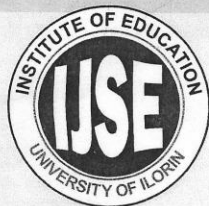


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MARITAL COMMUNICATION: THE MODERATING ROLE OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract

A correlational survey design was used to determine the mediating and moderating role of emotional intelligence on marital communication of Married adults in Ekiti State, Nigeria. Its major aim lies in knowing whether there is any relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication. Three hundred and eighty three (383) married adults from three Local Government Areas participated in the study. The results showed that 66.8% of the respondents had moderate level of emotional intelligence while 64.0% had moderate level of marital communications. It was also revealed that emotional intelligence had high, positive and significant relationship with marital communication while the moderating variable of gender and age were significantly related with emotional intelligence and marital communication. Furthermore, findings from this study revealed a significant difference in the emotional intelligence and marital communication of male and female married adult. It was recommended that there is the need for improved awareness to be created by Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) on the relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and marital communication so that counsellors can train couples in developing good communication and high emotional intelligence.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Marital Communication, Married adults.

Introduction

Communication is the heart and soul of any marriage. Marriage in itself can be ultimately described as a relationship between two communicators. However, marital communication is a process involving two people, usually a man and a woman in a socially contracted union operating as husband and wife expressing their need for intimacy, sexual desire and procreation through verbal, non-verbal and means of

passing their intent across (Adebiyi, 2014). This implies two people involved in a relationship with certain goals in mind and these goals could only be achieved if communication goes right.

When couples stop communicating or cannot communicate effectively a great vacuum or gulf is created hence, preventing the successful interaction that should exist between them. This causes everything around them to suffer and die slowly or gradually. The seeds of love, happiness and commitment once sown cannot grow; thereby making both spouses develop a strong inward thirst for their unmet needs, eventually resulting in cracks and a break in the wall of their relationship (Theravive, 2013).

Research shows that communication is an important tool for any successful marital relationship (Esere, 2002, 2006; Omozuwa, 2006). For couples to enjoy a satisfying and pleasant relationship; couples need to master the art of communicating effectively. No wonder Esere (2002, 2006) posited that a marriage without effective communication is likely to crumble.

Communication in marriage involves the simple and complex exchange of verbal and non-verbal messages between husband and wife. It is intrinsically woven into couples' daily life. Practically, it influences every dimension of their lives' happiness and also the quality of the marriage relationship (Borchard, 2013). As simple as it may sound has been revealed by research as a prominent cause of family breakdown. Idowu and Esere (2007) posited that more than half of failed relationships are due to the fact that there was severe lack of communication or inability to communicate effectively between couples; and that for one to have a lasting and long relationship with someone, there is need for excellent communication skill. However, to many couples effective marital communication seems to them a herculean task.

Although couples communicate every day, one might be tempted to query why communication has lead to the crash of many marriages. Couples often think "don't we talk?" This is because communication goes well beyond the usual "talk and receive feedback" that is popularly known. It encompasses a wide variety of elements, for instance, mere hearing someone does not connote listening. Communication entails one's words, the tone with which the words are spoken, and in fact the volume. In addition, it includes the accompanying body movements, gestures and postures. All these elements and many more affect the communication of couples, thereby making it successful or not. This therefore highlights the technicality of communication and how far its effects run in marriage.

Marriage is an emotional based relationship. Most marriages are established on love, as it is a form of emotion, in fact a complex one (Santrock, 2004). In the course of the interaction thousands of emotional impulses are transferred when couples relate. Emotions play a very large role in marital communication. Usually, there are positive or

negative emotions. Positive or healthy emotions help each of the spouses to reveal what he/she considers to be valuable in the relationship. Emotions become unhealthy when they are denied or ignored. It hampers the free flow of communication between spouses. Examples of emotions are joy, anger, sadness, disappointment, etc.

Couples inability to manage their emotions either positive or negative leads to a whole lot of communication related problems. For instance, inability to manage anger by a spouse may lead to physical fighting, getting violent or worse still; attempting murder. Such cases have been reported on television, newspaper and other media channels. The skilful handling of emotions typically relates to the construct "emotional intelligence." This deal with an individual's ability to identify what type of feeling(s) he or she is having, using such knowledge to guide ones actions as well as that of others around one, in order for a successful interaction to take place (Adebisi, 2014). Several research attempts have been made to figure out the elements that foster effective marital communication and the persistency in relationships including marriage (Batool & Khalid, 2009).

