

**Influence of Spousal Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution
as Expressed by Married Adults in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State:
Implications for Counselling Practice**

Lateef Omotosho Adegboyega

Abstract

This study investigated the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis. The research design adopted for the study was a descriptive design. A stratified sampling technique was employed to select 210 respondents. The main instrument used for the study was a researcher-designed questionnaire entitled “Influence of Spousal Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (ISCMCRQ)”. The instrument was validated by experts in counseling and also yielded a reliability co-efficient of 0.88 after a test re-test reliability method. One research question was raised and three hypotheses were postulated and tested. An analysis of Variance and t-test were employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level. Findings revealed that communication in marriage has a positive influence on marital conflict resolution. Findings also revealed that communication helps to resolve marital conflict if there is effective communication among couples and enhanced respect for each other. Ineffective communication between spouses leads to perceptive error. There were no significant differences in the influence of spousal communication style on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis based on gender, age and educational qualification. It was therefore recommended that married adults should be encouraged to pay attention to the non-verbal communication aspects of their relationships.

Keywords: spousal communication, marital conflict resolution, married adults, Ilorin metropolis, Kwara state

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Introduction

In the Nigerian context, marriage is the coming together of a man and a woman as husband and wife. Selecting a partner and entering into a marital contract is considered as a maturational milestone and personal achievement which requires the ability to communicate effectively with the partner. Marriage that was not built on effective communication might break up (Ogunsanmi, 2008). Communication is very essential in stabilizing marriage. Communicating effectively enables the couple to resolve conflict amicably (Esere, 2007). The institution of marriage is not crisis free since the two individuals that come together as husband and wife, most of time, have different temperaments and different personality types, which may manifest in terms of the level of communication; sometimes positive and at other times negative (with this latter type leading to spousal abuse).

Communication is seen by Hybels and Weaver (2001) as any process in which people share information, ideas and feelings which involve not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms, and style. Communication is an integral feature of human activity. It is a pillar which maintains the influence of spousal communication on marital stability and is a structure of peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding. Communication is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship (Esere, 2008). Communication is the key to a strong, healthy relationship. It allows partners to feel love and caring. Effective communication requires practice of the skills of listening and expressing thoughts and feelings.

Currently, marriage instead of being pleasant and enduring has become disappointing and fragile to a great number of people (Olson & Defrain, 2000). Universally, marriage is a foundation in every society. It can be the most nourishing and enduring asset in a human relationship. Larson and Holman (2004) posited that marriage provides the fundamental structure for establishing family relationships which are aimed at expanding the family by creating the next generation. A healthy marriage is characterized by a series of constructive influences and changes in the physical and emotional health of adults and children (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The decision to marry is a crucial decision in one's life. However, most people do not invest their time and energy before getting married in preparing themselves for their marital relationship. Some couples spend more time preparing for the marriage ceremony, instead of building skills for a sustainable marriage (Olson & Defrain, 2000).

The term marital satisfaction has proven to be rather elusive to define, often used interchangeably with the terms marital quality and dyadic adjustment. The husband and wife's ability to accommodate each other at any given time is defined as marital quality. Moreover, it can depict a single dimension like communication or perhaps the successful general functioning of a marriage (Harper, Schaalje, & Sandberg, 2000).

Marriage is the most sensitive and emotional commitment that people can have as it revolves around warm relations of mental peace and acceptance. However, results show that the problems of the day in many families have increased and that there is a decline in marital quality. Increases in divorce and family conflict not only threatens the family but it is also a serious threat to society and social systems (Nwadinigwe & Anyama, 2010).

Marital conflict often begins with verbal humiliation and emotional abuse and eventually intensifies and increases until it reaches physical abuse. Abusers usually say and do things to shame or insult their spouse. The perpetrator may mock the victim in private as

well as in front of other people, saying things such as: “You are too ugly”, fat, too skinny, stupid miserable, and lazy” and among others (Ordu, 2004). Marital conflict can be caused by lack of coordination between the couple’s needs and their satisfaction, self-centeredness, differences in preferences and behavioural patterns, and irresponsible behaviour attributed to marital issues and marriage (Farahbakhsh, 2004).

In Nigeria, the level of marital conflict or violence is significantly high. Afro News (2007) reported that one-third of women are believed to have been subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse carried out primarily by their husbands. In beating their wives, husband might believe they are instilling discipline in them, as well as maintaining control. This is especially so when the women are economically dependent on the men. This reason could be that Nigerian society is basically patriarchal and women’s place within the scheme is decidedly subordinate. Thus, the common forms of abuse reported were: shouting at a wife (93%), slapping or pushing (77%), and punching and kicking 40%. It is, however, disturbing to note that many women do not know if they had been abused or not. This could be due to the acceptance of some abusive behaviour being viewed as normal when perpetrated by the husband.

