

# INFLUENCE OF SPOUSAL COMMUNICATION ON MARITAL STABILITY: IMPLICATION FOR CONDUCTIVE HOME ENVIRONMENT

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## **Abstract**

*It is often said that the home is the basic unit of the larger society. Thus when the home is settled, the society is at peace. The main focus of this study was to find out the influence of spousal communication on marital stability: Implications for Conducive Home Environment. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled "Influence of Spousal Communication on Marital Stability Questionnaire" was used to collect necessary data for the study. The questionnaire was administered on 600 stratified randomly selected married adults in Ilorin metropolis. The t-test and ANOVA statistics were used to compare the perception of married adults on the basis of gender and length of marriage. The findings show that most of the respondents agree to the statement that lack of effective communication is the bane to marital stability. It was also found that there was significant difference in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability on the basis of gender and length of years in marriage. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended, amongst others, that marriage counselling clinics should be set up in all major establishments in Nigeria so as to educate married men and women of the need for effective communication in marriage for a peaceful and conducive home environment.*

**Key words:** Spousal communication, Conducive home environment, Married men and women, Marital stability.

## **Introduction**

The institution of marriage is as old as the creation of man. It dates back to the time of Adam and Eve. It is an essential phenomenon in human life irrespective of tribe, society and religious affiliations. In the opinion of Munroe (2003), marriage is a religious duty and is consequently a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity. It has been observed that marriage serves as a moral safeguard because it acts as an outlet for sexual needs and regulates man's sexual desire/expression so that man does not become a slave to it. The assumption for its social necessity is rested on the premise that through it, families are established and the family is the fundamental unit of human society.

When people make choices to marry, they want to live happily ever after. They want a loving, happy, successful marriage. After they have been married for a while, and the novelty has worn off, they tend to discover that marriage does not maintain itself. Marriage takes work from both spouses to stay. Marriage is the most difficult maze one will ever get lost in (Angel, 2008). Marriage can equal either bliss or chains. It all depends on what one makes of it. Marriage depends on many different things to be successful: trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty sincerity and above all effective communication.

A marriage without effective communication is likely to crumble. Communication is a life wire of marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship (Esere, 2002, 2006). It is the elixir for ailing marital relationship (Olagunju & Eweniyi, 2002). With so many marriages ending tragically in divorce (Adegoke & Esere, 1998), it is more important now to work on the communication between husband and wife. So many problems escalate when there is no communication, and many problems are resolved when there is effective communication. For sure, communication is the key to successful marriage, and without communication no marriage can survive in this divorce - filled world we live in (Jolin, 2007). Toward this end, this research is aimed at investigating influence of spousal communication on marital stability.

Communication is very essential in stabilising a marriage. Communicating effectively takes practice and a great deal of effort. Without communication, it is nearly impossible to resolve conflicts or grow a partnership. 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 activities. It is a pillar which maintains the

structure of peaceful co-existence and mutual understanding. Communication is very vital in all areas of human life especially the marriage relationship (Eseré, 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.

According to Idowu and Eseré (2007), more than half of the failed relationships are due to the fact that there was a severe lack of communication between couples. In order to have a long and lasting relationship with someone, one must have excellent communication skills. One must be able to convey one's emotions and thoughts, as well as being able to absorb one's partner's emotions and thoughts. The art of listening is probably even more important than the art of talking. Couples will learn and grow far more in their relationships if they sit down and listen to their partners, instead of talking and voicing all of their opinions at once. This is not to say that one will not voice one's opinions. But one must listen to the other's opinions as well, and take them into consideration. Some people do not communicate with words, they communicate through actions. If one pays close attention, one will get what he/she wants from his/her partner. But the problem is, most couples do not pay close attention to each other, thereby causing marital disharmony. In this study, an attempt will be made to investigate the influence of spousal communication on marital stability. This study is pertinent especially at the wake of increases in marital instability.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The home is the nucleus of the society and marriage is the major avenue whereby the society is populated by the number of children that are born in such marriages, thus marital instability produces negative multiplier effect on the society. When there is marital instability, there is a problem in raising and nurturing the children, which may lead to an increase in the rate of juvenile delinquency in the society and lack of peace.

