

Communication and Marital Stability Among Married Couples in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine communication and marital stability among married couples in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of these study three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Literature review was carried out accordingly. Survey research design was adopted for the study. This research design was used for study because it was considered appropriate. A sample of two hundred (200) married couples was used for the study. The sample was selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established through Cronbach Alpha reliability method. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis was the statistical technique employed to test the hypotheses under study. Each hypothesis was tested at .05 levels of significance. The results of the analysis revealed that, Level of marital communication affection, in-law's communication interference and Communication in marriage significantly relate with marital stability among married couples sin Vandeikya LGA of Benue State. Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that marriage counseling, workshops, symposia, conferences should be organized regularly for married couples on factors of marital stability.

Introduction

Marital stability has to do with the degree to which couples have the capacity to satisfy each other in marital relationship. Marital stability is a mental state that reflects the perceived benefits and costs of marriage to a particular person. It is a special case of relationship stability and it is the degree to which partners in marriage assess their approval of different aspects of their marital relations. When there is no stability in marriage, married couples becomes dissatisfied with each other which leads to marital instability.

Marital instability is a widespread problem which is prevalent in every society in the world. It is a problem which is widely spread in all countries of the world especially in African countries where men are seen to be the lord of their homes. According to Unimna, Ekwok and Ugbong (2024) today, more than ever, before the issue of marital instability pricks at the conscience of many societies as it has become an endemic problem facing various families. Marital instability has strong implication for individuals well-being. Marital stability and instability are of great concern to the married couples, Counsellors, government, non-governmental organizations, clergy and the society at large. Marital instability has some negative effects which include depression, hatred among spouse, lack of cooperation, infidelity, violence in the home, raising rebellious children, lack of growth and development in the home, prayerlessness, divorce and even death of one of the couple. Marital stability may have strong implications for the couples' wellbeing. Marital stability in this study may be influenced by communication variables which include communication affection, in-laws' communication interference and communication credibility.

Observing with kin interest and concern, the actions exhibited in marriage institution by some couples, in their negative utterances on issues of their marriages, seem to suggest the fact that, they are unhappy and need love and care. This led them to distress and the urge and desire to seek for extra marital affairs outside the home for their stability. This actions of theirs may lead to marital instability.

When a person does not have stability in his or her marriage, depression may set in. With a feeling of great sadness, he may become very unhappy and this may lead to lack of affection for the spouse. The person begins to lose the feeling of love he or she has for the spouse which may transfer to lack of communication, and he/she may always want to be left alone or may refuse to share information with the spouse but may prefer sharing information with in-laws. When in-laws are involved in the decision making of the home outside the spouse, the partner begins to have

negative self-concept about himself/herself which may lead to a broken marriage or separation or divorce.

Marriage is the union of a man and a woman as husband and wife. It is the foundation for a home and family, the bedrock of every society. The joining together of a man and a woman in this special union has legal, social, and spiritual importance and it forms the basis for a family (Unimna, Ameh, Osim & Francis, 2024). Marriage is therefore, an important factor that is considered in Nigeria when describing who is a responsible member of a society and who is not. More often than not, some individuals are denied certain responsibilities, not because they are not qualified or capable of handling such responsibilities but because they are not considered matured enough for that. In Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State, bachelors who are seen to be capable of being married are not often allowed to lead people who are married in most occasions, most especially in the church prayer sessions. This does not mean that God does not accept their prayers, but that they lack the credibility of leading such prayers. In family decision-making, people who are married are given more say than those that are not. This calls for the need for married couples to hold firm and adapt effectively in their marital life.

One of the major tasks of modern marriages is to achieve a state of marital stability in the home. Marital stability, therefore, can be referred to as individual's subjective experience of marriage in terms of when their needs are being met, and when the individual's expectations and desires are being satisfied. This can be with regards to the way couples communicate at home, marital affection, in-law's interference, among others (Hollingshead, 2023).

