

FACILITATING HEALTHY INTERACTION IN MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH COUNSELLING

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The paper focused on enhancing healthy interaction in marital relationship through attending to words counseling. Observations during counseling have revealed that spouses do not attend to words of their partners during interaction. Rather, they engage each other in negative use of words that degenerate to disagreements or argument using shouting or yelling matches, name calling in exchange of abusive and insulting words on each other which is unpleasant. An experiment study design of pre-test and post-test was used to collect data from diploma two students in Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. From a population of 257 students, in 2009/2010 academic session admission, a sample size of 30 spouses were randomly selected to take part in the study. An instrument titled "Couples Communication skills, Section on Attending to words Counselling" was administered for seven weeks to the spouses. The respondents used a four (4) point likert scale for rating. A t-test technique was used to analyze the data collected. The result of the study revealed that the treatment on attending to words Counselling was effective in enhancing interaction of spouses. It was therefore, recommended that attending to words counseling packaged be taught to spouses to enhance interaction in marital relationship of spouses.

Key words: Interaction, Relationship, Attending and words.

Introduction

Interaction at any level, have the purpose of building a relationship that allows the participants to unveil self to one another. The marriage relationship serves or provides such an enabling environment where spouses in their interactions, can be intimate through opening up in talking which facilitate the nurturing of a healthy environment for the marriage relationship. Pelt (2002) affirms this by reporting that talking to each other is a pleasant way to pass time, get to know each other, unburden one's heart and deepen intimacy between spouses. Strand (2005) concurred by stating that there is an incredible power in words. Words serve as an avenue for free sharing of self to a spouse. The quality of a relationship depends on the ability of spouses in use of words to share freely with their partners

One of the greatest challenges in marriage relationships is how spouses talk to each other about things, issues or problems, which are bothering them. Link (2013) reports that disagreement or arguments are becoming a normal part of marital relationships. This is evident in shouting matches, name-calling, exchange of abusive and insulting words and even the use of fists on one or each other. These acts destroy the relationship that might have taken years to build. It is the consequences of inability to talk healthily and so create a lot of difficulties in the marriage relationship. Gottman (1994) affirms by reporting that spouses engage in harmful interaction, which create anxiety and thereby ruin the relationship.

The unhealthy patterns of interaction in marriage relationships point to the fact that spouses do not know how to choose and use words. It also points to the fact that spouses are insensitive to their partner's emotions, which could develop into bitterness, resentment and anger. Branon (2013) reports that, in the emotion of the moment, a spouse could engage the other partner in a war of words to complain about unmet needs or unsatisfactory behaviors. In such moments, the chosen and used words are often times negative, vulgar and even insulting. Braverman (2012) reports that, if you do not have a healthy way to express your thoughts, emotions, of speaking and being heard, then, every thing else will crumble. This is an indication that spouses lack the knowledge of the power of words, do not know how to choose and use words. Strand (2005) supports by reporting that words spoken usually shot to the core of our being and negative words tear down, destroy and reverberate in the mind until it produces devastating results. Harsh and insulting words, often lead to strife. Kumuyi (2011) wrote that a word spoken in anger can destroy permanently a relationship built over many years. Therefore, spouses need to learn how to attend to the words, which their partners use in interaction and strive to make their interaction healthy through choosing and using positive words that would help build their marriage relationships.

The Problem

A healthy marriage relationship is built around positive interaction where partners shower each other with loving words that allow meaningful expression and sharing of intimate feelings, thoughts, fears, concerns and needs. This type of atmosphere creates friendliness and harmonies living in the relationship. However, when life challenges begin to take its toll on individuals, especially married partners, its effects are felt in relationships. Sometimes in exhaustion or exasperation, spouses do not pay close attention to what a partner is saying. This can be evident in the response mode to messages where a spouse replies back either in words which have no connection to the message, or murmurs back without speaking out loud, or uses negative words in yelling or shouting or focusing on what has happen previously, or in covert manner which are often hurting. These verbal abusive unhealthy interactions could be considered a kind of coercive cycle, which may be difficult to adjust or break. Strand (2005:7) writes, "Words have life, they have power when spoken, words can literally shape the destiny and future

of another; words are powerful and have deep and lasting meaning. Words have the ability to bless or curse, to build up or tear down, enhance or destroy, improve or wreck. Words have impart and impact especially when spoken by a significant person in our lives". For a meaningful interaction and healthy relationship, spouses should learn how to choose and use words. A spouse, who talks little today, sets the stage for more difficulty in talking tomorrow. A partner who cannot talk to a spouse healthily, have no basis for a relationship (Pelt, 2005). This paper, therefore, intends to facilitate healthy interaction in marital relationship using attending to words counseling. It also hopes to improve spouse's choice and use of positive words in interaction with their partners.

Research Question

A research question is set for this study as follow:

Is the interaction in marital relationship healthy through attending to words counseling of couples?

Hypothesis

The corresponding hypothesis for this study is stated as follows:

There is no significant difference in the level of healthy interaction in marital relationship through attending to words counseling pre-test and post-test of Couples.

Methodology

The method of data collection was through an experimental design of pre-test and post-test where the subjects were randomly selected to form a group for the study. From a total population of 257 students who are married in the Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, a sample of 30 subjects were pre-tested on attending to words skill counseling package for a period of six (6) weeks. After which they were post-tested on the instrument titled: "Couple Communication Skills" section on attending to words on the seventh (7) week of the research study. The data collected was analyzed using t-test statistic.