With so many marriages ending tragically in divorce (Adegoke & Eseré, 1998), it is more important now to work on the communication between husband and wife. So many problems escalate when there is no communication, and many problems are resolved when there is communication. Truly communication is the key to a successful marriage and without communication no marriage can survive in this divorce-filled world we live in. Effective interpersonal communication

skills are essential to social interaction, and to the building and maintenance of all relationships. Poor communication skills can cause irrevocable damage to relationships; affecting productivity, satisfaction, performance, morale, trust, respect, self confidence, and even physical health. Effective communication in marriage is vital to a happy marriage and family life. Ineffective communication is a common problem complaint of couples who are having difficulties (Esere & Idowu, 2000). Ineffective communication can lead to numerous family problems, including excessive family conflict, ineffective problem-solving skill, lack of intimacy, weak emotional bonding and so on. Poor communication style is also associated with an increased risk of divorce and marital separation (Esere, 2008).

Learning to communicate involves hard work and as the divorce rate shows, many couples are unable to reach this level of understanding and therefore issues are left unresolved and tension deepens leading to a lack of understanding and respect. Ultimately, this may lead to couples simply dissolving the relationship for lack of knowing how to fix the problems.

This research deems it necessary to investigate the Influence of spousal communication on marital stability. This is because divorce is becoming a rampant act. Several propositions have been presented in the past decade to explain the enhancement or the deterioration of quality of couple's relationship such as those by Yusuf (2005), which focused on indices of marital instability, Adeyemi (1991), worked on causes of divorce and separation, Isiaka (2005) empirically investigated relationship between divorce and spousal communication and found that lack of effective communication in marriage precedes divorce.

In spite of all these however, not much has been done on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability. This gap which has been left open is what this research intends to fill. To this end, this study is aimed at finding out the influence of spousal communication on marital stability

### **Research Questions**

This research intends to find answers to the following questions:

1. Are there differences in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability on the basis of gender?

2. Are there differences in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marriage on the basis of length of years in marriage?

This research study would be useful to all married couples and even youths who are about to get married who may want to learn how to keep their families together for peaceful coexistence. This study would also benefit the government of Kwara state who will have crime minimized in the long run if divorce is minimized as a result of openness of couples to one another. The ultimate result would be peaceful coexistence in the family and in the world as a whole.

## **Method**

### **Design**

The research design adopted for this research work is the descriptive survey method which tries to collect information from a representative group and based on such sample, inferences are drawn about the behaviour of the entire population. The researchers therefore, adopted descriptive survey research method and used questionnaire to determine the opinion, preferences and perception of persons of interest to the research.

### **Participants and setting**

The target population of the present study is all married adults in Ilorin metropolis. The researchers stratified the population and from each stratum selected representative samples from the target population.

Ilorin metropolis is made up of three local government areas. Married adults from each of these local government areas were stratified on the basis of occupation (Three different occupations, 70 respondents per occupation). From each stratum of different occupations, a total of 210 respondents were randomly selected from each local government area, bringing a total sample of 630 respondents from the three local government areas in Ilorin metropolis. However, only 600 copies of the questionnaire were correctly filled and returned, hence 600 respondents participated in the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The instrument used for data collection is a researcher – constructed questionnaire tagged “Influence of Spousal Communication on Marital

Stability Questionnaire (ISCOMASQ).” The questionnaire consists of two sections A and B. Section A requires the respondents to give some background information such as sex, length of marriage and educational status, while section B consists of 20 items with a response format of strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree. These were intended to elicit information on the influence of spousal communication on marital stability.

