

## **EFFECTS OF SPOUSAL COMMUNICATION ON MARITAL STABILITY AND PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

A healthy partnership requires effective communication because it enables partners to feel love, trust, tolerance, patience, and the ability to manage conflict. This study aims to determine the effects of spousal communication on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria. This research adopted the Solution Focused Theory of premarital screening and the Sound Relationship House Theory as its theoretical framework. A systematic review method was employed to search the major digital databases to locate all relevant published works that address one or more of the critical concepts examined in the paper, followed by a systematic integration and presentation of the findings. Females typically speak more in marriage; they see it as a way of releasing tension and providing some emotional relief, unlike men who talk less because they view it as un-masculine. Marriages with open communication between partners are happier than those without it. Effective marriage communication positively influences marital conflict resolution, facilitates marital stability, and improves productivity. The level of effective spousal communication was sub-optimal across the country, with the major obstacles being couples not spending sufficient time together, using a harsh tone of voice during a conversation, bringing up memories of past adverse events, not having trust in one's spouse, and not considering spouse's opinion during a discussion, among others. This study showed a sub-optimal level of effective communication among couples in Nigeria, which in turn negatively impacts marital stability and productivity across the country. Marriage counsellors and religious leaders should make premarital counselling and training on effective communication a core component of their services and premarital religious procedures, respectively. In addition, couples should be encouraged to create sufficient time to communicate effectively with their spouses with unbiased minds, trust, respect, and in the spirit of give and take.

**Keywords:** Spousal communication, marital stability, productivity, Nigeria

### **Introduction**

Marriage in Nigeria refers to the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife (Nigeria Law Guru, 2023). Choosing a spouse and entering into a marriage agreement takes strong communication skills, considered personal achievements and milestones in one's development. A healthy marriage has many components and changes that benefit both adults and children's physical and emotional well-being (Waite & Gallagher, 2000). The choice to be married is a significant one in one's life. However, most people don't spend much time or effort preparing for marriage before marriage. This has immensely contributed physical and emotional abuse in most homes (Awosan & Ajeh, 2023). Some couples devote more time to

getting ready for the wedding than developing the skills necessary for a long-lasting union (Olson &Defrain, 2000).

Marriage is influenced by both positive and negative communication encounters, according to research. According to Gottman and Driver (2004), how spouses interact affects the success of their marriage. Particular attention should be paid to how couples interact, particularly how they discuss how well they can resolve disputes and communicate emotionally. It has been demonstrated that how couples quarrel and display affection for one another greatly impacts how their marriages turn out. The way a couple acts toward one another is one of the other interpersonal elements. According to Onwuasoanya and Okeke (2009), communication is the process of imparting one's thoughts, feelings, and opinions to another person. Communication involves giving people information or communicating thoughts and feelings. It also refers to sharing meanings between two entities or groups using signs that both parties can understand. Esereet *al.* (2011) state that effective communication is essential to a successful marriage or other meaningful relationships; the authors claimed that it is the panacea for failing marriages, noting that many issues worsen with poor communication, while many problems are resolved with good communication.

The major purpose of marital communication is to understand how marriage interacts and how couples generally behave. Couples can express their differences as well as their love and appreciation for one another in an environment where communication is open and honest (Yeh *et al.*, 2006). Marital communication is understood to be direct communication between partners. Marriage communication is a process by which partners exchange information, viewpoints, and emotional states; it includes verbal and written expression, body language, individual mannerisms, and communication styles. It serves as a pillar for the system of understanding and peaceful coexistence. According to Esereet *al.* (2011), communication is crucial in all human existence, especially marriage; the authors submitted that effective communication is essential for a healthy relationship because it enables partners to feel love, trust, tolerance, patience, and the ability to manage conflict.

Pleasant communication in married houses entails handshakes, smiles, profound emotional exchanges, acknowledging one another's weaknesses, clothes and hairstyles, and vibrant touches. Strong communication in married households is believed to be the cornerstone of a happy couple's relationship. It is worrisome that communication problems, including a lack of amicable verbal and nonverbal interactions, are common in marital households in recent years due to the harsh economic situation in the country. These unpleasant communications may include insults, sarcasm, complaints, and judgmental statements. It has been observed that the prevalent conflict in many households across the country results from the absence of pleasant communication in a married home. According to Ogunsanmi (2005), couples would be happy, united, and confident if they communicated openly, expressed their emotions, and patiently listened to one another. Positive communication inside matrimonial homes enables couples to thrive and enjoy their way of life and contact. Also, it has been discovered that being able and ready to communicate is one of the most crucial elements in preserving pleasant ideas and feelings, including spoken and written words and body language. (Olson &Defrain, 2000).

