

Research Article

Patterns of Marital Instability in Three Urban Centers of Katsina State, Nigeria

Najibullahi Yusha'u^a, Umar Abdul-Kadir^a, Muhammed Sani Tanko^b

^aDepartment of Geography and Regional Planning, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Nigeria. ^bDepartment of Computer Science, Federal University Dutsin-Ma, Nigeria.

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the pattern of marital instability in some selected urban parts of Katsina state, Nigeria. A total of 400 questionnaires were proportionately allocated to the three most urbanized local government areas (LGAs), which serve as the headquarters of the three senatorial zones of the state, and were administered via the systematic sampling method. The data obtained were analysed by both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis through tabulations and Chi-square. The results indicate that divorce, accounting for 56.5%, is the most prevalent form of marital instability in the selected urban centers of Katsina state, with the Katsina zone having the highest number of cases of divorce in the state. This is followed by widowhood/widowerhood (28%), which is greater in the Daura Zone of the state. The results also show that marital instability is more common among couples aged between 30 and 34 years. This finding also shows that the trend of marital instability tends to be low at early and late stages of marriage. This is because couples tend to be more tolerant of each other at the early and late stages of marriage. The chi-square analysis shows that the relationship between locality and marital instability is statistically significant. The study finally recommends that religious organization leaders incorporate effective ways through which divorce among couples could be minimized or completely eradicated in society.

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1 Introduction

Marriage and family remain the foundation of social organization and are widely recognized as among the oldest institutions sustaining human societies. They provide companionship, procreation, and socialization, serving as the bedrock for continuity and stability within communities. However, contemporary social and economic transformations have gradually reshaped traditional understandings and expectations of marriage, altering family structures and relationship dynamics (National Population Commission (NPC) & ICF, 2019). Although marriage continues to be highly valued in Nigeria, recent trends indicate growing pressures on marital unions, with increasing cases of separation and divorce reported across several regions of the country (Punch, 2025).

Marital instability occurs when couples are unable to maintain a harmonious and satisfactory relationship, ultimately leading to emotional or physical separation, or the legal dissolution of the union. Widowhood remains an unavoidable outcome of the death of a spouse, while separation and divorce result from interpersonal conflict, unmet expectations, and socioeconomic challenges (Udi & Nwoke, 2021). Separation may take the form of spouses living apart or remaining together without emotional intimacy. Divorce, on the other hand, is the formal legal termination of marriage. The rising shift from widowhood-driven marital disruption to increased divorce and separation reflects broader changes in

gender relations, financial pressures, and societal expectations (NPC & ICF, 2019).

Across Africa, and particularly in Nigeria, marital instability has been increasing in recent decades (Essien & Okorie, 2022). Although marriage remains culturally esteemed in Nigerian society, several factors, including urbanization, economic hardship, changing gender norms, and declining fertility tolerance, have contributed to higher levels of marital conflict and dissolution (Adegboye & Olanrewaju, 2020; Okon & Ibrahim, 2023). Studies consistently show that factors such as infidelity, infertility, domestic violence, poor communication, and unemployment are among the leading causes of marital instability across Nigerian communities.

The consequences of marital instability are far-reaching. Children from unstable homes face heightened risks of emotional distress, economic vulnerability, and reduced academic performance (UNICEF, 2020). Women, especially in patriarchal societies, experience intense social stigma, limited social support, and economic insecurity following marital breakdown (Eke & Igboeli, 2022). For the broader society, patterns of marital instability influence social cohesion, child welfare outcomes, and community well-being.

Despite growing scholarship on marital instability in Nigeria (Nene, 2014; Asa & Nkan, 2017; Karik, 2017; Udi & Nwoke, 2021; Essien & Okorie, 2022; Okon & Ibrahim, 2023), much of the existing research has focused on causes.

and consequences, with limited attention given to how patterns of marital instability vary across different urban contexts. A recent geospatial study on marital dissolution in Nigeria revealed significant geographic differences in marital breakdown, emphasizing the importance of localized investigations (Arigbede, 2025). In Katsina State, however, empirical studies examining the patterns of marital instability across specific urban centres remain scarce. Yet anecdotal reports and court records suggest rising cases of marital breakdown across several towns in the state.

