Spousal Communication Styles and Marital Stability Among Civil Servants in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract
This paper identifies communication styles adopted by married couples. Four research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The study was conducted amongst married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State civil service. A random sample of 350 respondents was used. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Frequencies, percentages, mean distribution, regression and correlation analysis were used for data analysis. The hypotheses were tested using regression and correlation analysis at 0.05 level of confidence. Findings revealed that couples varied in their communication styles with the majority adopting leveling. The study also showed that educational qualification was the singular variable that had significant influence on both communication style and marital stability. Based on the findings some recommendations were proffered.

Introduction
Communication is "the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing, or signs". It is a complex process whereby information is enclosed in a package and is channeled and imparted by a sender to a receiver via some medium. The receiver then decodes the message and gives the sender a feedback. All forms of communication require a sender, a message, and an intended recipient (Montana & Charnov, 2008; Holmes, 2002). It is the way humans create and share meaning, both verbally and nonverbally (Olson and DeFrain, 2000).

Communication is a critical element in marriage as it is an inevitable requirement before the commencement of the relationship and also necessary for the sustenance of the union. According to Verderber & Verderber (2004) it can be referred to as the process used by people to create and manage relationships. Olson and DeFrain (2000), consider
communication as the heart of intimate human relationship and the foundation on which all other relationships are built, they also assert that it is the key to a successful couple relationship. In fact, the ability and the willingness to communicate have been found to be among the most important factors in maintaining a satisfying relationship. Studies reveal that the top five issues generating conflict in marriage are money, family, communication, household tasks and personal taste (Ekot & Usoro, 2006; Anyakoha & James, 2004).

The ability of a relationship to adjust, to take into account the changing needs of its members hinges on communication. Over the last twenty years, marital therapists, especially those working from the behavioral and cognitive behavioral model, have placed a strong emphasis on the relationship between communication, marital adjustment and stability (Gordon, Baucom, Epstein, Burnett, & Rankin, 1999).

Marital stability is viewed as a function of the comparison between one's best available marital alternative and one's marital outcome (Lenthal, 2009). It refers to the stability of the marital relationship, rather than to the condition of individual spouses. Stable marriages are those that there is no plan to divorce. In contrast, marital instability is defined as the propensity to divorce, which is determined by the presence of thoughts or actions which may lead to marital separation (such as, consulting a divorce attorney). Marital stability therefore refers to the relationship, not to the spouses as individuals (www.charismatest.com/research/4/what-is-marital-satisfaction).

Litvyak (2002) identified five communication styles as purported by Virginia Satir. The "blamer" or "aggressive" style reveals a dictator, a fault-finder and a boss. The "blamer" hides a feeling of alienation and loneliness behind the facade of tough and complacent person (Walker & Brokaw, 1998; http://www.caterineshafer.com/satir.html). The "placater" or "non-assertive" person tries to avoid any kind of confrontation, apologizes for his/her very existence; talks in an ingratiating way; seeks to please people and never disagrees no matter what (http://www.directiojournal.org/article/?662). The "computing" or "intellectual" style communicator tends to be emotionally detached in any encounter. He/She appears very aloof and correct, careful to show little emotion, uses super-reasonable communication and entails being very correct and logical with no semblance of showing any feeling (Gray, 1990; Litvyak, 2002). The fourth communication style is the "distracting" or "manipulative". Instead of taking positive actions, people with "distracting" style of communication use a whole range of
emotions from anger to guilt to manipulate others' feelings and to avoid unpleasant encounters. It is extremely difficult for these persons to stay focused. Such persons ignore questions and flirt from one thing to the next (http://www.arthurwenk.com/Parenting%20Presentation.doc.). The fifth and final communication style is called "levelling" or "assertive". Levellers’ response in words, body posture, tone of voice and facial expression are all congruent, all convey the same message. Levellers shares feelings rather than trying to conceal them. They are comfortable with vague situations; they are ready to talk honestly about their feelings and to stand for their rights and not to discriminate others. Gray (1990); Satir (1991); Smith & Apelleci (1982) and Litvyak (2002) all assert that levelling is the ideal communication approach and is a good step toward dynamic couple communication. Awareness of these styles as they occur in families can improve communication among family members.

Several studies have found that overall marital satisfaction was higher among couples who rated their communication as good. Fowers (1990); Gottman & Krokoff (1989); Holman & Brock(1986); Metts & Cupach (1986) all suggest that effective communication amongst other factors contribute to happy, satisfying and stable marriage.