The increasing incidents of marital conflict, broken marriages or divorce has propelled the researchers to investigate possible solutions to spousal abusive behaviour and marital conflict. Communicating effectively enables couple to develop the required competence to manage their emotions, negotiate their relationship, understand their spouse’s point of view, express empathy, and cope constructively with marital challenges and irrational dispositions (Esere, 2007). Munroe (2003) posited that the ability of couples to say sorry, show unconditional positive regard, be appreciative of others and express forgiveness needs certain effective communication skills like empathy, self-control. and a highly serviceable understanding of human needs and feelings (Nwadinigwe & Anyama, 2010).

A lack of effective communication in a marriage eventually leads to disunity and conflict in a marriage. Communication is germane to a marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship (Esere, 2002, 2006). It is the remedy for a sick and unhealthy marital relationship (Olagunju & Eweniyi, 2002). With so many marriages ending tragically in divorce (Idowu & Esere, 2007), it is very crucial now to work on the communication between husbands and wives. Several challenges develop when there is no communication with many of these problems being solved through effective communication. No doubt, communication is essential to a successful marriage. Without communication, no marriage can survive in a divorce-filled world that people find themselves in (Jolin, 2007). Effectual communication requires rigorous practice and a great deal of effort. Without communication, it is almost impossible to resolve conflicts or enhance a partnership.

There is a high correlation between communication and conflict resolution skills of couples and marital adjustment or divorce rates (Christensen & Shenk, 2001). Most of the divorce cases are due to unresolved marital conflicts among the couples (Samani, 2008). An investigation by Zargar and Doost, (2008) demonstrated some common factors related to divorce in Iran. They reported that a lack of communication skills, conflict over roles/responsibilities, a husband’s physical and verbal abuse and lack of social skills are the major divorce factors. In their study, Zargar and Doost (2008) pointed out communication problems as the most important divorce factor in Falavarjan, Iran. Consequently, there is an insufficient level of communication, which leads to family problems and contributes to the stress levels of the couple. With a rise in the quantity of such problems and the level of marital stress, a couple’s satisfaction levels fall.

It has been observed that both positive and negative communication interactions influence marriage. Married couples who display frequent negative interactions are more likely to experience strained relationships (Dilillo, 2001). Gottman and Driver (2004) stated that interaction between couples determines marital outcomes. The way partners communicate with one another is of particular interest, particularly how they reflect on their conflict resolution and affective communication skills. The way in which couples argue has been shown to be important, and the expression of affection they have for one another has proved to be significant in determining marital outcomes. Other interpersonal factors include a couple's behavior towards one another. In short, communication has long been the research focus for marital researchers and many studies have found an association between communication and relationship satisfaction (Bradbury & Karney, 2003). It has been indicated that communication behaviors and interaction patterns are evidently related to marital satisfaction.

Conflict management styles are responses or a set of patterned behaviours that people use during conflict (Wilmot & Hacker, 2000). Effective communication has been seen to be a great conflict management style in marriages. According to Idowu and Esere (2007), in order to have a long and lasting relationship with someone, excellent communication skills are necessary. The ability to communicate effectively in marriage permits spouses within a marriage to survive and enjoy their pattern of living and interaction (Sotonade, 2003). The couple may be able to withstand the inner and outer pressures of marriage with the effective use of communication. Although there are other factors reducing marital conflict that exist, effective communication could be more pertinent in addressing marital problems since it has been found to be useful in enhancing a good marital relationship (Esere, 2007). Therefore, this study investigated the influence of spousal communication style on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis.

Research Question

This research question was raised to guide the study:

- What is the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were postulated and tested:

1. There is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of age.

3. There is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of educational qualification.

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive design method. The choice of this design is based on the fact that it allows the researcher to seek information or opinions from the respondents without necessarily influencing their choice of response with regard to the variables under study.

Participants

The population for this study comprised all married adults in Kwara State while the target population consisted of selected married adults in the Ilorin metropolis drawn from Ilorin-East, Ilorin-West and Ilorin-South local government areas. The sample was taken from market places, churches, mosques, and schools etc. Since the study of the total population is not possible and also impracticable, the researcher selected 210 married adults for the study.