The components of Emotional Intelligence (EI) can be said to have relationship the level of effectiveness with which couples communicate. The skill of emotional intelligence plays a crucial role in the interpretation and management of emotions as it relates to people's experiences. Intimate relationship between couples requires to a large extent a very good and effective communication skill. This involves paying attention to other person's viewpoint, being able to empathize, and ability to perceive other partner's emotion, being sensitive and aware of each other's needs. These vital elements of communication can be fostered by each of the partners possessing a good amount of emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence refers to the ability to recognize, understand, manage and utilize one's emotion and the emotions of others (Mayer & Salovey, 1997).

The review of studies conducted in the West suggested that emotional intelligence moderates marital success (Batool & Khalid, 2009). Some components of emotional intelligence; specifically optimism, empathy, emotional expressiveness, emotional awareness and impulse control appears to possess greater importance to couples (Malik, 2005). Meanwhile, people differ generally in terms of the level of their emotional intelligence which is believed to develop with age and also considered as a very important component of intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship (Geher & Renstrom, 2004).

Goleman (1998) proposed a strong relation among emotional intelligence, successful conflict resolution and couples interpersonal relationship. He stresses the importance of empathy in romantic relationship. Goleman (1995) described emotional intelligence in relation to interpersonal communication, as how one knows the self and recognize the goals, needs and wants of other person. Interpersonal communication

involves the verbal and non verbal acts that are exchanged between two or more people. The way emotional intelligence influences interpersonal communication lies in the ability of an individual to recognize and accurately interpret the message the other person is sending. For one to be able to do this, one must be self aware and equipped with the ability of integrating verbal and non-verbal cues that are mostly emotionally carried. It is then expedient for one to possess emotional intelligence cum interpersonal skills as a means of living in this world which requires us to constantly interact.

Current trends in broken marriage and divorce have stirred up researchers to study the role that emotional intelligence play in marital relationship. Batool and Khalid (2009) posited that emotional forces between husband and wife are much more crucial than other factors affecting marital quality. They also posit that rifts and conflicts in marital communication are far more likely to develop if one or both partners have deficits in emotional intelligence.

Bricker and Rudnick (2005) studied EI and marital quality and found out that EI appears to be significantly and positively correlated with certain aspects of marital aspects. They reported that female EI was found to have a significant effect on couples' affective and problem solving communication skill. Self awareness is an important component of emotional intelligence. Franzosi, Davis and Young (1985) analyzed the influence of perspective taking and self awareness on the satisfaction experienced in monogamous, heterosexual relationship and there was a positive relationship between the variables. Private self awareness was predictive of self disclosure while self disclosure was positively correlated to satisfaction in relationship. From this, the important role EI plays in the happiness of a marriage relationship can be deduced as the ability to express emotion, understand emotion of others, being self aware and ability to control one's emotion was found to strongly correlate with communication in marriage.

On the whole, an adequate dose of emotional intelligence is needed for effective communication to take place between couples. This is because successful communication will lead to a successful marriage. According to Esere (2006), spouses achieve marital happiness and satisfaction when they are sufficiently open to each other and work together to resolve issues that emanate between them using an assertive communication style. Effective communication develops into intimacy and a kind of consensus which unpleasant life situations, miscommunication and communication gaps cannot destroy. Hence, the need for this study to investigate the relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of married adults in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

Marital therapists have rated dysfunctional communication as the most frequent and damaging problem they confront in their work with couples, (Geiss & O'Leary,

1981). This is likely to continue unabated except something is done and a little more keen attention is paid to effective marital communication as an important factor in the success of a marital relationship. This challenge has thus motivated the need to investigate the relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and marital communication and the ways in which these two constructs could affect each other. It then becomes essential for couples to be equipped with knowledge about themselves and their partners so that smooth interaction is facilitated between them which results eventually into pleasant relationship.

The level of emotional distress experienced by couples in Nigeria and beyond has been a source of research concern to researchers, clinicians and couples for several generations. According to Almanac book of facts as reported by Jekayinfa (1996), about 12,000 cases of divorce are reported yearly in Nigeria since 1975.