Officially remaining married without divorcing, physically separating, or separating legally is known as marital stability. In essence, marital stability refers to a marriage's resilience as a result of the husband and wife's mutual support is known as marital stability. In actuality, the strength of a marriage is thought to

depend on how well one's marriage fared compared to the ideal alternative (Lehrer, 2006). Marriage success, adjustment, and contentment are all correlated with marital stability. According to Scheen (2002), factors such as love, happiness, tolerance, trust, patience, and the capacity to handle conflict are all related to marital stability. Marital quality is described as the husband and wife's ability to accommodate one another at any time. Results, however, indicate a reduction in marriage quality and an increase in many families' issues of the day. Increased divorce and family strife pose a severe threat to society and social structures in addition to the family (Nwadinigwe & Anyama, 2010).

Evidence from research has shown that effective communication is crucial to maintaining a marriage. The pair can overcome disagreements amicably if they communicate well (Esere, 2007). Since the two people who join together as husband and wife typically have different temperaments and personality types, which may express in terms of the level of communication, sometimes positively, other times negatively, the institution of marriage is not free from crises (with this latter type leading to spousal abuse). For a relationship to be robust and healthy, communication is essential. It enables lovers to feel affection and concern. It takes practice to develop listening and expression skills to communicate effectively. It is believed that good communication skills, including empathy, self-control, and a highly practical grasp of human needs and feelings, are necessary for couples to be able to apologize, demonstrate unconditional positive respect, be appreciative of others, and express forgiveness (Nwadinigwe & Anyama, 2010). Unfortunately, in recent years, many people have found marriage disappointing and fragile rather than enjoyable and long-lasting (Olson & Defrain, 2000).

It is believed that many factors contributed to marital instability across the globe by being obstacles to effective communication. In a study conducted by Jamo (2019), the factors that were identified as obstacles to effective communication flow in marriage were cultural friction, intercultural relationships, extended family influence, poor communication skills, language barrier, communication defects and distraction from ICT.

Reports from studies conducted across the globe showed strong links between effective spousal communication and marital stability (and its correlates, including marital satisfaction and adjustment). An experimental study among couples who have been married for less than five years attending a counselling clinic in the city of Gorgan, Iran (with an experimental group which received eight sessions of training and counselling on effective communication skills, with each session lasting for 90 minutes, and a control group which received no training) reported a significant improvement in marital commitment and satisfaction among the experimental group (Mohammadipour & Moghadasi, 2016). A randomized control trial which employed a couple-focused approach to conducting marital communication skills training to promote marital satisfaction and psychological health during pregnancy among sixty pregnant women (with low marital satisfaction) attending the antenatal care clinic of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran, and their husbands observed that the levels of marital satisfaction while the level of depression and anxiety in the intervention group dramatically decreased, the levels at one month and three months after the intervention were significantly different ( $p < 0.05$ ) from those found in the control group (Alipour et al., 2020). A cross-sectional study among 50 women and their husbands in Kannur district, Kerala, India, reported that interpersonal communication among couples predicted marital satisfaction (Farah & Aneesh, 2018).

In addition to facilitating marital stability, a worker's ability to operate at work is also invigorated by positive home communication, which also connects them to their environment (Wehrich & Koontz, 2006). According to Aihie (2009), the factors that decide whether or not a person is satisfied with their work are not inherent to the task itself but are external issues that can reduce productivity. Idowu and Esere (2007) opined that working on communication between husbands and wives is essential because so many marriages sadly ended in divorce in recent years. In addition, considering the strong links that have been established between effective spousal communication and both marital stability and productivity, the high divorce rates across Nigeria in recent years, and the increasingly unfriendly work environment in the country, with a very high proportion of skilled workforce emigrating to other countries daily, it has become imperative to critically examine the status of spousal communication and its effects on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria, to make actionable recommendation towards alleviating the situation; more so, with the limited literature in Nigeria on the issues under consideration. This study aims to assess the effects of spousal communication on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

A systematic review method was employed; this involves a comprehensive and systematic search of the major digital databases (including PubMed and Web of Science), as well as African Journals Online repository and Google Scholar to locate all relevant published works that address one or more of the critical concepts examined in the paper. The terms used were "communication in marriage", "marital communication", "spousal communication", "marital satisfaction", "marital quality", "marital stability", and "effects of ineffective communication". A systematic integration and presentation of the findings was done.

### **Theoretical framework**

This research adopted the Solution Focused Theory of premarital counselling (Murray & Murray, 2004) and the Sound Relationship House theory (Driver & Gottman, 2004) as its theoretical framework. Murray and Murray (2004) created the Solution Focused Theory for premarital counselling. These theorists present the solution-based approach as a transitory, constructivist setting that demonstrates its applicability to premarital couples who focus on laying a solid foundation for their future married lives. Because of this, premarital counselling that emphasizes problem-solving helps couples find answers to their differences and allows them to adjust to married life and build enduring, happy relationships. Solution-focused counselling analyzes each couple's strengths, cultural beliefs, and reality views while focusing on the relationship as it is right now.