Marital stability is not only a value term, but also a relative term. It implies firmness and strength to endure under hard as well as easy circumstances. Hollingshead (2007) opined that, marriage problems represent a unique but common, category of adjustment difficulty that causes people to seek divorce in marriages. Problems can develop in a couple's relationships because of a perceived or social problem in either person, or in one of their children. Therefore, this study wishes to find out if communication and its variables (marital communication affection and in-law's communication interference) may cause marital instability. Communication is a process of expressing ideas and feelings or of giving people information. It is an act of conveying meanings from one entity or group to another through the use of mutually understood signs, symbols and semiotic rules. Communication according to Egbo, Egbo, Asogwa & Agbo-Petters, (2020) quoting Esere (2011) is a life wire of marriage relationship or any other meaningful relationship. They

further stated that it is the elixir for aiding marital relationship, noting that many problems escalate when there is no communication and many problems are resolved when there is effective communication.

Marital communication is the study of the communication perspective in a broadly defined marriage, with intimacy and trusting relationship. The main goal of marital communication is to understand the interactions of marriage and the pattern of behaviour of couples. Open and honest communication creates an atmosphere that allows couples to express their differences as well as love and admiration for one another (Wickrama, 2012). Marital communication is seen as one on one communication between couples. Marital communication is seen as a process in which couples share information, ideas and feelings which involves not only the spoken and written word but also body language, personal mannerisms and styles. It is a pillar which maintains the structure of peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding

Accordingly, marital communication affection refers to the communication among married couples that is full of affection and happiness. Marital communication affection means having appropriate and satisfied feeling and oneness from marriage. Marital communication affection is one of the most important determinant factors of safe functioning of marital institution (Greef, 2020). In other words, one of the most important factors of marital stability is the understanding that spouses experience in their marriage. Marital communication affection can be considered as a psychological condition that doesn't appear automatically but requires both partners' efforts. Especially in the early years after the marriage, when marital relationship is very unstable and is in its riskiest state (Diblassio & Proctor, 2023).

In-laws communication interference are unnecessary communication distractions caused by mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters or relations of spouse by marriage which deliberately wants to take part in the family communication affairs. Many mother in-laws contribute to the breakdown of the marriages of their children by their communication interference and this can also hinder stability in their marriages. Some find it difficult to accept the reality and implications of their children being one flesh with the wife which translates into more love and affection for his wife than themselves. Mother in-laws find it difficult to understand that the new couples are to start their own life and be independent of them. This attitude does not encourage marital happiness. Hence, in some cases, the mother in-laws do disrupt the marriages of their sons by their frequent and inordinate interference (Reiss, 2021). With this in mind, educators should continue to cultivate

individuals (mother in-laws/father in-laws) and inculcate in them communication skills and abilities with which they can be prepared for the future. Through this, the knowledge they gain becomes a tool of power and expansion of peaceful coexistence, irrespective of ethnic or racial differences originating from the family to the global community (Unimna, Arop & Ameh, 2024)

Statement of the problem

Family stability is crucial and important to every society and national development. Marital instability creates upheavals and retards family development. When a family is stable, there is bound to be marital stability among couples. In such a home, there is high degree of tolerance between the couples, emotional stability, and economic congruence on how family is to be run, especially on issues of finance, number of children and how such children are to be raised. Communication between the parties in the marriage is also very sound; such a home experiences joy, peace and harmony. Children of such homes experience high level of emotional, social and physical health that is crucial in their development. Since the family units determine how well the society progresses, healthy family relationship will definitely result in societal peace.

Today, the Nigerian society tends to experience high level of marital instability, turbulence, diverse deterioration in marital relationships that can result to the disappointment on the part of either or both spouses in getting their marriage stabilized. Both husbands or wives tend to experience series of psychological distress, depression, nervous breakdown and general health impairments as a result of instability and hostility in marriage life. They also experience frustrating in terms of communication interference from in-laws, absence of children in marriage homes that causes separation and instability. Based on this, the researcher is aimed at examining communication variables (marital communication affection, in-law's communication interference, communication credibility) and marital stability of married couples in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between communication and marital stability among married couple in Vandeikya Local Government Area of Benue State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. examine the relationship between marital communication affection and marital stability

among married couples

2. determine the relationship between in-laws' communication interference and marital stability among married couples

Research questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study.

1. What is the relationship between marital communication affection and marital stability among married couples?
2. How does in-law's communication interference relate with marital stability among married couples?

