

**CONTRIBUTION OF MARITAL COMMUNICATION ON MARITAL QUALITY AMONG
THE COUPLES IN THEIR EARLY STAGE OF MARRIAGE: A COMMUNITY BASED
STUDY IN THE NORTHEASTERN PART OF INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

Marital satisfaction is defined as the degree to which spouses perceive that their partners meet their needs and desires. It appears to be related, directly or indirectly, to the preservation of the family unit and a better quality of life, while dissatisfaction with marriage has been found to lead to stress, anxiety, and even dissolution of the family unit. Effective communication plays a vital role in a couple's marital life, especially in newlywed couples. It also has a key associated with marital quality among couples. The present study aims to assess marital communication and marital quality among couples in their early stage of marriage. We conducted a descriptive research study with newlywed couples who have completed their 6-month to 2 years of marriage. One hundred couples which include fifty females and fifty males were selected by using a simple random sampling method from the municipality area of Tezpur, Sonitpur. The written informed consent form was taken from the participants who fulfilled the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Semi-structured socio-demographic datasheet, modified kuppuswamy scale, marital quality scale, and marital communication inventory were administered. Data were analyzed using the software SPSS 25.0. The findings of the current study showed that the domains of marital quality are significantly positively correlated with marital communication inventory, moreover the other subscale like rejection, discontent, dissolution, potential, and dominance also showed a positive correlation with marital communication inventory. Marital communication has a greater contribution to marital quality and the pattern of communication is also a contribution to couples day to day life. It was found that satisfactory communication helps to improve marital quality among couples.

Keywords: Marital Quality, Marital Communication, Marriage, Problems & Northeast.

Introduction

Marriage is a social institution, and people enter this union to seek a satisfying and content way of life (Rhodes, & Markman, 2009). This is a common phenomenon found across all cultures and continents from the very beginning of human history (Ahmadi, & Fallahchai, 2014); seeking and maintaining a close and intimate relationship is one of the basic human needs (Bumeister, 2005), and according to Fowers (as cited in Azeez, 2013), marriage is a unique institution that responds to this need, helping humans find fulfillment and meaning in life and acting as a source of individual happiness. Marriage thus becomes essentially an integral element of social life where two people come together to share their talents and abilities to attain their needs and necessities (Soltani, Mahmoodi, & Hosseini, 2013). According to Raeisipoor and Zarei (2013), a marital bond is seen as the most fundamental human relationship because it provides not only love and sexual joy but ensures security from loneliness, a sense of peace, and contentment. It gives financial security in economic enterprise and protection against emotional insecurities and thus provides the initial structures for forming families and future generations.

There is an alarmingly growing number of instances where marriage itself becomes a source of great distress and dissatisfaction among the partners leading them to physical and psychological ill health as claimed by Karney and Bradbury (1995, as cited in Roberts & Caspi, 2007). Over the years, many studies have come up with results showing that relationship hazards and marital disharmony have substantially contributed to dysfunction and distress among couples and families (Sandhya, et al., 2009). Inadequate marital adjustment, coupled with individual distress, has an adverse effect on the mental and physical health of the couples, preventing them from experiencing physiological and psychological well-being which is one of the original intents of the marriage (Finchem & Beach, 2010). Marital or relationship problem has been one of the major reasons, around the globe, why people seek the help of mental health professionals and counselors (Whisman & Uebelacker, 2006). In the last two decades, the study of marriage and couples relationships bringing considerable attention due to the increasing rate of divorce and separation in India (Leary, 2011).

Most of the study suggests that newly-wed couple often face a marital adjustment problem in the first year of their marriage after the haze of romance or honeymoon phase that gets fizzled out, reality began to set in, and instead of spending time together, couples start facing the reality of life (Scott Haltzman, 2014). Conflict is inevitable, but if we know to handle it properly way than, it will help to save a marriage. Behind all the conflict and dissatisfaction is the selfishness and power dynamic of the couples (Stanley, 2016). Marital life is like a garden planned by a couple, it nurtures by a couple with their love, trust, commitment, and understanding among each other (Zarei, 2014). One of the studies mentioned that “Emotional forgiveness” among couples contributes to longitudinal marital stability and marital quality (Heq et al., 2018). Another study mentioned that ‘Marital conflict’ starts when the couple failed to balance five major area’s cooperation, sexual relationship, emotional reactions, and personal communication with their spouses (Tavakolizadeh et al., 2015).

