



Impact Factor: 4.081

Spousal communication pattern as indicators of marital well-being among married female researchers: An exploration

Fashiya. P. S.* and Jayan. C.**

*Psychologist, Near Calicut University, Kerala, India. **Professor (Retd)., Department of Psychology, University of Calicut, Kerala, India.

Abstract

Providing emotional security and feelings of belongingness is an important function of family today. It can be enhanced through effective communication. Couples vary in their values about marriage, in their communication with one another and in the level of happiness they obtain from their relationship. It is very important to think about how we communicate with our loved ones on a daily basis. The study is an attempt to explore the spousal communication on the basis of interaction perspective, and to explore verbal and non-verbal behaviours that may occur during couple communication. The sample included 26 married female researchers who were randomly drawn. Semi structured interview was conducted to collect data. Interpretive phenomenological analysis was adopted to analyse data. The obtained data were classified as self-disclosure, positive solutions, acceptance of the partner, criticism, justification, jokes and other categories. It was found that the quality and content of communication as having a major role in marital well-being of the spouses.

Key words:- communication, interpretive phenomenological analysis, marital well-being.

There is no doubt that constructive communication patterns are associated with satisfaction. In marriage, communication as an interpersonal process develop with the marriage and are related to changes in satisfaction. Over the years, poor and ineffective communication in marriages has affected the growth and development of many homes. Ability to communicate effectively is regarded as central to the establishment of good marital relationship (Esere, 2001, as cited in Esere, Ake-Yeyeodu, & Oladun, 2014). Communication is considered as part of the development, maintenance, deterioration of relationships especially the marriage relationship (Ojiah, 2004). The works of Filani (1985, as cited in Esere, Ake-Yeyeodu, & Oladun, 2014) and Salifu (2009, as cited in Esere, Ake-Yeyeodu, & Oladun, 2014) had studied communication and marital adjustment of educated couples in Ogbomoso and Kogi state respectively. Studies regarding communication patterns of spouses in the Kerala context is found to be rare, especially as indicators of marital well-being.

Significance of the study

Communication has been reported as a major source of marital success. Without proper communication, there is no growth between spouses. Ineffective communication may lead to family breakdowns. In unhappy marriages, communication has been reported as the missing link. As an essential tool for stabilizing a marriage, the patterns of spousal communication requires further analyses. It is essential to identify the major contents of the communication pattern and the verbal and non-verbal communication that may occur between spouses.

Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To explore the spousal communication on the basis of interaction perspective.

2. To explore verbal and non-verbal behaviours that may occur during spousal communication.

Method

Sample

The sample for the study included 26 married female researchers who were randomly drawn without considering their age and socio-demographic data. They belonged to Malappuram, Kozhikode and Trissur districts of Kerala, India. They have completed post graduation and above. Their longevity of marriage included one year to ten years.

Measures used

Semi-structured interview schedule and personal information schedule were used as tools. Most of the items of the interview were descriptive in nature. The schedule contained items that were related to major areas of spousal relationship, familial communication, interaction and so forth.

To fix the validity of the items, they were prepared in advance and evaluated by two experts in Psychology. Repetition of some of items were used during interview to verify reliability of items. But it was used in a few cases not to affect further results.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted in individual settings in the park or canteen in most of the cases. Rapport was established with each participant after revealing the purpose of the study. Their personal consent was sought before the data collection and confidentiality was assured. The topic of the interview was disclosed in advance. Date, time and place were fixed as per their convenience. Then they were asked to mention about the major contents and style of communication usually occurring between themselves and their partner. For recording of the responses, key note method was used with the consent of the interviewee. Important aspects of their answers were noted down. Each dialogue and responding behavioural context of spouses were identified and scored by putting the tally marks and counted frequency.

Interpretive phenomenological analysis was used for analysing the data.

Results and Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore spousal communication on the basis of interaction perspective. The sample included 26 married female researchers who had completed post graduation and above without considering their age and socio demographic data. Semi structured interview was conducted to collect data. For the purpose of analysing their communication, interpretive phenomenological analysis as explained by Smith and Osbern (2015) was followed.

Using the Duquesne school of empirical phenomenology (Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis), the self-reports collected from the participants were analysed to construct a phenomenal view of spousal communication pattern. While analysing the major themes of the communication pattern, they were classified into sub themes such as self-disclosure, positive solutions, acceptance of the partner as he/she is, criticism, justification, jokes, and others.