Previous studies regarding emotional intelligence has produced varying results. For instance, Afsaneh, Shariff and Roya (2011) examined the accuracy of emotional intelligence in predicting the degree of satisfaction in marital communication. It was found that emotional intelligence and satisfaction in marriage are positively correlated. This means that couples with greater emotional intelligence ability such as control of emotions, self esteem and awareness are more satisfied with their communication with their spouses. So also did Bricker and Rudnick (2005) work on the role of emotional intelligence in marital relationships, their work reveals that emotional intelligence significantly and positively leads to satisfaction in marriage.

Therefore the concern of this researcher is to investigate the relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and marital communication of married adults in Ekiti State. It is hoped that this study will provide couples with knowledge about the aspects of emotional intelligence and how it helps in buffering a lot of hiccups in communication thereby fostering their ability to communicate effectively.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been drawn to guide the conduct of the study:

1. What is the level of emotional intelligence of married adults in Ekiti State?
2. Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of male married adults?
3. Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of female married adults?
4. Is there any relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of younger married adults?
5. Is there any difference in the emotional intelligence of male and female married adults in Ekiti State?

Research Hypotheses

1. There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of male married adults.
2. There is no relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of female married adults.
3. There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of younger married adults.
4. There is no significant difference between emotional intelligence of male and female married adults in Ekiti State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey of the correlational type. It used both parametric and inferential statistics to determine the results of the hypotheses while central tendency was used to determine the level of married adults' emotional intelligence in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The population of this study comprises of all married adults in Ekiti State while multi-stage sampling technique was used to select respondents that participated in the study from selected local governments in Ekiti State. A sample size of 383 married adults was used for the study and the data collected was analysed through the use of mean, t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The results are described below.

Results

Table 1: Mean and Rank Order Analysis of Emotional Intelligence Scale

Item No.	I am the type of person who:	Mean	Rank
1	knows when best to speak to my spouse about my personal problem	3.62	1 st
7	can help my spouse feel better when he/she is down	3.61	2 nd
9	can express myself assertively	3.5	3 rd
17	presents myself in such a way that makes good impression on my spouse	3.49	4 th
4	expects good things to happen to my spouse	3.49	4 th
12	who do not give up in the face of challenges because I believe I can get through it	3.45	6 th
16	compliments my spouse when he/she has done something well	3.44	7 th
11	knows when my mood changes	3.44	7 th
8	finds it easy to understand why spouse behaves the way he/she does	3.43	9 th
15	motivates myself by imagining a good outcome from the task embark on	3.39	10 th
10	seeks out activities that makes me happy	3.37	11 th
2	is aware of my emotions as I experience them	3.36	12 th
20	maintains positive for a long time when interacting with my spouse	3.36	12 th

18	feels as though I experience the event myself when my spouse shares his/her life's issues with me	3.35	14 th
19	shares my emotions freely with my spouse	3.34	15 th
5	can tell how my spouse is feeling by the tone of his/her voice	3.32	16 th
3	understands the non verbal messages of my spouse	3.3	17 th
6	can use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles	3.28	18 th
13	finds it easy to solve problems when I am in a bad mood	3.22	19 th
14	has control over my emotions	3.20	20 th

Table 6 showed that item 1 "I am the type of person who knows when best to speak to my spouse about my problem" ranked the highest with the mean of 3.62. This was followed by item 7 which states that "I am the type of person who can help my spouse feel better when he/she is down" with a mean score of 3.61. Ranked third was item 9 ("I am the type of person who can express myself assertively") with a mean score of 3.50. However, the least ranked items were 6, 13 and 14. Though rated low, the mean scores are still above average of 2.50. This shows that all of the respondents have scores above the average on the emotional intelligence scale.

Hypothesis One: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of male married adults

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Emotional intelligence and Marital Communication of Male Married adults in Ekiti State.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-tab	p
Emotional Intelligence	165	69.20	8.32	0.784*	0.195	0.00
Marital Communication	165	66.39	8.15			

*p<0.05

Table 2 showed that there was a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of male married adults in Ekiti State ($r = 0.784$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of female married adults

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Emotional intelligence and Marital Communication of Female Married adults in Ekiti State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	R-cal	r-table	p
Emotional Intelligence	218	66.97	8.34	0.732*	0.195	0.00
Marital Communication	218	64.48	9.87			

*p<0.05

Table 3 revealed that r -cal (0.732) was greater r -table (0.195) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of female married adults in Ekiti State.

Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of younger married adults*

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Emotional intelligence and Marital Communication of younger Married adults in Ekiti State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-tab	p
Emotional Intelligence	172	68.20	8.39	0.790*	0.195	0.00
Marital Communication	172	66.35	8.80			

* $p < 0.05$

The result in Table 4 showed that there was a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of younger married adults ($r = 0.790$, $p < 0.05$). The null hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis Four: *There is no significant difference between emotional intelligence of male and female married adults*

Table 7: Mean, Standard Deviation and t-test value comparing emotional intelligence of Male and Female Married adults in Ekiti State

Variable	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	t-tab	p
Male	165	69.20	8.32	381	2.592*	1.960	0.00
Female	218	66.97	8.34				

* $P < 0.05$

The result in Table 7 showed that there was significant difference in the emotional intelligence of male and female married adults in Ekiti State ($t = 2.592$, $p < 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. Male respondents have higher emotional intelligence indices than their female counterparts.

Discussion

The rank order analysis of items of table 1 provides some useful insights. For instance, item 1 was ranked as the first in position which states that "I am the type of person who knows when best to speak to my spouse about my personal problem" This is not surprising as it matches Bricker and Rudnick (2005) results, where they asserted that both male and female were found to be expressive in their relationship with their

spouse. On the other hand, the least ranked item was 14 stating "I am the type of person who has control over emotions". This raised a number of concerns as emotional control is vital to successful marital interaction. Fitness (2001) emphasized the importance of emotions control, as he stated that the better control individuals have over their emotions the better and improved marital satisfaction they experience.

The first hypothesis was rejected. Emotional intelligence of male married adults was found to be related their marital communication. Thus for men, a positive, high and significant relationship was shown. The current findings corroborated those of Ghanbari-Panah, Sharif and Koochack (2011) which showed that males' emotional intelligence predicted marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis two stated that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of female married adults in Ekiti State. This null hypothesis was rejected as females' emotional intelligence and marital communication were found to relate significantly. This finding is in consonance with the work of Austin, Evans, Goldwater and Potter (2005) which posited that women are skilful at handling and directing their own emotions. Again, Hannah and Murachver (1999) concurred that women were found to be considerate listeners; they interrupt less and are prone to offering compliments. Bricker and Rudnick (2005) found in their study that the level of female emotional intelligence appeared to have significant effect on the couple's affective relationship.

Hypothesis three states that there is no significant relationship between emotional intelligence and marital communication of younger married adults in Ekiti State. After testing this stated hypothesis a significant relationship was found. But in the study of Cordova, Gee and Warren (2005) age was found not to be significantly correlated with emotional intelligence and communication. Whether the individual was young or old had nothing to do with emotional intelligence.

Emotional intelligence and marital communication of married adults with younger marriage were found to relate significantly. Mitchell (2005) studied on heterosexual couples in non clinical setting, using newlyweds as focus. Results from the study showed a positive correlation between couples emotional intelligence and marital satisfaction in which marital communication is a key factor. Similar to this is the result of the study of Zeidner and Kaluda (2008) who found a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and romantic love of newlyweds.

Hypothesis four states that there is no significant difference in the emotional intelligence of male and female married adults. The t-calculated of (2.592) was greater than the t-critical (1.960) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected. Meaning a significant difference does exist between the level of emotional intelligence in men and women. There are several opinion of findings related to this hypothesis. For instance, Aquino (2003) found no clear significant difference in the emotional

intelligence of men and women. Many studies that are based on ability tests such as the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (Mayer and Caruso, 2000) that include gender, in their analysis have assumed women to be superior in their emotional abilities (Brackett & Mayer, 2003; Livingstone & Day, 2005; Farelley & Austin, 2007).

Recommendations

It was recommended that more counselling centres should be established to cater for emotional and communication related issues in people's marriages. So that couples can be exposed to emotional intelligence training such as emotion management skills, development of emotional perception ability etc as well as training in interpersonal skills especially communication. Through this training, couples can achieve a more satisfied and enduring marital relationship.

Counsellors need to be exposed to re-training in order for them to become more versatile in the knowledge of emotional intelligence and marital communication. This knowledge will help them to coach clients so that they can enjoy a healthy and satisfied marital relationship.

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