The procedure for data collection was carried out in two phases: The first phase was the experimental treatment conducted on attending to words counseling for one hour with the sample-married spouses for a period of six weeks. A brief outline of the treatment programme package is as follows:

Week 1: Define communication, types of communication and emphasis interaction in relationship. The researcher is to jot down on board the subject' responses and at the end clarify their responses

Week 2: Define concept of attending, words, verbal abuse and its characteristics.

Week 3: Verbal abusive attitudes and behaviours, which are unhealthy for interaction in marital relationships such as anger, anxiety, fear, among others.

Week 4: Use of words in the positive sense such as encouragers, appreciative and compliments

Week 5: Use of 1-message speaking rules and methods

Week 6: Importance of attending to words in relationship for healthy living.

Week 7: This is the second phase of the experiment which is the administration of the instrument for the study to gather data (post-test). The data collected would be analyzed.

The data obtained was subjected to a t-test analysis where the scores of the pre-test were compared with that of the post-test

Results

The hypothesis of the study states: There is no significant difference in level of healthy interaction in marital relationship through attending to words Counselling pre-test and post-test of couples in the experiment group. The Table is the analyses of the hypothesis

Table 1: T-Test on Improvement Level of Attending to Words Counselling Relationship of Couples in the Experiment Group.

Component	Variables	No	Mean scores	Standard deviation	t	Df	P
Attending words	to Pre-test	30	2.59	0.41	5.35	58	.000
	Post-test	30	2.07	0.34			

Critical t-value at 58 degree of freedom = 2.00

The result in Table 1 shows the mean scores and standard deviation of spouses in the pre-test as $M = 2.59$, $SD = .41$, while the post test $M = 2.07$ and $SD = .34$. The mean scores of the post-test ($M = 2.07$) is lower than the pre-test ($M = 2.59$).

The observed t-calculated value of 5.35 is higher than critical t-value of 2.00 at 58 degree of freedom. The observed level of significance ($P = .000$) is lower than 0.05 ($P < 0.05$). This result, therefore, indicates that there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores. Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in pre-test and post-test in the level of healthy interaction in marital relationship through attending to words counselling of couples in the experiment is therefore rejected. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion

The result of the tested hypothesis revealed a statistical difference in the pre-test and post-test mean scores in the level of attending to words counseling for healthy interaction in marital relationship of spouses in the experiment. This demonstrates an understanding of how to attend to words by spouses in rating their responses moderately based on what they learnt during the counseling session. This is an indication that they benefited from the content of the treatment package and the procedures of teaching might have helped spouses understand the need to attend to words they choose and use with their spouses, which might also have helped to enhance their interaction in marital relationship for healthy living. Morley (1994) stated that words are the windows into the soul; it gives form and expression to our deepest thoughts.

It is evident from the finding of this study that attending to words counseling package was effective in enhancing healthy interaction in marital relationships of spouses. This is possibly so because spouses in the experiment might have learnt how to choose and use words, which would express how they feel, what they want and even report unmet or unsatisfactory behaviors, which are unacceptable in the relationship, in a proper and better way. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) lent support by stating that couples do not only want their partners to stop annoying habits, but also want to feel some of the old attractions, closeness, contact and intimacy they used to share. Pelt (2005) further reported that verbal compliment or words of affirmation are powerful in enriching relationship. It shows acceptance, appreciation or respect towards a partner. Therefore, when spouses learn how to choose and use words, realize that words have import and impact they are attending to their partners. Rosen-Grandon (1999) reported that verbal expression of affection is one of the most effective techniques that enable spouses develop and sustain a genuine relationship. Sperry and Carlson (1991) stated that focusing on positive strengths such as support, recognition, acceptance and confidence, are essential qualities to creating a healthy relationship. Thus, when spouses deliver verbal bouquets daily, they are attending to words, which are also nurtures of healthy interaction in marital relationships. Therefore, the marriage relationship is a friendship of knowing the heart of one another and sharing one's heart with the partner who is trusted. Spouse should learn to be discernable and not focus much on the negatives, which could make the relationship interaction difficult and discouraging. Rather, try to learn positive words and use them on their partners even in relationship circumstances that are less than good. Furthermore, a meaningful connection to a spouse requires the focusing of attention on the proper choice and use of words that are positives for a healthy relationship that would enable a partner to remain in regular contact or stay close to each other. It also serves as a unique and healthy relationship that allows spouses to interact with each other in any aspect of life experiences, because they are aware of those times when contact is lost and can therefore identify ways of adapting to those unhealthy circumstances and can also reconnect and re-establish their closeness for a healthy interaction in relationships.

Conclusion

Since marriage relationship is the basis for friendship, spouses should learn to attend to the words, which they use to speak with their partners, if they are to experience a healthy interaction in marital relationship. Spouses should also pay attention and try to understand what their partners are saying and respond appropriately and positively using words that build the relationship. This way, the partners would experience and engage in healthy interactions, which will sustain the marriage relationship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are made for spouses to enhance their interaction in relationship:

1. Spouses should seek for counseling help with regard to their interaction from time to time as difficulties would be experienced in communications. This would help to improve their interaction and relationship.
2. Spouses should learn new words, which are not hurting and use them to clearly express what they want or need or show dissatisfaction about a behavior. This will encourage self-confidence and acceptance by a partner.
3. Spouses should speak to each other with respect and state their thoughts or feelings clearly and freely for their partners to understand.
4. Spouses need to orient themselves especially in their use of words to become conscious of how a partner feels to promote healthy interaction in marital relationship.
5. Spouses should agree to work on those areas of their marital interaction which is causing difficulties by setting time to talk on them, plot positive approach by developing points, consider options, decide on a possible settlement and be positive in the use of words.

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