Statement of hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated to guide this study

1. marital communication affection does not significantly relate with marital stability among married couples.
2. There is no significant relationship between in-law's communication interference and marital stability among married couples.

Literature review

Marital communication affection and marital stability

Marital communication affection refers to the communication among married couples that is full of affection and happiness. Marital communication affection means having appropriate and satisfied feeling and oneness from marriage. Marital communication affection is one of the most important determinant factors of safe functioning of marital institution (Greef,2020). In other words, one of the most important factors of marital stability is the understanding that spouses experience in their marriage. Marital communication affection can be considered as a psychological condition that doesn't appear automatically but requires both partners' efforts. Especially in the early years after the marriage, when marital relationship is very unstable and is in its riskiest state (Diblassio & Proctor, 2023).

Claudia and Russell (2021) assessed affection in relationship and marital stability. Sixty married couples completed questionnaires, which affection was a variable in the marital relationship. Subjects who felt validated by their spouses reported more on a greater frequency of affectionate touching from their spouses, Thomas (2022) considered marital stability as a union in

which husband and wife are in agreement on the major issues of marriage such as expression of affection and sharing confidence.

Greef and Bruyne (2020) conducted an empirical study with the aim of investigating the relationship between two variables of marital affection namely forgiveness and love in marriage on marital stability. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was subjected to face validity by experts in measurement and evaluation. The reliability estimate of the instrument was done using split-half reliability method. Pearson product moment correlation analysis was used to test the hypotheses under study. All hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. From the results of this study, it was revealed that there is a statistically meaningful relationship between two respective indices on marital stability.

In this line Fincham and Steven (2024) in a study which investigated the relationship between understanding affectionous communication and couples' marital stability. The study adopted the survey research design. A sample of 450 couples were randomly selected using stratified random sampling technique. A 36 item questionnaire was administered to the sample. The data were analyzed using Pearson product Moment correlation analysis. From the results it was revealed that there is relationship between marital communication affection and marital stability.

Fatemi and Iloseiniyan (2025) in their study showed that couples' forgiveness is related to their marital communication affection and their adjustment in their life. This study was done with the aim of evaluating the relationship between two variables of forgiveness and marital affection. The study adopted the survey research design. A sample of 300 couples were randomly selected using stratified random sampling technique. A 18 item questionnaire was administered to the sample. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment correlation analysis. The results of the study showed that there is statistically significant relationship between the respective variables.

In-laws communication interference and marital stability

These are unnecessary communication distractions caused by mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters or relations of spouse by marriage which deliberately wants to take part in the family communication affairs. Many mother in-laws contribute to the breakdown of the marriages of their

children by their communication interference and this can also hinder stability in their marriages. Some find it difficult to accept the reality and implications of their children being one flesh with the wife which translates into more love and affection for his wife than themselves. Mother in-laws find it difficult to understand that the new couples are to start their own life and be independent of them. This attitude does not encourage marital happiness. Hence, in some cases, the mother in-laws do disrupt the marriages of their sons by their frequent and inordinate interference (Reiss,2021).

According to Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale (2022) communication conflict among in-laws may pose a challenge to marital stability. This is because it is a pervasive problem which negatively affects many women during their lifetime, and has been a typical family problem for a long time. The study adopted the Ex-post facto research design. A sample of 260 respondents were randomly selected using simple random sampling technique. A 26 item questionnaire was administered to the sample. The data were analyzed using simple percentages. From the result revealed that the communication conflict between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law has been reported to be a major precipitating condition in 34 percent of daughters-in-law and 43 percent of mothers-in-law among married couples (Adams, 2020). In addition, conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law frequently leads to marital disunity among the couples (Antonovsky, 2023). The researcher further observed that mother in-law problems communication has been reported to be a major cause of divorce among married couples. Thus, the conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law appears to constitute a significant source of stress among married women, influencing women's psychological well-being and marital instability. The study of communication conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in relation to psychological wellbeing and marital stability should employ both groups of women.

Bell (2021) on his study on in-laws' communication interference and marital stability adopted the survey research design. A sample of 300 respondents was randomly selected for the study. A well validated instrument was administered to the respondents with aids of two research assistants. Independent t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. From the results, it was discovered that conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is not clearly measured in terms of the possible response dimensions, such as the frequency, duration, and intensity of the conflict. Women's psychological well-being and marital stability would seem to be differently influenced by the frequency, duration, and perceived severity of the conflict.