Driver and Gottman (2004) created the "Sound Relationship House theory" as an example to explain the requirements for a healthy relationship. Like a home, relationships require a solid foundation. Making Love Maps of one another's realities to understand what is important to each other is the cornerstone of a strong relationship. The Sound Relationship House Model (SRH) serves as a guide to help couples grow closer, manage problems, and contribute to what matters to them individually and collectively. The findings from the research supported by the SRH model prompt two fundamental decisions about what constitutes stable relationships: Partners deal with one another like friends, with relationships characterized by regard, compassion, friendship, and inspiration, and Partners handle conflict tactfully and constructively.

## **Results and Discussion**

### **Effects of spousal communication on marital stability and productivity in Nigeria**

Studies conducted in Nigeria showed that sub-optimal spousal communication adversely affects marital stability and productivity. A survey of the impact of communication on marital adjustment among 82 couples in the Port Harcourt Municipal Area of Rivers State found that women typically speak more in marriage, as they see it as a way of releasing tension and providing some emotional relief, in contrast to men who talk less because they view it as un-masculine. Also, marriages with open communication between partners are happier than those without (Agi, 2005). A study conducted among 120 couples from four randomly selected four Local Government Areas in Ekiti State, Nigeria, reported a substantial proportion of participants' lack of effective communication skills with adverse effects on their relationships (Osakinle & Okafor, 2013).

A study conducted among 1060 randomly selected married teachers from sixty public secondary schools in Delta State reported a general lack of communication in marital homes, negatively influencing their work performance (Maciver & Enekeme, 2019). In a study conducted by Esere et al. (2014) to determine the obstacles and suggested solutions to effective communication in marriage among 660 randomly selected adults across the three senatorial districts in Kogi State, Nigeria, the barriers reported by the study participants were getting home late regularly, harsh tone of voice during conversation and bringing up memories of past adverse events. The solutions suggested by the authors were considering one's spouse's contributions, having trust in one's spouse, and considering the spouse's opinion when discussing issues.

A quasi-experimental study conducted to assess the effects of assertiveness training and marital communication skills in enhancing marital satisfaction among Baptist couples in Lagos, Nigeria, reported that the community skills group obtained the highest scores on marital satisfaction, while the control group obtained the lowest score (Animasahun & Oladeni, 2012). A study conducted to assess the influence of marital communication on family stability among 455 randomly selected teachers in Nsukka education zone secondary schools, Nsukka, Nigeria, found a significant positive relationship ( $p < 0.05$ ) between marital communication and family stability among the participants (Omeje et al., 2022).

Communication in marriage has a positive impact on marital conflict resolution, according to a community-based study by Adegboyega (2021) among 210 married adults in Ilorin, Nigeria, to ascertain the influence of spousal communication on marital conflict resolution and the implications for counselling practice. It was also discovered that improved communication between spouses and increased respect for one another could help overcome matrimonial disputes. The expert suggested that married individuals should be encouraged to focus on their marriages' nonverbal communication components. A study that assessed the perceived influence of verbal and non-verbal communication skills on marital stability among married lecturers of Federal University, Dutsin-ma, Katsina State, Nigeria, reported that verbal and non-verbal communication skills significantly influenced marital stability among the study participants. Also, the couples' length of marriage had a significant influence on their utilization of communication skills. The authors recommended that couples spend time in their homes discussing pleasant and unpleasant issues before sleeping. The authors also encouraged couples to be open and use verbal and non-verbal communication to foster marital stability (Adamu & Ali, 2022).

A study that assessed the impact of verbal and non-verbal communication on marital stability among couples in the Ukum Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria, reported that verbal and non-verbal communication significantly impact the marriage stability of couples in the area. The authors recommended that couples learn to adopt effective marital communication in marriage for peaceful coexistence (Akume & Saatan, 2013). A study conducted among six hundred randomly selected married adults in Owerri metropolis, Nigeria, reported that poor communication and faulty cognition were responsible for marital instability among the participants (Esere et al., 2015). Marriage dissolution was primarily ascribed to a lack of effective communication, according to a study on the causes and effects of a breakdown in communication among couples at Babcock University (Uwom-Ajaegbu et al., 2015). The findings of this study agree with the results of studies conducted across the globe (Mohammadipour & Moghadasi, 2006; Alipouret al., 2020; Farah & Aneesh, 2018; Wehrich & Koontz, 2006), as they predominantly found a lack of effective communication among couples (which was principally responsible for the rampant cases of divorces worldwide), and with training interventions on effective communication skills generally having positive effects on marital stability and productivity.

### **Concluding Remarks and Recommendations**

This study showed a sub-optimal level of effective communication among couples in Nigeria, which in turn negatively impacts marital stability and productivity across the country. The findings of this study underscore the need for marriage counsellors and religious leaders to make premarital counselling and training on effective communication a core component of their services and premarital religious procedures, respectively. In addition, couples should be encouraged to create sufficient time to communicate effectively with their spouses with unbiased minds and in the spirit of give and take. These would facilitate understanding among couples, promote peace and unity in homes, strengthen marital relationships, and ultimately facilitate marital stability and increased productivity across the country.

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