Tanner (1990) in Santrock (2002) observed that lack of communication was high on women’s reasons for divorce whereas for men it was insignificant. Developmentalists have conducted less research on the quality of communication within families than on some of the other dimensions of communication, so they are a long way from understanding all the ramifications of communication styles (Bee and Boyd, 2007). Concerns about communication ability are becoming wide spread. More and more marital failures are being blamed on the inability of couples to communicate effectively (Orthner, 1981). What these and other studies seem to be saying is that good communication does not just involve periodic problem solving, it is a condition of the relationship that is continuously reinforced.

In view of the current increase in the cases/rate of divorce and marital instability globally and in Akwa Ibom State, occasioned with the relevance of communication in marital relationship, the researchers sought to determine the relationship between spousal communication styles and marital stability among civil servants in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria.

**Objectives of the Study**

The general purpose of the study was to determine the relationship between spousal communication styles and marital stability among civil servants in Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. Specifically the study
determined the extent to which the respondents are aware of the role of effective communication in marital stability.

identified the various communication styles adopted by married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State.

determined the respondents' expressed level of marital stability.

Hypotheses

Three null hypotheses were formulated to establish the presumed relationship between variables.

H0: There is no significant influence of gender, educational qualification and duration of marriage on communication style of married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State.

H0. There is no significant influence of gender, educational qualification and duration of marriage on marital stability of married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State.

Population for the Study:
The population for the study consisted of all civil servants in Akwa Ibom State civil service. A total of 13,117 comprising 7,317 males and 5,739 females workers make up the workforce in the state civil service, (Akwa Ibom State Civil Service Commission Annual Report, 2006).

Sample for the study: A purposive sampling technique was adopted for the study. To arrive at the specific number of respondents for the study, a multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select a total of 350 respondents. The first stage involved randomly selecting 10% of the fifty-two ministries and parastatals in Akwa Ibom State civil service. That resulted in five ministries being chosen with a total population of 3,556 employees. In the second stage, 10% of the population was further randomly selected from each of the five ministries to arrive at the sample size of 350 which comprised of 223 males and 127 females.

Instrument for data collection: A 4-
point structured questionnaire was adopted from family communication scale by Olson & Barnes (2006) and used for the study. It was made up of three sections and twenty-six items. It was validated by four experts. 

**Data collection and analysis techniques:** Five research assistants were trained and used for data collection. They distributed the questionnaire to civil servants in each of the five ministries selected for the study. The completed copies of the questionnaires were collected at the end of one week. The data on research questions were analyzed using frequencies, percentages and mean scores while the hypotheses were tested using regression and Pearson Correlation Coefficient at 0.05 level of confidence. A mean score of 2.50 served as a cut-off point between high/low, adequate/inadequate for decision making.

**Findings of the study**

Findings revealed that the extent of the respondents’ awareness of the role of communication in marital stability was high (93.43%) although (6.57%) indicated that they were not aware.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>I exhibit a beggarly attitude when talking to my spouse to avoid possible hostile behaviour.</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>17.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I usually find faults and boss it over my spouse when we communicate</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>I strive to be very logical and correct whenever I am communicating with my spouse.</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>26.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>I attempt to avoid issues during conservation or move the conversation off course.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>When communicating with my spouse, my response in words and tone of voice convey the same meaning.</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>29.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1, shows the items used to ascertain the communication styles of married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State.
married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State. Findings revealed that 60 respondents (17.1%) adopted a beggarly attitude during communication; this style is otherwise known as the placater style of communication. Seventy-six respondents (21.7%), claim they find faults and are bossy when communicating with their spouse thereby adopting the blamer style. Ninety-two respondents (26.3%) strive to be very logical and correct when communicating with their spouse, thus using the computer style of communication. Eighteen respondents stated that they attempt to avoid issues during conversation thereby exhibiting the distracter style of communication, while one hundred and four respondents (29.7%) stated that during communication with their spouse, their response in words and tone of voice usually conveyed the same meaning thus they were classified as levelers.

Table 2: Mean responses of the expressed level of marital stability of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My spouse and I spend reasonable time together.</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I do not enjoy shared activities with my spouse.</td>
<td>2.01</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My spouse participates freely in performing all aspects of household task.</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My spouse concentrates on household work that is relevant to his/her gender.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My spouse and I jointly meet the financial needs of the family.</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My spouse and I have equal right to the use of our family income.</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My spouse and I freely discuss all family matters.</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Family problems are resolved by my spouse and I without external or third party.</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. My spouse plays a dominant role in family decision making.</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. We jointly agree over family decisions.</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. My sexual relationship with my spouse is satisfactory.</td>
<td>3.15</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. When it comes to sexual relationship with my spouse, I feel I am not married.</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. My spouse and I share the same religious belief.</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2, reveals the mean responses of the expressed level of marital stability of civil servants in Akwa Ibom State. The respondents scored high in eleven out of the thirteen items used to assess their level of marital stability while two items were rated low.
Table 3: Regression analysis of demographic variables influencing communication styles of married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Co-efficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-0.308</td>
<td>0.358</td>
<td>0.390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Qualification</td>
<td>0.402</td>
<td>0.163</td>
<td>0.014**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years of marriage to spouse</td>
<td>-0.176</td>
<td>0.128</td>
<td>0.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>16.351</td>
<td>0.892</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Significant at 0.05

