

Review of Spousal Communication and the Increasing Rate of Divorce in Nigeria Society

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Abstract: *The home is frequently referred to be the fundamental building block of greater society. Hence, when the house is peaceful, so is society. The primary goal of this study was to determine how spousal communication affected divorce proceedings and family stability in Nigeria. The library research method was used for this study. This method allowed the researcher review secondary literatures and analyzed the positions of scholars to derive a conclusion. Symbolic interactionism theory formed the theoretical basis of the study and argues that interpersonal communication among people is the most humanizing activity engaged daily by people and is needed for daily sustenance of relationships. The paper concludes that divorce can most likely occur when two partners have lost communication or have exhausted all communication links and decided that the union should not go further. While some divorce cases might have other triggers such as abuse or other forms of unresolved conflicts, this paper posit that almost all divorce cases have communication effect whether directly or indirectly hence a couple with a high level of marital communication (without secrecy) stands a greater chance of staying longer together. It was argued also in this paper that money and financial communication is a key consideration in marriages if the couples want to enjoy bliss and avoid divorce. This paper recommends that couples should engage in constant communication to share their problems as they arise and ensure to deal with it from the foundation. Also, when choosing a life partner, intending couples need to ensure that the partner is someone they can easily communicate with on a balanced level where feedback is gotten in due time (almost immediately and not coerced). Furthermore, the issue of family finance should be discussed at length to avoid subsequent financial disputes due to lack of accountability and excessive secrecy.*

Keywords: *Communication, Divorce, Marriage, Spousal communication*

I. Introduction

Marriage is a custom that has existed from the beginning of time. That goes back to Adam and Eve's period. Regardless of tribe, society, or religious connections, it is a necessary phenomenon in human life. According to Munroe (2003), marriage is a religious obligation and is therefore both a social necessity and a moral safety net. Marriage has been found to work as a moral safeguard because it allows men to express their sexual demands in a controlled way and prevents them from being enslaved to them. As families are formed through it and families are the essential building block of human society, it is assumed that it is necessary for society. People desire to live happily ever after when they decide to get married. They desire a devoted, joyful, and prosperous marriage. They usually learn that marriage does not maintain itself after they have been married for a while and the novelty has worn off. For a marriage to last, both partners must put in effort.

The most challenging puzzle one will ever encounter is marriage (Angel, 2008). Marriage can bring about happiness or misery. Everything depends on how one interprets it. Trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty, sincerity, and most importantly efficient communication are all necessary for a healthy marriage. Without good communication, a marriage is prone to fail. Marriage relationships and other important

relationships depend on effective communication (Esere, 2002, 2006). It is the remedy for a failing marriage (Olagunju & Eweniyi, 2002). It is more crucial now to work on husband and wife communication because so many marriages sadly end in divorce (Adegoke & Esere, 1998 cited in Adegboyega, 2021). When there is effective communication, many issues are resolved whereas many others escalate when there is ineffective communication.

Without communication, no marriage can endure in the divorce-filled society we live in. Communication is undoubtedly the cornerstone to a happy marriage (Jolin, 2007). In order to better understand how communication between spouses affects marital stability. The stabilization of a marriage depends heavily on communication. It takes a lot of skill and work to communicate effectively. Without communication, it is incredibly difficult to settle disputes or develop a partnership. According to Hybels and Weaver (2001, quoted in Adegboyega, 2021), communication is any process in which people share thoughts, feelings, and information with one another and includes not only verbal and written expression but also body language, mannerisms, and personal style.

Human activities include communication as a fundamental component. It is a pillar that upholds the influence of spousal communication on marital stability and serves as a foundation for understanding and harmonious coexistence. In many aspects of human existence, but especially in the marriage partnership, communication is essential (Esere, 2008).

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 in order to have effective communication.

More than half of unsuccessful relationships, according to Idowu and Esere (2007), were brought on by a serious lack of communication between partners. One needs to communicate well if they want to have a long-lasting relationship with someone. Both the ability to express one's feelings and thoughts and the capacity to receive those of one's spouse are necessary. The skill of hearing is maybe even more crucial than the skill of speaking. Sitting down and listening to one another instead of talking and airing all of their thoughts at once would help couples learn and develop in their relationships much more; not that one won't express their ideas, though (Adegboyega, 2021). But it's also important to hear what the other person has to say and give it some thought. Some people express themselves through deeds rather than words. One will be able to receive what they desire from their partner if they pay attentive attention. The issue is that most couples don't pay sufficient attention to one another, which leads to marital discord. An attempt will be made to evaluate how spousal communication affects marital stability in this paper. This research has significance, particularly in light of rising marital instability in Nigeria.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Since marriage is the primary means by which the society is populated by the number of children that are born in such marriages, marital instability has a negative multiplier effect on society. The house is the foundation of society. When there is marital instability, it is difficult to raise and care for the children, which can contribute to social unrest and an increase in the rate of juvenile criminality. It is more crucial now to work on husband and wife communication because so many marriages sadly end in divorce (Adegoke & Esere, 1998 cited in Adegboyega, 2021). Without communication, so many issues worsen, and when there is communication, many issues are resolved.