When the couples were at parental home, most of their communication took place during bed time, as per the reports of 73% of participants. The communication contents of 88 % of couples included matters related to sexuality. The sub themes of self-disclosure included sexual talks, aesthetic discussions and past events. Towards their partners, the participants were ready to self-disclose about their sexual likes and dislikes, innovations in sexuality, to make flirts each other and so on. The findings

could be supported by the works of MacNeil and Byers (2005) in which it was found that communication about sexuality as an essential element to the development and maintenance of satisfying sexual relationship. Coffelt and Hess (2014), Hess and Coffelt (2012) and Montesi et al. (2013) also investigated the better understanding of sexual communication in relational satisfaction. Ross, Clifford, and Eisenman (1987) examined communication of sexual preferences in married couples.

Aesthetics dominated a major place in the talks of couples in the present study. The surprising thing noticed was that it were husbands who made more communication with their partners regarding aesthetics than vice versa. Among them 21 partners of the participants talked about their preferences of the beauty they were expecting from their wives, and they encouraged them to make efforts to implement them such as reducing fat belly, exercise regularly, follow dietary food, be careful in dressing and so on. Half of them were free enough to explain the beauty of other females to their wives and suggested them to follow those ladies in maintaining their beauty. They were interested to talk about their own beauty and the suggestions from the part of wives to make further improvements, as per the reports of four participants.

20 participants had self-disclosures about their past experiences such as childhood jokes, school – college experiences, love affairs and so on. While hearing the past events, four participants commented as, “Most of the time, I was really bored while hearing the childhood experiences which has repeated”. They asked their partners to stop talking regarding the past. The matters related to past love affairs were mostly from the part of husbands. One participant was dare enough to self-disclose her husband about the sexual abuse she has experienced during her childhood. In her opinion her husband gave emotional support to her regarding it.

19 participants reported that their partners were providing positive solutions for their dilemma. Most of them were mainly related to the academic matters of the participants as they were educated wives. One commented as, “my husband indirectly helps me for collecting reviews, to take print outs, to enter data in SPSS, for typing the materials and so on”. In others’ words, “it is my husband who always remind and motivate me to finish the work in prescribed time period”. Also they had plans about their better future. 21 couples had talks about the job opportunities of the participants. 22 participants reported the financial talks occurred between their partners as, “we plan mutually about the financial investments and the way it has to be spend. It is my husband who always give suggestions in money matters whenever I’m in a trouble”.

Acceptance of the partner as he/she is another sub theme identified. 77 % of couples expressed their emotions with their partners irrespective of the nature of emotions. In their opinion, the partner is the most suitable person who can easily express out their emotions without any restriction. Some added that, “I’m lucky enough to get such a partner who can accept me as I’m”. 16 participants expressed their happiness through their words such as, “my partner actively listens to me when I say something”. The likes and dislikes of the partner could be easily identified by the partners of 23 participants. The comments were as follows,” during our conversation, whenever my tone of voice and mood swings, my husband can easily recognise it, and usually it is he who adjust well to avoid further conflicts”.

The sub theme criticism were mainly related to lack of care in looking after the younger ones and for not helping their mother in household works. Most of the time, 18 participants were criticised by their partners in the name of lack of care in looking after the kids. They reported that, “whenever the child cries, he turns towards me by saying that it is due to my lack of care, the child has fallen down or fell in such troubles”. Three participants added that it is due to the mother-in-law’s influence that

the son was responding in such a manner. Another area which caused criticism for the wives were mainly regarding the purchase of unnecessary household items. But 19 of them added that “usually we together plan discuss for purchasing the new household items which are common to the house such as buying a car, television, refrigerator, dining table and the like”.

In the opinion of 50% of the participants, their partners justified their own perspectives during conflicting situations. Justifications were of two types such as justification for the parents and for the self. Only five participants reported that the major cause of disagreements between the spouses were related to the issues with in-laws. They commented that, “whenever I communicate him about the issues created by mother-in-law/sister-in-law or co-sister, he always blamed me by saying that it might be due to my false interpretation regarding the interacting situations with those people”. Almost among all participants, disagreements with in-laws occurred especially in the early years of marriage. The findings can be supported with the findings of Christensen and Johnson (1971).

Half of the participants had jokes during their communication. Most of them were mainly related to academic / work matters of the spouse, cooking, lack of care in aesthetics, slang and culture of the spouse/spousal relatives and so on. They include comments such as, “why are you doing higher studies, as you don’t know such a silly matter?”, “I’m the person who was selected to taste the experiments prepared by you!”, “I was caught in the wedlock”, and so on. Some of them used colloquial terms such as “budhoos” (fool) during their conversation. But the participants were not found to be hurt by such comments as they could identify the meaning inherent in them. The comments on the lack of care provided to the aesthetics were mainly related to the pimples and fat figure of the partners. During such situations the participants also made comments in a tit for tat manner. One participant reported as, “my husband always make ridicule of me regarding my anxiety”.