Although conflict might occur in the same areas for the same period, not all daughters-in-law experience the conflict at the same levels of severity. Thus, to fully understand the influence of conflict" vim mother-in-law on daughter-in-law's psychological well-being and marital stability, the frequency, duration, and severity of conflict need to be researched Bell, 2021). In addition to these three response dimensions of the conflict, two sets of factors are likely to be associated with levels of psychological well-being and marital stability. The degree of the impact of conflict with the mother-in-law upon the daughter-in-law's psychological well-being and marital stability depends upon (1) the resources available for meeting the demands precipitated by the conflict, such as social support and self-efficacy, and (2) definition or perception of the conflict, such as perceived severity, positive appraisal of the conflict, and attributions of blame.

Beck (2024) opined that when a daughter-in-law experiences communication conflict with her mother-in-law, she may blame the conflict on her own character and behaviour in different extent, on her mother-in-law, other people, or impersonal world such as circumstances, situations, or fate. Whom or on what the daughters-in-law assign blame for the conflict may influence her psychological well-being and marital stability. Whether or not these types of blame are adaptive or maladaptive seems to depend on whether the factor blamed is relatively under one's own control and thus modifiable.

Bowman (2020) conducted a study on in-law's communication interference and marital stability among couples in Korea; ten hypotheses were postulated and tested by conducting multiple regression analyses. Findings of the study were based on questionnaire responses from 199 daughters-in-law who lived in Seoul, Korea. Results of the multiple regression analysis on daughter-in-law's psychological well-being indicated that higher scores on the psychological well-being were significantly associated with (a) a lower level of perceived severity of conflict, (b) greater self-behaviour blame for the conflict, (c) less ascription of blame to the impersonal world, and (d) greater emotional support from people in daughter-in-law's social networks. Although eight of the 11 independent variables were significantly correlated with marital stability, multiple regression results showed that husband's helpfulness in the context of conflict with the mother-in-law was the only significant predictor of daughter-in-law's marital stability.

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted for the study. This research design was used for study because it was considered appropriate. A sample of two hundred (200) married couples was used for the study. The sample was selected through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The questionnaire was the main instrument used for data collection. The reliability estimate of the instruments was established through Cronbach Alpha reliability method. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis was the statistical technique employed to test the hypotheses under study. Each hypothesis was tested at .05 levels of significance. The results of the analysis revealed that, Level of marital communication affection, in-law's communication interference and Communication in marriage significantly relate with marital stability among married couples in Vandeikya LGA of Benue State.

Results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant relationship between Level of marital communication affection and marital stability of couples. The results of the analysis is presented in table 1.

Table 1

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between marital communication affection and Marital stability of couples (N=200)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
Marital communication affection	18.22	2.98	0.480*	.000
Marital stability of couples	18.74	1.43		

*Significant at 0.5, critical r =, 138, df = 198

The results of the analysis as presented in table 1 revealed that the calculated r-value of 0.480 is significant at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this results, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between Level of marital

communication affection and marital stability of couples was rejected. This result implied that, marital communication affection has a significant relationship with marital stability of couples. The positive r implied that the higher Level of marital affection, the higher the marital stability of couples tends to be. On the other hand, the lower Level of marital affection the lower the marital stability of couples tends to be.

Hypothesis two

There is no significant relationship between in-laws' communication interference and marital stability of couples. The result of the analysis is presented in table 2.