In this divorce-filled culture we live in, communication is genuinely the key to a happy marriage. Without communication, no marriage can endure. The development and maintenance of all relationships depend on having effective interpersonal communication abilities (Adegboyega, 2021). Relationships can suffer irreparable harm from poor communication skills, which can also have an impact on performance, morale, trust, respect,

self-confidence, and even physical health. The key to a great marriage and family life is effective communication. One of the main issues that couples who are having problems complain about is ineffective communication (Esere & Idowu, 2000). Many family issues, such as excessive family conflict, poor problem-solving abilities, lack of closeness, weak emotional ties, and others, can arise from inefficient communication. Also linked to a higher likelihood of divorce and marriage dissolution is poor communication (Esere, 2008).

Learning to communicate takes effort, and as the divorce rate demonstrates, many couples are unable to attain this level of understanding. As a result, conflicts go unsolved and tension rises, which breeds a lack of respect and understanding. When they are unable to figure out how to solve the issues, couples may ultimately decide to end their relationship. This study finds that it is important to look into how spousal communication affects marital stability. This is due to the fact that divorce is increasingly common. In the past ten years, a number of theories have been put up to explain the improvement or decline in the quality of a couple's relationship. Examples include those by Yusuf (2005), which focused on indicators of marital instability; Isiaka (2005) empirically researched the relationship between divorce and spousal communication and concluded that ineffective communication in marriage preceded divorce. Adeyemi (1991) studied the causes of divorce and separation. Despite this, not much research has been done on how spousal communication affects the stability of a marriage. This study aims to close this gap that has been left unfilled. In order to better understand the impact of spousal communication on marital stability, this study was conducted.

II. Review of Literatures

2.1 What is Communication?

Numerous academics have attempted to define communication's significance.

According to the Association of Perioperative Practice, the Latin word *communis* is the source of the word communication. Lunenberg (2010) agrees that the Latin word *communis* serves as the origin of communication. He claims that it actually means "common," which implies that the source and the listener must share the same interpretation of the content being delivered.

The typical understanding of communication is that it involves social contact. There is often a sender (source) and a receiver in communication. It entails the exchange of signals between the participants. These cues could be gesture or visual, verbal or graphic (photographic). Essentially, communicating includes deciphering codes that are performed with the eyes, body, or voice. Regardless of the method, there is always a process when someone initiates a meaning intent that is communicated to the other person (receiver). According to Daniel (2016), the communication process is complete when feedback has been delivered to the sender (source), which entails the receiver responding to the signal by starting a new circle of meaning exchange.

Communication, according to Giffin and Patten (1976), is the process of both ascribing and producing meaning. It is the interaction and sharing of ideas among group members. Communication is defined as the activity or process of expressing ideas and sentiments or of imparting information to people (Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, 2004). It is acceptable to assume that communication is the act of transmitting data and messages from one location to another and between individuals (Vitalis et al., 2023). Participants must develop a shared understanding that goes beyond merely encoding and decoding information, news, ideas, and emotions. It is crucial that they also produce and distribute the communications' underlying meaning (Daniel, 2013). Moreover, it is believed that communication can link individuals or locations. Because an organization or institution cannot function without communication across levels, departments and personnel,

it is also viewed as a crucial management task (Okenimkpe, 2010). Marriage being an institution requires communication for its sustainability.

2.2 Codes of Communication

Lawal (2004), asserts that language is a complete communication code, signaling system, or semiotic system. Code is defined as a system of words, letters, numbers, or symbols that represents a message or surreptitiously records information in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English. Craig (2000), communication can be categorized by the code, the medium, or the channels through which it takes place, and language is the principal code (or, from various viewpoints, a medium or channel) of human communication (Vitalis et al., 2024). He goes on to say that code describes how a sign system is organized to create a certain association between signs and meaning. Language serves as both a primary code and a means for communication.

A set of symbols can be used to describe spoken and visual human languages. They are typically established in grammars, which are forms of communication. Several languages around the world use graphs or sound patterns to help people communicate with those around them (Yule, 2010; Daniel, 2011).