Given this gap, the present study examines the patterns of marital instability in three urban centres of Katsina State, Nigeria. Understanding these patterns is crucial for designing context-specific interventions and policies that promote marital stability and strengthen family well-being.

2 Materials and Methods

2.1 Study Area

The study area is Katsina State, with an estimated population of 10,733,560 as of 2025. Katsina State is located between latitudes 11°07'49"N and 13°05'22"N and longitudes 6°52'30"E and 9° 20'40"E (Patrick, 2012). The state is bounded by the Niger Republic to the north, by Jigawa and Kano States to the east, by Kaduna State to the south, and by Zamfara State to the West (Figure 1).

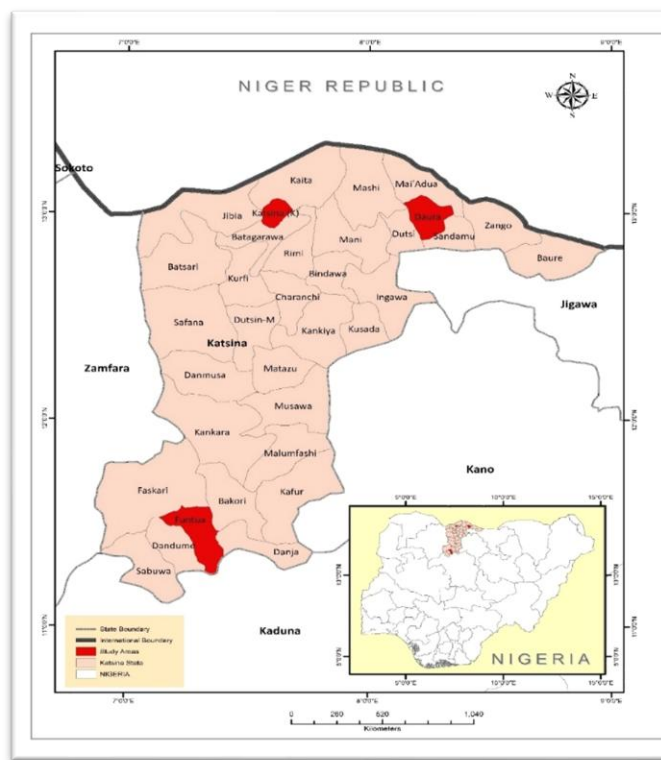


Figure 1: Map showing the study area.

2.2 Data Sources

Primary data were obtained through questionnaire

administration in the three most urbanised local governments of Katsina State, representing the three senatorial zones of the state. These LGAs are Katsina from the Katsina Zone, Funtua from the Funtua Zone, and Daura from the Daura Zone.

2.3 Data Collection

To determine the sample size, the Yamani formula for determining sample size is adopted. This formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n = Sample Size

N = Total Population

e = Level of precision at a Confidence Level of 0.05

Since our total population figure is determined (see Table 1), our sample size using the Yamani formula is therefore:

$$n = 1,397,120 / 1 + 1,397,120 (0.05)^2$$

$$n = 1,397,120 / 1 + 1,397,120 \times 0.0025$$

$$n = 1,397,120 / 1 + 3,492.8$$

$$n = 1,397,120 / 3,493.8$$

$$SS = 400$$

However, a systematic sampling method was used to select the sample units across the wards of the selected LGAs. Also, a systematic sampling method was used to administer the questionnaires to households until the required sample size was attained.

Table1: Sample Unit and Sample Size.

Sample Unit	Population as at 2016 (NPC, 2006)	Population Projected to 2025 at a Growth rate of 3.86%	Sample Size
Katsina LGA	429,400	578,574	166
Funtua LGA	303,900	409,475	117
Daura LGA	303,600	409,071	117
Total	1,036,900	1,397,120	400

The data collected was analysed using the descriptive statistical method and presented through tables and cross-tabulations. Also, a chi-square analysis was done to determine the relationship between the different urban centers and the nature of marital instability (divorce, separation, and widowhood) in the three urban centers of Katsina State.