Table 2

Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis of the relationship between in-laws' communication interference and Marital stability of couples (N=200)

Variables	$\bar{X}$	SD	r-value	Sig.
In-laws' communication interference	18.08	3.16	0.308*	.000
Marital stability of couples	18.74	1.43		

*Significant at 0.5, critical $r = 138$, $df = 198$

The results of the analysis as presented in table 2 revealed that the calculated r -value of 0. 308 is significant at .05 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom. With this result, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant positive relationship between in-laws' communication interference and marital stability of couples was rejected. This result implied that, in-law's interference has a significant relationship with marital stability of couples. The positive r

indicated that the higher in-law's communication interference the lower the marital stability of couples tend to be. On the other hand, the lower in-law's communication interference the higher marital stability

Discussion of findings

The results of the first hypothesis indicated that, level of marital affection significantly relate to marital stability of couples. The findings of this study agrees with that of Diblassio and Proctor (2023) who informed that women who lack adapting with their husband in marriage is as a result of lack of understanding in their marriages. This can lead to more understanding and frustration with the relationship, as most of them characterize their relationship as being like two separate people than a couple. Fincham and Steven (2020) also argued that as men and women have different roles and see different aspects of relationship (such as the division of labour, parenting and sexual intimacy) in different ways they evaluate them differently and adapt to them differently.

In this line Fincham and Steven (2020) also in a study with the theme of investigating the relationship between understanding and couples' marital stability, represented that there is relationship between marital affection and marital stability. Also, a significant relationship was observed between understanding and marital stability in subscales of individual or singular relationship with ones' own relatives and family relationship with spouse's relatives and friends. They also showed that more generous married people have meaningfully more continuity, adjustment, level of relation and marital affection in comparison with low generous married adjustment.

Marital affection refers to happiness and enjoyment from the relationship among couples. Marital affection means having appropriate and satisfied feeling and oneness from marriage. Marital affection is one of the most important determinant factors of safe function of marital institution. In other words, one of the most important factors of marital stability is the understanding that spouses experience in their marriage. Marital affection can be considered as a psychological condition that doesn't appear automatically but requires both sides' efforts. Especially in the early years after the marriage, marital relationship is very unstable and understanding is in its riskiest state.

The results of the second hypothesis indicated that, in-laws' interference significantly relate to marital stability of couples. The findings are in line with the view of Beck (2024) who opined that when a daughter-in-law experiences conflict with her mother-in-law, she may blame the conflict on her own character and behaviour in different extent, on her mother-in-law, other people, or impersonal world such as circumstances, situations, or fate. Whom or on what the daughters-in-law assign blame for the conflict may influence her psychological well-being and marital stability. Whether or not these types of blame are adaptive or maladaptive seems to depend on whether the factor blamed is relatively under one's own control and thus modifiable. For example, behavioural self-blame has been hypothesized to be related to positive outcomes following stressful life experiences. Behaviour is more modifiable and controllable than character.

Bell (2021) also expressed that conflict between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law is not clearly measured in terms of the possible response dimensions, such as the frequency? duration, and intensity of the conflict. Women's psychological well-being and marital stability would seem to be differently influenced by the frequency, duration, and perceived severity of the conflict. Although conflict might occur in the same areas for the same period, not all daughters-in-law experience the conflict at the same levels of severity. Thus, to fully understand the influence of conflict with mother-in-law on daughter-in-law's psychological well-being and marital stability, the frequency, duration, and severity of conflict need to be researched. In addition to these three response dimensions of the conflict, two sets of factors are likely to be associated with levels of psychological well-being and marital stability. The degree of the impact of conflict with the mother-in-law upon the daughter-in-law's psychological well-being and marital stability depends upon (1) the resources available for meeting the demands precipitated by the conflict, such as social support and self-efficacy, and (2) definition or perception of the conflict, such as perceived severity, positive appraisal of the conflict, and attributions of blame.

Many mother in-laws contribute to the breakdown of the marriage of their sons by their interference and this can also hinder adjustment in their marriages. Some find it difficult to accept the reality and implication of their son being one flesh with the wife, which translates into more love and affection for his wife than themselves. They at times find it difficult to understand that the new couples are to start their own life and be independent of them. This attitude does not encourage marital happiness. Hence, in some cases, the mother in-laws do disrupt the marriage of their sons by their frequent and inordinate interference.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the study the following conclusions were reached.

1. Level of marital communication affection significantly relate to marital stability of couples.
2. In-laws communication interference significantly relate to marital stability of couples.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study it was recommended among others that:

1. Marriage counselling workshops, symposia, conferences should be organized regularly for married couples on communication affection and other factors that enhance marital stability.
2. Counsellors, religious leaders and Government and Non-Governmental agencies should organize enlightenment campaigns that focus on the influence of in-laws' interference in marriage

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