2.3 Finance as the Key Element of Spousal Communication

Spousal communication simply put is the exchange of meanings between couples using different codes. Married couples should talk about their own issues to prevent misunderstandings that could lead to fights. Understanding each other's debt situation, financial state, and money personality can help spouses reach agreement on the family's finances and prevent needless disputes (Smith 2007). It is much more crucial to communicate about money as it is one of the main topics of marital conflict (Springboard 2007 cites in Grobbelaar & Alsemgeest 2016). Several factors can lead to divorce, however up to 70% of married couples split for reasons related to poor communication (Wood 2013 cited in Grobbelaar & Alsemgeest 2016). So, if couples are not speaking on a general basis, financial communication will also be put on hold. So, it is crucial for couples to focus on their communication regarding the financial facets of their marriage. Since funds are so strongly related to emotions like success, competence, safety, and security, most couples opt not to discuss their finances (Shapiro 2007).

One of the main topics of spouse communication is money. Couples' stress levels may increase as a result of their diverse approaches to managing their finances. In order to better understand one another and lessen their financial stress, which can lead to financial fights, couples should communicate their differences (Brandweek 2010). Britt and Huston (2012) found a direct correlation between divorce rates and financial disputes. Couples should therefore pay close attention to how they communicate about the all aspects of their marriage especially finance. Most couples opt not to discuss money because it is linked to emotions like achievement, competence, safety, and security (Shapiro 2007).

One of the main topics of communication between spouses is finances. Couples may experience more stress as a result of the diverse ways they manage their finances. By discussing these differences, couples can better understand one another and lessen their financial stress, which can decrease financial conflicts (Brandweek 2010). There is unquestionably a connection between financial disputes and divorce rates, claim Britt and Huston (2012). According to the literature, financial discrepancies between spouses can contribute to stress, which in turn leads to conflicts (Grobbelaar & Alsemgeest 2016). Finance is a pivot upon which other marital communication can rise. This is because money can influence cheating, addictions, cause loneliness, create divisions among others. That is, the absence of money as well as the abundance of it influences marriages greatly.

Divorce is predicted by dishonesty, abuse, addictions, and financial issues (Britt & Huston 2012). Arguments about money, which arise from financial issues such as debt incurred during the marriage, the work position of the spouses and financial decision-making, are the main predictor of financial troubles and divorce (Britt and Huston 2012; Waseem 2004).

According to a survey on married couples in the United States, 48% of them quarrel about money, with the most common topic being the other spouse's careless spending. To prevent disputes, some respondents even admitted to hiding credit cards and purchases made by their spouse (Brandweek 2010). For newlyweds, bringing a significant amount of debt into a marriage puts a tremendous strain on the union (Loftus 2004).

Couples that manage their finances differently may frequently argue about money, which can be caused by a lack of financial management skills (Kerkmann et al. 2000). Financial difficulties that cause disputes include a spouse's reckless spending habits and opposing views and practices regarding money (Amato & Previti 2003; Dew 2008). Couples who pay their bills late also tend to dispute more frequently than those who pay their bills on time, and the longer a couple is married, the more financially savvy they become via experience and dialogue, and as a result, the frequency of arguments tends to diminish (Waseem 2004). Inequality in the marriage results when just one partner handles the household finances without taking into account the opinions of the other spouse. The less fortunate spouse frequently feels constrained in their ability to control the household budget and access to resources. There tends to be less disparity when both the husband and wife control the home money (Waseem 2004). In order to ensure financial openness and avoid potential disagreements in this area, it is crucial for married couples to express how they handle their finances and their financial goals for the future (Lawrence et al. 1993).

Because personal finances are seen as "one of the most personal and private parts of society," it's probable that this is one of the reasons why couples find it so difficult to talk about money together (Fehlberg et al. 2010). Couples may be prevented from talking and resolving home concerns by conflict, fear, and financial anxiety (Fehlberg et al. 2010). The managing of funds is much more demanding for young adults who are in the career development phase and working to pursue their ambitions (Wrosch et al. 2000). Excessive amounts of stress might make workers less productive at work. People may end up making poor financial decisions, developing a poor view of their financial situation, and even developing health issues like irregular sleeping patterns, eating disorders, and increased alcohol consumption (Joo & Grable 2000; Kim & Garman 2003).

According to a survey of American workers, having money troubles and a lack of income are the main causes of employees' high levels of stress. The survey also showed that women often experience more financial stress than males (Nadler 2010 cited in Grobbelaar & Alsemgeest 2016). High stress levels are a result of a variety of financial problems, including unemployment, unpaid debt, missed payments on financial commitments, spousal conflicts, and improper money management (Brandweek 2010; Grable et al. 2008). Undiscussed finance can lead to a breach in marriage especially among couples that had very little in the earlier stages of their marriages.

