This suggests that while advanced education may temper expectations, it may also contribute to more stable and satisfying marital relationship over time.

In reference to participants' dating period and marital expectations, the results revealed a statistically significant relationship between the duration of the dating period and marital expectations ($\chi^2 = 14.192$, $df = 2$, $p = .038$). The majority of participants (63.2%) had been dating for 1.2 to 3 years, while 13.7% had dated for 1 year or less, and 23.1% had been in relationships for over 3 years and 1 month. Participants in the 1.2–3-year dating range exhibited the highest proportion of realistic expectations (12.8%) and high expectations (46.2%), while 4.3% of them reported low expectations. Those who had been dating less than or equal to 1 year did not report low expectations, and only 0.9% had realistic expectations. However, 12.8% held high expectations. For those dating more than 3 years, 0.9% reported low expectations, 6.0% realistic, and 16.2% high expectations. These findings suggest that couples in the early to mid-stages of dating (1.2–3 years) may have a more balanced and hopeful view of marriage, perhaps due to developing emotional intimacy and compatibility without the complications of long-term relational fatigue. Interestingly, couples dating over 3 years showed lower levels of high expectations, which could indicate either a maturing understanding of marital realities or emerging doubts about long-term compatibility. The statistically significant association ($p = .038$) indicates that dating duration is a meaningful factor influencing marital expectations. Longer dating periods may allow couples to clarify roles, set expectations, and gather important information about each other, which helps them enter marriage with reduced stress and conflict (Deressu & Girma, 2019). In addition to dating duration, levels of education can affect marital satisfaction. Couples with higher education levels often face more complex stressors that influences both their marital expectations and partner selection (Deressu & Girma, 2019). Premarital Counseling also plays a vital role in shaping realistic expectations. According to Ratson (2015), such counseling helps couples identify

vulnerabilities that may worsen after marriage. are helped to identify areas of vulnerability that may worsen after marriage. Christian counseling, in particular includes a spiritual dimension that emphasizes God's design for marriage and fosters relationships grounded in Christian values (Fickle, 2020).

While premarital counseling was once a requirement in some religious traditions, its relevance has declined in contemporary society (Teal, 2018). Nevertheless, it remains an effective tool for teaching couples how to resolve conflict, communicate needs, and align expectations (Bittles, 2017). The engagement period, as emphasized by both De Loof (2022) and Carlson et al. (2021), is a critical phase during which couples reflect on their shared goals, financial plans, and individual aspirations. Finally, research suggests that people often approach marriage with positive emotions and anticipation, as it remains a socially valued milestone (Dennett & Girmé, 2024; Finkel et al., 2015). This period of introspection enhances self-awareness and contributes to more informed decision-making about the future of the relationship.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed that the majority of premarital couples from selected churches in Nairobi hold high (unrealistic) marital expectations, reflecting idealized views of marriage influenced by personal, cultural, and religious factors. A smaller proportion demonstrated realistic or low marital expectations. Sociodemographic factors such as years of education and dating duration showed significant associations with marital expectations, indicating that individuals with fewer years of education and those in mid-length dating relationships (1.2–3 years) are more likely to hold higher or unrealistic expectations. Conversely, age and gender were not significantly related to marital expectation classifications in this sample. These findings highlight the complex interplay between individual background and relationship experiences in shaping marital outlooks among premarital couples.

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