#### **Validity of the Instrument**

The content validity of the measuring instrument was determined by giving the questionnaire to a panel of five experts in the Department of Counsellor Education. The experts made corrections and suggestions which were taken into consideration while producing the final draft of the questionnaire. The general consensus of the experts was that the instrument measures what it purports to measure and was therefore adjudged adequate for the study.

#### **Reliability of the Instrument**

In order to establish the reliability of ISCOMASQ, a test re-test method of reliability was adopted. The instrument was administered twice with an interval of three weeks to the same respondents. The two sets of scores were correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Co-efficient. A coefficient value of 0.67 was obtained. This was adjudged high enough for the instrument usability.

#### **Method of Data Analysis**

In analyzing the data collected for this study, both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were employed. That is, frequency counts and simple percentage were used to analyze respondents’ personal information in section A. The t-test and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tools were used to test the research hypotheses arising from the research questions for the study.

## Results

**Table 1:** Mean and Rank Order of Respondents' Score on Influence of Spousal Communication on Marriage

Item No.	Item Statement In my own opinion,	Mean	Rank Order
8	Communication is the key to a successful marriage	3.71	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	Free communication among couples promotes sexual satisfaction	3.64	2 <sup>nd</sup>
1	Lack of effective communication is a bane to marital stability	3.59	3 <sup>rd</sup>
7	Couples tend to understand each other more if they maintain open and frank discussion	3.55	4 <sup>th</sup>
5	Open lines of communication affect the psychological well-being of the couples	3.52	5 <sup>th</sup>
9	Style and level of communication can make or mar a couple's marriage	3.52	6 <sup>th</sup>
10	Meaningful communication between couples promotes marital wellbeing	3.47	7 <sup>th</sup>
17	Effective communication reduces conflict among couples	3.46	8 <sup>th</sup>
13	Effective communication promotes intimacy among couples	3.44	9 <sup>th</sup>
15	Communicating understanding of the sexual needs of the spouses promotes marital stability	3.43	10 <sup>th</sup>
16	Maintaining an open line of communication among couples reduces marital instability	3.39	11 <sup>th</sup>
3	Existence of communication gap among couples leads to marital instability	3.37	12 <sup>th</sup>
14	Understanding verbal and non-verbal cues promotes peace and stabilizes marriage	3.28	13 <sup>th</sup>
4	Marital conflicts are easily resolved through the use of frank and open discussion	3.24	14 <sup>th</sup>
18	Communication is the life elixir of ailing marital relationships	3.18	15 <sup>th</sup>
19	Communication problem is a barrier to marital stability	3.16	16 <sup>th</sup>
12	The more couples communicate the more stable their marriage	3.09	17 <sup>th</sup>

Item No.	Item Statement In my own opinion,	Mean	Rank Order
11	Open and frank communication helps to unite the couple	3.02	18 <sup>th</sup>
20	Effective communication promotes love and understanding among couples	3.00	19 <sup>th</sup>
6	Inability to discuss freely and fairly is the bedrock of marital instability	2.93	20 <sup>th</sup>

Table 1 presents the respondents' scores on their perception of influence of spousal communication on marriage. From the table, it could be observed that Item 8 which states that "communication is the key to a successful marriage has the highest mean score of 3.71". This is followed by Item 2 with a mean score of 3.64. With this, most of the respondents subscribe to the statement that free communication among couples promotes sexual satisfaction. Item 1 which states that lack of effective communication is a bane to marital stability attracted a mean score of 3.59 while item 6 which states that effective communication promotes love and understanding among couples has the lowest mean score of 2.93 which is still within the range of positive acceptance of spousal communication in marriage.

### Hypotheses Testing

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marriage on the basis of gender.

**Table 2:** Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test Comparing Male and Female Adults' Perception on the Influence of Spousal Communication on Marriage.