Satisfactory marital life is based on Communication and it is important to understand or emphasize what is happening with their partner's life. Couples should open the door of communication which gives a satisfactory marital relationship (Singh, 2018). Marital satisfaction contributes to a good quality of the marital life of the couples. Every society has a different role assigned to men and women. Gender role also affects an individual’s life. Both the gender role and couples role plays a vital role and explore the quality of life of the couple (Soltani et al., 2013). There are various studies that suggest that mental satisfaction also helps to reduce the chance of marital depression and promotes coping in couples (Choi E., 2016). Considering the issues of marriage there are actors which contribute to success and failure in marriage. The study is not to decipher which factor prevails as the most important and influential of them all but to posit that an effective communication strategy between the couples will immensely help in attaining a greater level of relationship satisfaction. Through this study, we want to reflect on some areas which contribute to the marital life of couples in the Sonitpur district following the aims and objectives specially designed for this study.

Aims of the Study: To assess marital communication and marital quality among couples in their early stage of marriage.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the marital communication among the couple in the early stage of marriage.
2. To assess marital quality among couples in their early stage of marriage.
3. To see the contribution of marital communication on marital quality among couples.

Material and Methods

The study was descriptive in nature. A hundred couples (fifty male and fifty female) were selected from the municipality area of Tezpur, Assam, India. A random sampling technique was used for data

collection. The study was conducted during the period from 2019 November to January 2021. Couples who are residing together, aged above 18 to 35 years of age, married for 6 months to 2 years, and the couples who can read and write Assamese were included. Those who refused to give written informed consent were diagnosed with alcohol dependence and those who are not in the permanent residence of Sonitpur, Assam, or diagnosed with any type of psychiatric illness for the study were excluded. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee.

Instruments used for the study

- 1) **Socio-Demographic Data:** Semi-structured socio-demographic data sheet has been constructed to obtain social, personal, and family information.
- 2) **Modified Kuppaswamy Scale 2018:** Socioeconomic status measurement scale has been used to assess the socio-economic status of the respondent. The scale is widely used to determine the socio-economic status of individuals or families residing in urban settings. It has 3 parameters. The scale classified a family into 5 groups in the community.
- 3) **Marital Quality Scale:** It is a multi-dimensional self-reported scale to assess marital quality. It consists of 50 items in statement form with a 4-point rating scale of usually sometimes, rarely, never. This tool has a separate form for males and females. The scale has 12 factors to assess the overall quality of life. Score range from 50-200. A higher score indicates poor quality of marital life. The scale was developed and standardized on Indian married couples from clinical and non-clinical settings.
- 4) **Marital Communication Inventory:** This is a self-report measure of marital communication that assesses processes like spouses 'ability to express themselves and their style of expression. It is a 46 – item inventory, arranged on a 4 –point rating scale with the option of usually, sometimes, seldom, and never. The tool yields a single total score. The scale has rating scores from 0 to 138 and a High score indicates better communication.

Ethical Clearance

Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional ethical committee of THCH (Tezpur Medical College & Hospital). The written informed consent form was provided to all the participants who fulfilled inclusion and exclusion criteria. Explained the purpose of the study, aim, and objectives with the future implication of the findings of the study. Confidentiality of the participants was maintained.

Statistical Analysis

After the collection of data, data entry and analysis were done using SPSS 20 software (Statistical Package for the Social sciences) following the objective of the study. A descriptive statistic in the form of frequency and percentage as well as a statistical test (Pearson correlation) was used to find out the relationship between the variables.

Results

Table 01: Socio Demographic Profile of Participants (N=100)

S.No	Variables	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Age in year's		
	20-25	14	14%
	26-30	55	55%
	31-35	20	20%
2	Religion		
	Hindu	53	53%
	Christian	21	21%

	Muslim	24	24%
	Others	2	2%
3	Family Type		
	Nuclear	47	47%
	Joint	47	47%
	Extended	06	06%
4.	Duration of Marriage		
	0-6 months	2	2%
	6 months-1 year	25	25%
	1-2 years	75	75%

Table No 1 shows a sample of 100 participants. Most of the sample (55%) was in the age group of 26-30 years. The majority were Hindu (53%). In the type of family, the result shows nearly equally divided between Nuclear and Joint (47%). A majority (75%) of the participants had a duration of marriage is in between 1-2 years.

Table 2: Frequency and percentage of marital communication among the couples (N=100).

Marital communication Inventory	Scoring	Frequency	Percentage%
Poor communication	0-45	32	32%
Satisfactory	46-92	66	66%
Good	93-138	2	2%

In the present study table no 2 shows that, among the 100 respondents, 66% of the respondents were found to have satisfactory Marital communication among couples, while 32% of the respondents had poor Marital communication among the couples.

Table 3: Frequency and percentage of the marital quality of the couples (N=100).

Marital Quality Scale	Scoring	Frequency	Percentage %
Good	50-70	20	20.0
Mild	71-90	30	30.0
Moderate	91-110	14	14.0
Severely affected	110 & above	36	36.0

As shown in table no 3, the majority (36%) of the respondent's marital quality is severely affected, while (30%) couples were affected at a mild level in their quality of married life.

