

COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIP OF MARRIED
COUPLES: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the communication process pattern of male and female married couples. The sample consists of 375 respondents randomly drawn from Zaria educational zone of Kaduna State. The communication process of spouse observational checklist (SOC) developed by Weiss and Perry (1979) was adopted. Frequency count, simple percentages and Mann-whitney u-test was used for data analysis. The result showed an overall communication pleasantness among male and female respondents. Implication of this finding for counseling was discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The family is the nucleus of the entire society. It is an important group where each individual has the opportunity to communicate with the others. The process of that communication among members is initiated by two individuals i.e. husband and wife. The communication between husband and wife determines to a certain extent, the type of interaction that does go on in a family (Magari, 1994). If there is an effective communication, there may be a good relationship between the two and the society at large.

Communication in the home and between the husband and wife is very important. Minzberg (1973) reports findings from research studies that speaking to others, listening to them or reading words they have written, occupies the highest percent of the time of an individual, of which the couple is part. Van Pelt (2005) affirmed that the time a couple spends talking together is of great importance, for talking can bring two people together. Wright (2001) opined that husbands and wives have responsibility for each other's nurturing. Communication is the link that creates a relationship between people.

Communication tops everyone's list nowadays according to Van Pelt (2005) because it is basic to intimate relationship. It sparks caring, giving, sharing and affirming. Communication is the most common challenge married couples face daily. Melgosa and Melgosa (2006) explained that a great majority of people, even in this time of changing values, seek the company of someone of the opposite sex to communicate with. The need to be united with someone who will provide emotional balance, friendship, love and support is a universal phenomenon. This, Van Pelt (2005) affirmed that couples need spend time talking together. For the basic and important function of speaking is to establish a relationship.

In marital life, couples experience challenges as they struggle to understand the needs of their partners. This is because there are subtle and apparently mysterious differences between men and women communication patterns. Melgosa and Melgosa (2006), Wright (2001), Van Pelt (2005) and Houts and Sachs (1998), all affirmed that men and women use different communication style. They explained further that by becoming aware of these different patterns, couples can greatly improve their chances for learning to communicate at new and deeper levels. i.e. speak the language of the opposite sex. Thus, communication can be the basic for building sound relationship and the ground where love grows and is beneficial to all.

The objective of this paper is to stimulate awareness of the pattern of communication process among married couples. The hypothesis of this study states that there is no significant difference between the mean score of marital communication pleasantness of male and female respondents.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is a survey design. Married staff consisting of males and females in the government chosen schools were randomly selected and so constitute the sample. The schools used for the study included G.G.S.S. Soba, Barewa college, W.T.C, GDSS Kofan Gaiya, Dogon-Bauchi, Chindit Baracks, Giwa G.G.S.S and Technical school Soba, all in Zaria Educational zone. A total of 375 respondents were used.

PROCEDURE

The instrument of the study was a modified version of the communication process section of spouse observational checklist originally developed by Weiss and Perry (1979). The instrument was administered by the researcher personally. The data was collected and analyzed using simple percentages, frequency count and mann-whitney u-test.

RESULTS

The results of the data collected for gender is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1: Sex of Respondent

Variable	Category	Absolute Distribution	Relative Count %
Sex	Male	224	59.73
	Female	151	40.27
Total		375	100

A look at table 1 indicates that out of the total respondents of 375, 224 representing 59.73% were Males while 151 representing 40.27 were Females. Though the number of Males is greater than that of the Females, the response from Female respondents should be regarded as encouraging judging from the fact that it is not always easy to get Females to open up and talk.

Table 2 Hypothesis

The result of the analysis using mann-whitney u-test for male and female respondents communication process scores is as follows:

Variable	Sex	N	Median	U	P
Males		224	78.00	43420.0	0.2039
Females		151	77.00		
Total		375			

NS= Not significant, $P > 0.05$

A look at table 2 shows that 224 respondents who are the majority were males with a median of 78.00, while the remaining 151 respondents were females with a median of 77.00. The result shows no significant difference between the median score of male and female respondents. The result is not significant at 0.05 because U value is 43430.00 and P-value is 0.2039. The hypothesis is retained.

DISCUSSION

The finding in this study appears surprising because one would have expected that there would be some differences in the level of pleasantness in communication process of male respondents and those of female. A possible explanation for this finding could be that the respondents might have had an in-depth knowledge of their partner's communication process, hence developing a pleasant attitude towards each communication. The views of Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson (1967), Roger's (1961) and Berne (1964) lends supports to this preposition, in that, they all opined that messages exchanged by two or more people within a system like the home who through their understanding of each other as equals, being open, accepting and who are non-judgmental towards each other, always seem to be complementary in pattern.

Furthermore, Holmes and Sachs (1998), Wright (2001) and Van Pelt (2005) affirmed that couples who choose to adopt their partner's style, content and structure of communication patterns will find and experience understanding and free flow of communication. For successful cordial and harmonious relationship at home to take occur, there is need to create and maintain effective communication patterns among married couples. Messages sent should be expressed clearly and explicitly to avoid any assumptions and misunderstandings.

COUNSELING IMPLICATION OF THE FINDINGS

The implication of this study is that communication is the key to establishing sound relationships, be it at home, school, or workplace. In the light of this, married couples, individuals and children should seek and use effective communication process in their daily relationship. This is possible through use of oral dialogue at all levels. Communication is a difficult task that requires a lot of practice and efforts if it is to be effective.

Furthermore, the findings of this study shown that males and females communicate in the same level. This is interesting because the females who were thought to be reluctant to talking are now engaging in conversations. This can be attributed to the facts that females like their males seem to recognize the need to freely express their thought, feelings and ideas. They also seek to be understood and to receive feedback on communication that goes on. Therefore, both genders now seek more ways to engage in effective dialogue so as to experience quality time together thereby solidifying their relationship. Thus, there is need to create more opportunities especially at home for family members to interact with each other.

In addition, government at all levels and even the private sector should provide a variety of recreational facilities within the communities where they operate. These facilities would serve as avenues for family members to be together and so interact with one another on a deeper level. This interaction would provide opportunities for effective communication as members socialized outside the home and with other families. It would also serve as a therapeutic process for all family members by building a strong healthy and cordial relationship among them.

THE WAY FORWARD

If Nigerian Couples desire effective communication process, then communication skills need be acquired by all men and women regardless of their gender. This is because communication is the life line of any relationship. Communication skills when acquired and are frequently used result to fluency and thereby become effective.

In addition, messages sent should be clearly expressed, be direct and simple. This is to enable the receiver to give appropriate feedback that is required. When effective response is achieved, there may be no misinterpretation of messages and ambiguity is removed. Communication channels would freely flow and expression would be clear, open and understanding would be the result.

Furthermore, those in places of authority should strive to maintain healthy and effective communication with their subordinates. Efforts should be made to allow free communication flow from the top to bottom and vice versa for harmony to occur. This would help to reduce rumour mongering, be it in the work place, school or at home, and also enable subordinates communicate freely with their leaders or colleagues.

CONCLUSION

The significance of communication in all endeavors of life cannot be overemphasized. Therefore, it is necessary that everyone engages in the pursuance of the skills that would help to make interpersonal communication effective. For communication is the basis of relationship at all levels. Efforts therefore, should be made to practice it often.

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