Table 3 shows that the co-efficient of educational qualification of the respondents was 0.402 and is significant at 0.05 level of confidence for communication styles. This implies that an increase in the educational qualification of the respondents improves the communication styles of the respondents by 0.402. Thus, educational qualification significantly influences the respondents’ communication styles. On the other hand, sex and years of marriage to spouse do not significantly influence the respondents’ communication styles.

Table 4: Regression Estimates for demographic variables influencing marital stability of married civil servants in Akwa Ibom State.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Co-efficient</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>-0.475</td>
<td>0.585</td>
<td>0.418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational qualification</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.266</td>
<td>0.010**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of years of marriage to spouse</td>
<td>0.226</td>
<td>0.210</td>
<td>0.282</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>34.209</td>
<td>1.457</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Significant at 0.05

Table 4 reveals that educational qualification of the respondents was significant at 0.05 with a regression co-efficient of 0.693. This shows that an increase in the educational qualification of the respondent will lead to 0.693 increase in the level of the respondents’ marital stability. The sex of the respondents and the number of years of marriage to spouse do not significantly influence the respondents’ level of marital stability.

Findings
Findings indicate the following:

- 93.43% respondents indicated that their awareness of the role of effective communication in marital stability was high.
- The highest percentage of respondents (29.7%) use leveler as their communication style (See Table 1).
- Respondents scored high in eleven
out of the thirteen items used to assess level of marital stability thus indicating high marital stability (See Table 2).

- Educational qualification has a significant influence on communication style while sex and years of marriage do not (See Table 3).
- Educational qualification has a significant influence on marital stability whereas sex and years of marriage do not (See Table 4).
- There is a significant relationship between spousal communication style and marital stability (See Table 5).

Discussion
The importance of communication in intimate relationship cannot be undermined. This study revealed that (94.43%) of the respondents had high awareness level of the role of effective communication in marital relationship. This findings agrees with the views of Fowers (1990); Gottman & Kroff (1989); Holman & Brock(1986); Metts & Cupach (1986) who suggest that effective communication amongst other factors contribute to happy, satisfying and stable marriage.

Findings also revealed that married civil servants in the study area utilized all the identified communication styles at varying levels from placater (17.1%), blamer (21.7%), computer (26.3%) and distracter(5.1%). The communication style accorded the highest percentage was leveling with (29.7%). This shows that the respondents have used the different communication styles at one time or the other in their marital relationship but that majority have gradually settled for the leveling style of communication to promote marital unity. This finding is in tandem with the proposition of Gray (1990); Satir (1991); Smith & Apelleci (1982) and Litvyak (2002) who assert that levelling is the ideal communication approach and is a good step toward dynamic couple communication.

Awareness of these styles as they occur in families can improve communication among family members. The study further revealed that majority of the respondents expressed that their marital relationship was fairly stable. The findings on the hypotheses regarding the relationship of selected demographic variables (sex, educational qualification and number of years of marriage) on communication style and marital stability revealed that educational qualification had a significant influence on both communication style and marital stability while sex and number of years of marriage had no significant influence. These findings are in agreement with Olson & Fowers (1993) who identified higher education as a factor contributing to efficient communication that facilitated marital stability.
Conclusion
The study was to determine the spousal communication styles and marital stability among civil servants in Akwa Ibom State. Findings revealed that majority of the respondents level of awareness of the role of communication in marital stability was high; the respondents used various styles of communication with leveling having the highest score; findings also indicated that the expressed level of marital stability of the respondents was high. The study showed that only educational qualification of the respondents among other variables assessed had a significant influence on communication style and marital stability. Finally the study indicated a significant relationship between communication style and marital stability.

Majority of the respondents in this study adopted leveling as their communication style, thus resulting in marital stability. It could therefore be concluded that spousal communication style has an influence on marital stability.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proffered;

- Couples should be flexible in their communication style. They should not adhere strictly to one type of style as a standard approach but should graciously graduate from whatever initial style that the used to leveling which has been identified as the best approach.
- Considering the relevance of communication in marital harmony/ disunity, the issue of communication should serve as a front burner in premarital counseling.
- Since educational qualification has been identified as the singular demographic variable amongst those used in the study as having a significant influence on both communication style and marital stability, couples should strive to choose their partners bearing this in mind.

References