Table 2: Sample Wards from the Sample Units

Sampled LGA	Wards	Sampled Wards	Sample Size
Katsina	1. Arewa 1	1. Arewa 1	56
	2. Arewa 2		
	3. Gabas 1		
	4. Gabas 2		
	5. Gabas 3	2. Gabas 3	55
	6. Kudu 1		
	7. Kudu 2		
	8. Kudu 3		
	9. Shinkafi 1	3. Shinkafi 1	55
	10. Shinkafi 2		
	11. Yamma 1		
	12. Yamma 2		
Funtua	1. Dandutse	1. Dandutse	39
	2. Dukke		
	3. Goya		
	4. Mai-Gamji		
	5. Makera	2. Makera	39
	6. Maska		
	7. Nasarawa		
	8. Sabon Gari		
	9. Tudun Iya	3. Tudun Iya	39
	10. Unguwar Ibrahim		
	11. Unguwar Musa		
Daura	1. Kusugu	1. Kusugu	39
	2. Madobi A		
	3. Madobi B		
	4. Mazoji A		
	5. Mazoji B	2. Mazoji B	39
	6. Sabon Gari		
	7. Uban-Dawaki A		
	8. Uban-Dawaki B		
	9. Sarkin Yara A	3. Sarkin Yara A	39
	10. Sarkin Yara B		
	11. Tudun Wada		
TOTAL			400

3 Results

Table 3 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents. The table shows that 56% of the respondents are male. This is due to the Islamic (the dominant religion in the study area) rule of “no entry,” which forbids all males, excluding relatives, from reaching any female in the community without the consent of an elder from her family.

However, the female respondents were approached with the help of female research assistants or the guidance of an elder from their family. The table also shows that the majority of the respondents (84.2%) are within the age bracket of 15-49. This implies that the majority of the respondents are within their reproductive ages and that any anomaly in their marital life affects their reproductive capacity. The table also shows that the majority of the respondents are literate (can read and write). However, even with that, the area still suffers from

marital challenges. Farming is the major occupation in the study area, accounting for more than 35% of the total responses. The farming system is practiced in the form of crop production or livestock rearing. However, this study confirms the findings of Yusha’u et al. (2021) and contradicts the observations of Olaleye (2010), who explained that educational status sometimes reflects the nature of occupation. The table shows that 54.8% of the respondents are in polygamous unions, whereas 45.2% of the respondents are in monogamous unions. This is because the dominant religion in the study area is Islam, which permits men to marry as many as four wives, provided that they can maintain justice and equity between them.

Additionally, their Culture views men who are in monogamous unions as incomplete and manly deficient. This makes it very rare to find a man within the age bracket of 35-45 with only one wife. Additionally, the

percentage response of monogamous union (45.2%) may be attributed to the high level of education in the study area as well as the concept of serial monogamy attributed to the study area in previous studies. Serial monogamy refers to the fact or custom of having a number of marriages one after another but never more than one at a time (Yusha'u et al., 2023).

The study also revealed that over 69% of the respondents had their first marriage between the ages of 18 and 29. These findings indicate that early marriage is

still common among the people in the study area. Additionally, the majority of the respondents (70.3%) had 1--8 children ever born. This finding shows that childlessness may not necessarily be a major cause of marital instability in the study area.

Table 3: Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristic	Class	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	224	56
	Female	176	44
	Total	400	100
Age	15-49	337	84.2
	50 and above	63	15.8
	Total	400	100
Education	Islamiyya	92	23
	Informal	21	5.2
	Primary	22	5.5
	Secondary	173	43.3
	Tertiary	92	23
	Total	400	100
Occupation	Civil Servant	66	16.5
	Trading	96	24
	Livestock rearing	18	4.5
	Crop Cultivation	125	31.3
	Artisan	95	23.7
	Total	400	100
Marital Union	Monogamy	181	45.2
	Polygamy	219	54.8
	Total	400	100
Age at First Marriage	Below 18years	88	22
	18-23years	99	24.7
	24-29years	179	44.8
	30 and above	34	8.5
	Total	400	100
Number of Children Ever Born	None	8	2
	1-4	157	39.3
	5-8	124	31
	9-12	65	16.2
	13-16	30	7.5
	17 and above	16	4
	Total	400	100

3.1 Locality and Marital Instability

Table 4 presents the distribution of marital instability by locality in Katsina State. The table reveals that 56.5% of the total respondents are divorced. Of this 56.5%, the majority (20%) of the divorcees are from central Katsina. This is followed by the Funtua zone, with 18.4% out of the

56.5%, and the Daura zone has the least number of cases of divorce, with only 17%. This explains why divorce cases prevail in the Katsina zone (popularly called Katsina Central) of the state. This may be due to evolving gender roles, education, and financial independence associated with the urban landscape. Approximately 28% of the total

followed by the Katsina zone, with 10.8% of the respondents.