Gender	No. Of Cases	Mean (x)	SD	df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value
Male	242	79.76	.638	598	20.02*	1.96
Female	358	58.30	16.65			

\* = significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 20.02 is greater than the critical value of 1.96. Hence, there is significant difference in the perception of respondents on the influence of spousal communication on marriage on the basis of gender. On the basis of this result, the null hypothesis was rejected,  $t(df=598) = 20.02, p < 0.05$ .

**Hypothesis 2** There is no significant difference in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marriage on the basis of length of years in marriage.

**Table 3:** Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test Comparing Respondents' Perception on Influence of Spousal Communication on Marriage on the basis of Length of Years in Marriage.

Source of variance	df	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	Calculated F-value	Critical F-value
Between Groups	2	128248.10	6412.04	25.89*	3.00
Within Groups	597	37325.86	6251		
Total	599	16563.96			

Table 3 shows that the calculated F-value of 25.89 is greater than the critical value of 3.00. Hence, there is significant difference in the perception of respondents on the influence of spousal communication on marriage on the basis of length of years in marriage. On the basis of this result, the null hypothesis was rejected  $t(df=598) = 25.89, p < 0.05$ .

**Table 4:** Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) showing differences in the perception of married adults on the influence of spousal communication on marriage on the basis of length of years in marriage.

Length of marriage	N	1	2	3
1-5 years	99	35.32		
6-10 years	354		70.39	
11 years and above	147			80.00

In Table 4, the Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) results was used to determine the type of marriage mean that led to the significant difference noted in the ANOVA results in Table 3. The DMRT results indicated that group 3 (with a mean score of 80.00) is different from groups 1 and 2 (with the mean scores of 35.32 and 70.39) respectively. It is worth noting that all the groups differed from one another. But, the significant difference noted in the ANOVA results of Table 3 was due largely to group 3 which has the highest mean score. By implication therefore, adults who have been married for a period of 11 years and above have better perception of the influence of spousal communication on marriage than their counterparts who have not been married for too long.

### **Discussion**

The general objective of this research work is to carry out an investigation on the influence of spousal communication on marriage. The study was carried out in Ilorin metropolis.

The findings show that sex of respondents influenced their perception. That is the way the female respondents perceived the influence of spousal communication on marriage varies from the way the male respondents perceived it. According to Eseré and Idowu (2000), majority of couples have one or two disagreements per month, which means that knowledge of marital communication is built on a relatively infrequent event. That is to say whether couples communicate or not there must be conflict between them, it only depends on the way they handle it. Males tend to bottle up issues whereas women are more expressive of their emotions.

Hypothesis two stated that there was no significant difference in the perception of married adults on the basis of length of years in marriage on the influence of spousal communication on marriage. Awe (1996) found that there is a significant difference in marital adjustment of spouses who were long married and recently married. He said the first two to five years are the most critical period in which couples begin to learn about their individual differences.

### **Recommendations**

For the purpose of this study, the following counselling intervention measures are hereby recommended.

- Setting up of marital counselling clinics in all nooks and crannies of Nigeria.
- Also, courses in marriage communication and sex should be made compulsory for counsellors in training.
- Couples should communicate effectively and try as much as possible to know the likes and dislikes of each other.
- Finally, the researchers recommend the provision of marital counselling to couples before and after marriage. Marriage seminars and symposia should be constantly mounted.

### **Implications for conducive home environment**

The findings of this study revealed that there was an apparent awareness that lack of effective communication is a road that leads to marital instability and problems in marriage. It was also discovered that most of all the problems in marriage are due to lack of communication between couples. As couples go into marriage and even during marriage, there is need to understand each other very well, understanding each other means knowing the verbal and non verbal cues of each other as well as creating time for each other so as to know each other well.

This implies that counsellors in their various capacities should assume more active role in encouraging marital communication. They should try to provide guidance that can facilitate cordial relationship especially in the area of communication. They should enlighten couples on the consequences of not communicating effectively which could lead to divorce. With its attendant negative multiplier effect on the society.

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