Table 4: Correlation of marital quality and marital communication among the couples.

S.No	Marital Quality Scale	Marital Communication Inventory
1.	Understanding	.294**
2.	Rejection	.175
3.	Satisfaction	.541**
4.	Affection	.583**
5.	Despair	.473**
6.	Decision making	.352**
7.	Discontent	.053

8.	Dissolution potential	.112
9.	Dominance	.120
10.	Self-disclosure	.468**
11.	Trust	.406**
12.	Role function	.281**

($P < 0.01$)

In the present study, table no 4 shows the following results Understanding, Satisfaction, Affection, Despair, Decision making, Self-disclosure, Trust, and Role function subscale has a significant correlation with marital communication inventory. Moreover the other subscale like Rejection, Discontent, Dissolution potential, and Dominance also has a positive correlation with Marital Communication Inventory.

Discussion

The result of this study brings out strong implications that the spouses who engage in effective communication, who are willing for free and frank self-disclosure, who are ready to listen actively and accommodate differences patiently, enjoy more satisfying and fulfilling marital relationships, as has been somewhat similarly said by (Yalcin and Karahan 2007). A healthy interaction pattern in a married relationship works like a tonic, ever rejuvenating the marital relationship, for the very relationship itself is dialogical. In the northeast region, like many other states of India, consulting and seeking the help of professionals and clinicians are still seen with a social stigma attached to them, more so, when it comes to the family and the couple's relationship (Luchies et al., 2013). Couples often do not buy the idea of consulting a counselor or mental health professional due to the fear of their good name being at stake (Spanier GB.,2007).

When effective communication between the couples does influence a great deal the level of marital satisfaction in a spousal relationship, it is not the only contributive factor determining the quality of a marital relationship (Wunderer & Schneewind, 2008). There is a need to take into consideration while developing programs for communication enrichment, other related factors like career or job satisfaction and financial well-being and the like, an area which the present study has not delved into (Bradbury, & Pihet, 2009). Likewise, the study has not considered the age of the participants as an influencing factor in the level of marital satisfaction and couples' communication. This study was conducted among 50 couples who are married for a duration of six months to two years to see the association between marital communication and marital quality among the couples. The majority of the couples were under 26-30 years of Age, Hindu in religion (47%) living in a joint family, and (47%) living in a nuclear family with a duration of 1-2 years of marriage. Finding suggests that most of the couples (66%) had communication with each other is satisfactory. Satisfactory marital communication has a major contribution to couples' life (Clayton et al., 2007).

Couples in their early stage of marriage are usually found to be difficult to adjust to each other (Slatcher et al., 2010). Marital communication skills are the ability of couples. Effective communication helps to transfer a constructive message which helps in maintaining better communication and quality of marital life (Granillo et al., 2011). Results suggest that majority of the couple's (36%) couples' marital quality is severely affected in their early stage of marriage. Some of the marital quality depends on some amount of quality among the attitude of the couple that shows towards each other's (Liu H, Waite L., 2014) Various factors like financial security, attitude, relationship, future security, mental, sexual, and psychological satisfaction also contributes on marital quality among the couples. Impulsivity leads to

lower marital satisfaction positively related to communication which effects indirectly on marital quality of newlyweds couples (Tan K, Jarnecke AM, South SC., 2017). After analysis, It was also found that marital communication has significant positive marital quality in the area of the followings domains viz Understanding, Satisfaction, Affection, Despair, Decision making, Self-disclosure, Trust, and Role function and it also has a positive correlation with other domain of marital quality.

The finding shows that most of the domains of the marital quality scale is reflecting that if marital communication is good among the couples then the marital quality is also satisfactory. Communication helps to maintain a better relationship among couples. It helps to reduce the effect of the spark of conflict and interrupt a healthy and good marital quality. There are very few studies which are directly supporting the present study (Bhaghipur et al, 2010; Tavakalized et a., 2015). It is here that the real challenge lies for therapists and marriage counselors. Through tactfully thought-out programs on awareness creation, this fear has to be exorcised from the minds of the people. Further reflections and serious researches are to be conducted in this direction.

Implication and Further directions

High occurrence of divorce and marital disharmony couples must go for pre-marital and post-marital counseling. It will help couples to deal with day-to-day hassles. Need to plan and conduct workshops for couples in the community to bring awareness of and importance of marital counseling and also to approach family therapists for mild to moderate family issues.

Limitations

However, the author came across certain limitations in this study. The major limitation of the current study is its small sample size. Participants in this study were restricted to specific regions of the northeast only which could limit the generalization of the result.

Conclusion

The present study revealed that interpersonal communication skills are necessary for making good relationships and bonding between partners. Communication skills play an integral role in maintaining good marital quality. Both communication and marital quality are interdependent on each other.

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Conflicts of interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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