Zone	Ward	Divorce		Separation		Widowhood		Total	
		Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Katsina Zone	Arewa 1	31	7.8	10	2.5	15	3.8	56	14.0
	Gabas 3	28	7.0	12	3.0	15	3.8	55	13.8
	Shinkafi 1	25	6.2	17	4.2	13	3.2	55	13.8
Funtua Zone	Dandutse	21	5.2	11	2.8	7	1.8	39	9.8
	Makera	28	7.0	2	0.5	9	2.2	39	9.8
	Tudun Iya	25	6.2	7	1.8	7	1.8	39	9.8
Daura Zone	Kusugu	21	5.2	0	0.0	18	4.5	39	9.8
	Mazoji B	24	6.0	3	0.8	12	3.0	39	9.8
	S. Yara A	23	5.8	0	0.0	16	4.0	39	9.8
TOTAL		226	56.5	62	15.5	112	28.0	400	100

separation, and widowhood/widowerhood. Table 4 reveals that a greater percentage of the respondents (26%) fall within the age bracket of 30–34 years. Sixteen percent of those aged 35–39 years were recorded, whereas the lowest percentage was found among those aged 15–19 years, with only 2% of the respondents. Additionally, Table 3 shows that the Arewa 1 ward (4.2%) and the Gabas 3 ward (4.2%) from the Katsina zone had the highest percentages of people aged 30–34 years with marital challenges. This is followed by the Tudun Iya ward from the Funtua zone with 3.8%.

[illegible]

The trend of marital instability tends to be low when couples are newly married (i.e., at the early stage of marriage), reaches its peak at a young age, and decreases as couples graduate from their youthful age (Table 4). This relatively high divorce rate among people aged 30–35 years is attributed to immaturity, inability to handle marital conflicts, and the feeling that they are still young and can easily find another partner (Karik, 2017). This study also concurred with the findings of Otanwa (2017), who reported that divorce was more common among people aged between 25 and 35 years. The low rate of divorce among the older generation shows maturity in the presence of their children and grandchildren, who view them as role models.

Table 5 shows a cross-tabulation of the name of the locality and the educational background of the respondents. The table reveals that 43.2% of the respondents attained secondary education, 23% attained tertiary education and Islamic education, and 5.5% and

5.3% of the respondents attained primary and informal education, respectively. This shows the high literacy level of the community under study, as the majority of the respondents can read, write, and have formal education. The table also reveals that the majority of the respondents who attained tertiary education are from the local government of Katsina (13.5% of the 23%). This is because of the availability and proximity to different tertiary institutions within the region (Katsina Central), which also has the largest concentration of tertiary institutions within the state. This is followed by the Funtua Local Government, with 5.8% of the 23%. This is due to its proximity to the Zaria Local Government Area of Kaduna State, which is one of the cities with a high concentration of tertiary institutions in the country. However, this result clearly reflects the urban nature of the study area as well as the samples selected for the study.

Table 6: Crosstabulation on the Name of Locality and Educational Level

		EDUCATIONAL LEVEL					Total
		Islamiyya	Informal	PSLC	SSCE	Tertiary	
NAME OF LOCALITY	KTN-Arewa1	10	4	2	21	19	56
		2.5%	1.0%	0.5%	5.2%	4.8%	14.0%
	KTN-Gabas3	6	5	0	23	21	55
		1.5%	1.2%	0.0%	5.8%	5.2%	13.8%
	KTN-Shinkafi1	8	0	1	32	14	55
		2.0%	0.0%	0.2%	8.0%	3.5%	13.8%
	FTA-Dandutse	12	4	2	15	6	39
		3.0%	1.0%	0.5%	3.8%	1.5%	9.8%
	FTA-Makera	5	2	2	22	8	39
		1.2%	0.5%	0.5%	5.5%	2.0%	9.8%
	FTA-Tudun-Iya	4	2	4	20	9	39
		1.0%	0.5%	1.0%	5.0%	2.2%	9.8%
	DRA-Kusugu	8	0	2	20	9	39
		2.0%	0.0%	0.5%	5.0%	2.2%	9.8%
	DRA-Mazoji-B	18	4	2	9	6	39
		4.5%	1.0%	0.5%	2.2%	1.5%	9.8%
	DRA-Sarkin-Yara-A	21	0	7	11	0	39
		5.2%	0.0%	1.8%	2.8%	0.0%	9.8%
Total		92	21	22	173	92	400
		23.0%	5.2%	5.5%	43.2%	23.0%	100.0%