The amount of money couples have attracts a lot of other things to their family. For instance, the number of dependent relatives a family handles is often directly related to how wealthy those couples are hence finance is a major topic consideration for couples. This is so because proper discussion and handling of finance can help manage other social issues such as family burden, peer pressure, household expenditures, trips and social relations (friends and colleagues) among others. All these issues can also dominate marital communication depending on the individual demands and social status of the couples.

2.4 Marriage Defined

Marriage is an accepted social institution that involves two individuals with the target of procreation, growth and mutual advancement. Marriage, which entails the union of two individuals with dissimilar interests, needs, and goals, is a unique association that is shaped by social laws and customs and has a considerable impact on people's growth and self-realization (Ersanli & Kalkan, 2008). Marriage serves many purposes that are universal and important for societies, including satisfying the need for love and the need to be loved, meeting the biological, social, psychological, and motivational needs of both individuals, fostering the development of children, gaining acceptance in society, feeling safe and protected, cooperating, feeling confident about the future, feeling proud of one another, and promoting a healthy sexual life (Canel, 2012). The structures of family and marriage have kept their universality and continue to be the foundation of communities even though its proportions and contents have evolved throughout human history (Zgüven, 2001 cited in Ogyigit, 2016). Marriage is widely seen as the institution where intimacy and camaraderie exist, where children are nurtured in safety, where people can engage in sexual activity, and where there is possibility for emotional growth (Yavuzer, 2012).

Marriage is a public institution and a private, intimate connection, as shown by disagreements over its definition. Marriage, on the one hand, entails a sexual and emotional bond between two specific people. Marriage joins two families while also being an institution that goes beyond the specific people who are a part of it. In certain societies, marriage ties two families together through a complex web of resource transactions involving labor, land, and other resources (Eyo, 2018). The couple's potential offspring are also of interest to the couple's extended relatives and the general public. However, the laws surrounding marriage and the legal definitions of marriage typically serve as the symbolic manifestation of fundamental cultural norms (unwritten rules of behavior) (Eyo, 2018).

2.5 Concept of Divorce

According to Ukpong (2014:185), a divorce is the formal termination of the marriage relationship, any formal separation of a man and his wife in accordance with accepted custom, or any kind of total separation. The term originally related to the breakup of a legal marriage, but it is today also used to refer to the division of two institutions or circumstances into two different categories, such as the division of the state from the church or other religious institutions (Eyo, 2018). It is noteworthy that divorce is not possible unless there exist a valid marriage tie. So, since co-habiting individuals were not legally married, their decision to separate cannot be described as a divorce. Although it is not always socially acceptable, divorce is a "known datum of modern life" (Allan Fromme 1969:131 cited in Eyo, 2018). It is antisocial and rarely commemorated, unlike marriage, with food, dancing, or other festivities. Because of the cause(s) and consequences of divorce, it is frequently depressing and extremely traumatic. Divorce never happens overnight; it takes a bit of time, and in some instances, it is quite difficult (Eyo, 2018).

2.6 Divorce as an Outcome of Miscommunication

Divorce is becoming more and more commonplace. No longer is marriage considered to be a lifetime commitment. Instead of for the priceless bond that marriage signifies before God, it seems that couples choose to get married on the spur of the moment based on their emotions and feelings (Maddox, 2010). What motivates a person to marry? Is it because they have found their soul partner who will push them to grow in the Lord so they may become more holy together, or is it to fulfill their need to feel loved and accepted? Although though divorce is challenging, when kids are involved, it becomes even more challenging (Maddox, 2010).

In the modern world, divorce is relatively common. The holy commitment that marriage once was in families does not appear to exist nowadays. Nowadays, when a married couple marks their 25th wedding anniversary, society congratulates them on their longevity as if it were a significant accomplishment. It seems that a lot of people do not believe that marriage is a lifetime commitment anymore. Many people think they have every right to seek for divorce and stop their marriage if they are unhappy with their spouse instead of communicating the reason for unhappiness and adjusting afterwards (Maddox, 2010).

Although people can renege on earlier agreements, communication of expectations goes a long way to prepare the minds of couples towards marital demands. For instance, when couples decide on the number of children to have and how to make plans for the training of those children, it becomes relatively easier to manage those children as they come more than when there was no such communication. When things like body fat, shape and old age becomes the topic of communication during relationships, then the expected body change can be controlled to an extent. All these communication needs can reduce the unexpected in marriages which leads to divorce.