Other talks between the couples, as per the opinion of the participants, included health related matters, plan for outing, current affairs and social issues, and religion. It was females who were eager to discuss daily events to their partners than vice versa. They expected the same from their partners even though it were not the case, which could be reflected through the comments like, “some times he keeps silence for what I say. Most of the time I wonder that whether he also had some experiences outside home which can be simply talked to me”. In the words of females, talking about daily events in their life enable them to develop a sense of working through their problems together. 15 partners made opinion of the recipes, that is, goodness of the taste or to make additions in future preparation.

Nonverbal communication were reported as occurring more during quarrelling and sex. Participants agreed that crying was the major non-verbal communication occurring among females during conflicting situations. One opined, “even though I know that it is useless to cry before my husband, still I cry during conflicts”. During quarrelling situations, the partners of the participants were reported as using non-verbal communication to warn the wife to be silent. Most of the participants were reluctant to disclose about the non-verbal communication related to sexuality. The work of Cupach and Metts (1991) reported that much sexual communication was conveyed nonverbally. As a part of compromising also, spouses could easily identify the nonverbal communication between them. Love making as a part of consideration were reported to express that “I love you”, “food prepared by you is so delicious”, and the like.

Major inferences of the study

Positive solutions to the dilemma of the participants dominated highly in the spousal communication whereas self-disclosure remained the second position. The major reason for quarrelling were regarding the criticisms, especially in the name of not looking after the younger ones properly and based on the belief that the wives were not helping the mothers-in-law in the household tasks. Especially in the early years, the major reason for conflicts between couples were topics related to in-laws. The major contents of the jokes were related to the wives which included her “lack of common sense”, cooking, beauty, slang and family culture, academic matters, for being trapped in the wedlock with her and the like. Most of the participants were enjoying the same.

Crying was reported as a major non-verbal behaviour used by females, especially during conflicting situations. From the part of husbands, the non-verbal behaviours were to warn the wife to ‘be silent’ during conflicts. During compromising and considering situations also, the husbands expressed non-verbal behaviours, which could not be explored in detail during sex.

The inferences can be a source for exploring the contents of communication patterns of spouses which may enhance or diminish marital well-being. Pre-marital and post-marital counselling can be provided to enable them to acquire information capable of bringing necessary contents in spousal communication and to avoid unnecessary ones.

References

- Christensen, H. T., & Johnson, K. P. (1971). *Marriage and the Family*, U.S.A: The Ronald Press Company.
- Coffelt, T. A., & Hess, J. A. (2014). Sexual disclosures: Connections to relational satisfaction and closeness. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 40(6), 577-591. doi: 10.1080/0092623X.2013.811449
- Cupach, W. R., & Metts, S. (1991). Sexuality and Communication in close relationships: In K. McKinney & S. Sprecher (Eds.), *Sexuality in close relationships* (pp. 93-110). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Esere, M. O., Ake-Yeyeodu & Oladun, C. (2014). Obstacles and suggested solutions to effective communication in marriage as expressed by married adults in Kogi State, Nigeria. *Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 114, 584-592.
- Hess, J. A., & Coffelt, T. A. (2012). Verbal communication about sex in marriage: Patterns of language use and its connection with Relational outcomes. *Journal of Sex Research*, 49(6), 603-612. doi: 10.1080/00224499.2011.619282
- MacNeil, S., & Byers, E. S. (2005). Dyadic assessment of sexual self-disclosure and sexual satisfaction in heterosexual dating couples. *Journal of Social & Personal Relationships*, 22(2), 169-181. doi: 10.1177/0265407505050942
- Montesi, J. L., Conner, B. T., Gordon, E. A., Fauber, R. L., Kim, K. H., & Heimberg, R. G. (2013). On the relationship among social anxiety, intimacy, sexual communication, and sexual satisfaction in young couples. *Arch Sex Behav*, 42, 81-91, doi: 10.1007/s10508-012-9929-3
- Ojiah, P. O. (2004). Fostering interpersonal relationships: The counsellor’s view point. *The Nigeria Journal of Guidance and Counselling*, 9, 121-136.
- Ross, J. L., Clifford, R. E., & Eisenman, R. (1987). Communication of sexual preferences in married couples. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society*, 25(1), 58-60.
- Smith, J. A., & Osbern, M. (2015). *Interpretive phenomenological analysis in qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods*, New Delhi: Sage.