3.2 Chi-Square Test of Spatial Variation in Marital Instability

To validate whether the observed differences in marital instability across the three urban centres of Katsina State are statistically meaningful, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted using the distributions presented in Table 4. This test is appropriate because both variables (locality and marital instability type) are categorical and the data are in frequency form.

Variables Used:

Independent Variable: Locality (Katsina Zone, Funtua Zone, Daura Zone)

Dependent Variable: Marital Instability Type (Divorce, Separation, Widowhood)

Sample Size: N = 400

The result in Table 7 shows that $p < 0.05$; therefore, the relationship between locality and marital instability is

statistically significant. This means that marital instability does not occur randomly across the three zones. Spatial location significantly predicts whether an individual is more likely to experience divorce, separation, or widowhood.

Table 7: Chi-square Test on Spatial Variation of Marital Instability (Funtua, Katsina & Daura Zones)

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	20.87	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	23.45	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.21	1	.013
N of Valid Cases	400		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.8.

Katsina Zone accounted for the largest share of divorce cases (20% of all respondents). The chi-square test confirms that this is not due to chance, but reflects a real spatial pattern. Likely contributing factors include higher urbanization and exposure to modern marital expectations, increasing female education and financial autonomy, evolving gender roles leading to more frequent disputes, and reduced stigma toward marital dissolution in highly urbanized settings. The statistical test supports the conclusion that Katsina Zone is significantly distinct in its divorce profile. Funtua Zone, with moderate divorce and noticeable separation, recorded 18.4% divorce and a relatively high proportion of separation cases.

The chi-square results confirm that Funtua's pattern differs from Katsina and Daura. Underlying factors may include semi-urban economic pressures, migratory livelihoods linked to trading, and transitional social norms less conservative than Daura but not as urbanized as Katsina. Thus, Funtua represents a middle spatial pattern, statistically distinct but not extreme. Daura Zone has the lowest divorce rate (17%) and the highest widowhood rate (11.5%). The chi-square results verify that widowhood prevalence in Daura is significantly greater compared with the other zones. Possible explanations may include higher adherence to conservative marital norms reducing divorce, an older population structure in parts of the zone, male mortality patterns linked to migration, security exposure, or occupation. Thus, Daura stands out in a statistically significant way not for divorce but for widowhood.

The statistical evidence strengthens the study's central claim that marital instability in Katsina State is spatially patterned and not uniform across the three urban centres. This means that interventions must be zone-specific, not generalized. Katsina Zone needs urban marital counseling and conflict mediation systems. Funtua requires programs addressing economic stress and instability in semi-urban households. Daura needs targeted support for widows, including socio-economic rehabilitation programs.

4 Conclusion

The findings from this study demand urgent attention from all concerned bodies, including counselling psychologists, marriage counselors, religious leaders, married couples, and the entire public. This is because the study has revealed and confirmed the reality and the prevailing nature of marital instability. The study also moves further to explain the spatial variation in marital instability in Katsina State. Therefore, the results of this study should be of paramount interest to marriage counselors. The study further recommends strengthening Family Counselling and Conflict Resolution Mechanisms through the establishment of community-based family counselling centers in each local government area (LGA), particularly in urban areas such as Katsina, Funtua, and Daura, where divorce rates are highest. Additionally, traditional and religious institutions (such as Hisbah boards, Shari'a courts, and community leaders) should be empowered with modern counselling techniques to mediate marital disputes before they escalate into separation or divorce. Furthermore, the study recommends that religious organization leaders incorporate effective ways through which divorce among couples could be minimized or completely eradicated in society.

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