A purposive sampling technique was used to select participants from churches, mosques, market places, public and private organizations for this study. The purposive sampling technique is a sampling procedure in which a researcher purposively selects certain groups as a sample because of their relevance to the investigation under consideration (Daramola, 2006). Therefore, a total number of 210 respondents (that is 70 respondents from each of the Local Government Areas) participated in the study.

Data Collection Tools

The instrument that was adopted for collecting data for this study was a researcher-designed questionnaire entitled “Influence of Spousal Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution Questionnaire (ISCMCRQ). The questionnaire has two sections (A and B). The first section included the demographic data of the respondents such as age, gender, and educational qualification. The instrument was validated by experts in counselling and also yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.88 after a test re-test reliability method.

Data Analysis

Descriptive and inferential statistical measures were employed to analyse the generated data. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and t-test statistical measures were employed to test the postulated hypotheses. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question: What is the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adult in the Ilorin metropolis?

Table 1: Mean and Rank Order on the Respondents' Expression on the Influence of Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution

Item No.	As far as I am concerned, communication helps to resolve marital conflict if:	Mean	Rank
19	effective communication among couples prevent occurrence of a nonchalant attitude to each other	3.90	1 st
16	maintaining a good communication channel can improve understanding, love and affection	3.85	2 nd
2	ineffective communication between spouses leads to perceptive errors	3.83	3 rd
18	effective communication among couples can facilitates expression of each other	3.82	4 th
12	effective communication on child/children upbringing promotes, peaceful environment within the home	3.70	5 th
8	proper home management such as neatness, tidiness and hygienic can generate comfort and resolve marital conflict	3.78	6 th
5	sexual intercourse between spouse can enhance effective communication in the home	3.77	7 th
15	effective use of verbal communication skills prevents provocative utterance among couples	3.75	8 th
6	active listening to one's spouse can help couples to resolve their conflict	3.73	9 th
1	effective communication among couples enhance respect for each other	3.70	10 th
9	effective communication facilities satisfactory sexual relation in the marital life of family	3.70	10 th
13	self commitment to openness can help spouses to clarify issues accordingly	3.71	12 th
7	peace in the home can be determined by the mutual communication, which promotes commitment of spouse in each other	3.67	13 th
14	mutual understanding among couples prevents interference of others	3.65	14 th
11	effective communication between couples enhance religious tolerance in marriage	3.35	15 th
20	effective spousal communication can strengthen love bond in the home	3.30	16 th
10	mutual communication and understanding between couples assist to resolve financial related issues	3.28	17 th
17	effective communication between couples prevents separation and divorce	3.18	18 th
4	effective spousal communication created similarity of character	2.97	19 th

3	among couples couples effective use of non-verbal communication reduce tendencies of marital conflict	2.81	20 th
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Table 1 presents the mean and rank order of the respondents' expression on the influence of communication on marital conflict resolution. The table indicates that item 19 which states "effective communication among couples prevent occurrence of a nonchalant attitude to each other" ranked 1st with a mean score of 3.90. Item 16 which states that "maintaining a good communication channel can improve understanding, love and affection" ranked 2nd with a mean score of 3.85. Ranked 3rd is item 2 with a mean score of 3.83 and states that "ineffective communication between spouses leads to perceptive errors". Furthermore, item 17 which states that "effective communication between couples prevents separation and divorce" ranked 18th with a mean score of 3.18, Item 4 which states that "effective spousal communication created similarity of character among couples" ranked 19th with a mean score of 2.97, while item 3 which states that "couples effective use of non-verbal communication reduce tendencies of marital conflict" ranked 20th with a mean score of 2.81. Since all the twenty items have mean scores that are above the mid-cut off point of 2.50, then it can be said that communication in marriage has positive influence on marital conflict resolution.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin metropolis on the basis of gender.*

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-value on the Respondents' Expression on the Influence of Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution Based on Gender

Gender	N	Mean	SD	Df	Cal. t-value	Crit. t-value	P-value
Male	107	69.50	7.71	208	0.70	1.96	.480
Female	103	68.83	5.81				

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 0.70 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 with corresponding p-value of .480 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication style on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin metropolis on the basis of gender is therefore not rejected.

Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of age.*

Table 3: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Respondents' Expression on the Influence of Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution Based on Age

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	1058.49	2	92.95	1.70	3.00	.212
Within Groups	8727.99	207	54.53			
Total	9786.48	209				

Table 3 shows that calculated F-ratio of 1.70 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .212 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Since the calculated F-ratio is less than the critical F-ratio, the null hypothesis is therefore not rejected; hence there is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin metropolis on the basis of age.

Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin metropolis on the basis of educational qualification*

Table 4: Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) showing the Respondents' Expression on the Influence of Communication on Marital Conflict Resolution Based on Educational Qualification

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Squares	Cal. F-ratio	Crit. F-ratio	P-value
Between Groups	547.70	4	29.92	1.97	2.37	.142
Within Groups	9238.78	205	15.17			
Total	9786.48	209				

Table 4 shows that calculated F-ratio of 1.97 is less than the critical F-ratio of 3.00 with a corresponding p-value of .142 which is greater than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected since the calculated F-ratio is less than critical F-ratio, hence there is no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication style on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in Ilorin metropolis on the basis of educational qualification.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that effective communication among couples prevent occurrences of a nonchalant attitude towards each other, that maintaining a good communication channel can improve understanding, love and affection, and that ineffective communication between spouses leads to perceptive errors. Adopting good and effective communication styles increases the level of understanding and togetherness among married adults (Okobia & Okorodudu, 2003). The findings of the study are in line with the work of Kolo (1993) who stated that the crucial element in a healthy relationship is where communication is effective. Therefore, effective communication in marriage helps in moulding well-desired behaviours and prevents bad behaviour. The findings of this study corroborates with the study of Keyton (2011) who asserted that communication is a vital tool in spousal interaction and conflict resolution; integral factors which improve understanding, love and affection among others between couples. The findings are also in line with the finding of Berger (2005) who opined that when spouse's experience poor communication or ineffective communication, there may be problems resulting in disturbed/dysfunctional families and spousal abuse or it can lead to perceptive errors.

Another finding revealed that there was no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of gender. This implies that male and female married adults were not different in their expression on the influence of communication on marital conflict resolution. This finding is not in line with the submission of Esere, Yusuf and Omotosho (2011) who found that a significant difference existed in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability based on gender.

In another finding, it was revealed that there was no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of age. This means that respondents were not significantly different in their expression on the influence of communication on marital conflict resolution based on their age. This finding does not corroborate with the view of Munroe (2003), who found that there is a significant difference in marital conflict adjustment between young couples and older married adults.

Another finding also revealed that there was no significant difference in the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis on the basis of educational qualification. This means that respondents were no different in their expression on influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution based on educational qualification. The finding negates the study of Odutayo (2002) who found a significant difference based on educational attainment on spousal communication and marital stability. It was stressed further that those couples with higher levels of education were more likely to be stable in marriage than those with less education.

Conclusion

The study revealed that communication in marriage has a positive influence on marital conflict resolution. The study also revealed that effective communication among couples prevents occurrences of nonchalant attitudes towards each other, that maintaining a good communication channel can improve understanding, love and affection and that ineffective communication between spouses leads to perceptive errors. As well, effective communication among couples can facilitate expressions towards each other and effective communication on a child's upbringing promotes a peaceful environment within the home. There were no significant differences in the influence of spousal communication style on marital conflict resolution as expressed by married adults in the Ilorin metropolis based on gender, age and educational qualifications.

Implications for Counselling Practice

The findings of this study have immense implications for counselling practice in Nigeria. Practicing counsellors should organize workshops on the influence of effective communication in stemming spousal abuse behaviour. It should be open to all married adults in marital relationships. The purpose of training and workshops are to integrate information about influences of effective communication in marital relationships early enough. This implies that, it is imperative that counselling training in the area of spousal communication should be introduced to cater to the various challenges faced by couples experiencing abusive behaviour. This is because counsellors with expertise knowledge in the education of couples (i.e. marriage counselling) in particular, will provide the appropriate services needed by spouses who perpetrate abusive behaviour. Counsellors in their various capacities can assume

a more active role in encouraging marital communication. They should try to provide guidance that can facilitate a cordial/harmonious and peaceful co-existence relationship especially in the area of communication. Counsellors can enlighten couples on the consequences of not communicating effectively.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Married adults should be encouraged to pay attention to the non-verbal communication aspects of their relationships such as body language, eye contact and physical touch. Emphasis should also be placed on couple's self-disclosing their thoughts and feelings.
2. Professional in-counselling psychology (particularly marriage counselors) should organize programs where effective communication and consequences of spousal abuse behaviour will be discussed.
3. Couples should be trained on how to apply the principles of interpersonal relationship skills and communication styles that will help them develop effective communication styles that could reduce spousal abuse behaviour.

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