There is hardly any divorce trigger that does not arise due to communication breach. For instance, Eyo (2016) assert that one of the causes of divorce is domestic violence which is verbal, emotional, economic, or sexual violence. A closer look at these triggers shows a breach in communication as verbal abuse of partners can be controlled through communication as well as finance as earlier discussed. Sexual abuse among couples can be handled if the couples discuss the issue of sex intensely before and during their marriages. The sexual desires and fantasies of intending couples need to be deeply discussed among themselves as it is one of the major reasons why marriages break (infidelity).

2.7 Theoretical Framework

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

This theory was propounded by George Herbert Mead in the 1934 though the first person to put it into print was Herbert Blumer in 1937 (Oloidi (2020). Blumer argued that interpersonal communication among people is the most humanizing activity engaged daily by people (Griffin, 2006; Oreoluwa et al., 2024). Mead on his own part hypothesized that people create images of themselves through the interactions they have with others and the environment and this shapes their lives in no small way. These interactions eventually lead to the creation of mental symbols and ideologies that define other communications or interactions. According to the symbolic interactionist perspective, humans engage in a dynamic social setting where the meanings of the things in their environment are produced through various contextual interpretation and interpersonal relationships (Oliver, 2011). In summarizing the postulations of symbolic interactionism theory, Oloidi (2020) conclude that: Despite various disparagements about the theory of symbolic interactionism, its contributions to human relationship with other people, events and objects (animate and inanimate) cannot be overemphasized. It brings about cultural identity thereby distinguishes a particular community from others. These dissimilar identities brought about multiple attractions in the community and country at large. The identities include language, artefacts, mode of dressing, tribal marks, names, food, festivals, etc. The meanings and real interpretations of animate and inanimate objects are coded. In this case, only those who have direct and frequent interactions with the object can understand or decipher the signs and symbols associated with them (p.54)

This means that interaction or communication is a starting point for people to know each other better as well as to understand the environment within which they live. This theory emphasizes the need for communication among people and the environment for them to better understand themselves through those interactions (Maiwada et al., 2025). Spousal

communication is a symbolic interaction because marriages are symbolic union that contributes to the growth and sustainability of the society.

III. Research Methods

The library research method was used for this study. This method allowed the researcher review secondary literatures and analyzed the positions of scholars to derive a conclusion. The data sources were mainly books and journals on marriage and related issues.

IV. Result and Discussion

Adegboyega (2021) observed in an empirical study that marital communication influences marital conflict resolution positively to the benefit of the couples involved. That is, when couples communicate frequently, they stand a greater chance of resolving any dispute between them faster than couples who barely communicate. Adegboyega (2021) further found 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 (p.80).

The above finding explains that the educational qualification of couples make little or no difference in their conflict resolution capabilities implying that it takes understanding as well as communication among couples to be able to handle their issues irrespective of their academic qualifications. This means that educational background of couples is not what determines marital stability but their level of communication of issues and the desire of both parties to resolve them that determines the rate of divorce in the society.

In a separate study, Grobbelaar and Alsemgeest (2016) found that marital stress and other issues related to marriage are directly or indirectly connected to the way financial communication is handled by couples. This means that couples must engage in constant communication on how their resources, when gotten, will be spent and discuss intensely on handling of responsibilities in marriage. This will help manage sudden and expected wealth and the outcome of such wealth on the marriage in the long run. This further reemphasizes the importance of any form of communication in marriage.

V. Conclusion

Divorce can most likely occur when two partners have lost communication or have exhausted all communication links and decided that the union should not go further. While some divorce cases might have other triggers such as abuse or other forms of unresolved conflicts, this paper posit that almost all divorce cases have communication effect whether directly or indirectly hence a couple with a high level of marital communication (without secrecy) stands a greater chance of staying longer together. It is argued in this paper among other things that money and financial communication is a key consideration in marriages if the couples want to enjoy bliss and avoid divorce. A clear discussion of how available resources as well as incoming resources will be handled can help forestall future cracks in marriages. Although the paper is not advocating for a total financial

surrender in marriages, it suggest a relative communication that creates an understanding among couples on how their daily activities are managed. This will create trust and reduce unnecessary rancor between couples.

Recommendations

This paper recommends the following:

1. Couples should engage in constant communication to share their problems as they arise and ensure to deal with it from the foundation
2. In choosing a life partner, intending couples need to ensure that the partner is someone they can easily communicate with on a balanced level where feedback is gotten in due time (almost immediately and not coerced).
3. The issue of family finance should be discussed at length to avoid subsequent financial disputes due to lack of accountability and excessive secrecy.

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