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Communication Strategies among couples in Nasarawa State, North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was carried out to examine the effects of communication strategies on family relationship in Nasarawa State. The study used descriptive survey method of design. The instruments used to collect information from respondents were interview and questionnaire. Data collected were subjected to statistical analysis using frequencies and percentage for demographic variables, frequencies, mean and standard deviation for research questions, while Pearson, Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to measure the correlation between communication strategies used in, husband/wife subsystem and their relationship. The results of the study revealed that majority of spouses in Nasarawa State frown at each other as they communicate as this had the highest mean score of 3.39 and this was followed by a mean score of 3.38, where respondents asserted that they talk down on their spouses because of the familiarity they have for each other. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that family members should embark on effective communication so as to lessen cases of crises and tensions in the family and to strengthen family relationship.

Keywords: *Information, Family, Relationship, Husband / Wife subsystem and Communication*

Introduction

Communication is the basic block of family relationship as well as the heart of every relationship. Communication is regarded as a key to warmth in family relationship. It is also through communication that family members convey their thoughts, feelings and connection. Epstein, Bishop, Ryan, Miller and Keither (1993), defined communication as the way in which verbal and non-verbal information are exchanged between family members.

Verbal communication is accompanied with words, which include the tone of voice and choice of words used by those involved. Non-verbal communication involves body signs or language which include eye contact, facial expression, body posture as well as physical expression like hugs, kisses a pat on the back. It was further explained that communication involves the ability to pay attention to what others have to say in order to get the information that is to be passed across. Looking at what communication is further, Pelt (2002), defined it as a two-way street of conversation which comprises the giving and receiving of information. Communication is said to be the livewire of any relationship. In other words, it is the fuel on which the engine of relationship runs.

In another way, Odukoya (2008), defined communication as the giving or receiving of information and it involves more than just giving of information, but the information given must be heard and understood. It is important to understand that where there is no information, there is no communication; where there is no communication, there is no understanding and where there is no understanding, there can be no relationship. Communication is therefore a way by which one person speaks by passing his or her experiences, ideas and knowledge to another person and the other person listens and gives the feedback the way he or she understands. Communication is very important to a successful family relationship, as the status of a family relationship depends on their communication strategies.

Communication strategies are the ways, principles and methods a family plans to skillfully pass ideas and share their experiences with one another. Pelt (2002), explained that communication in marriage is complete where members of the family can handle three principles constantly. First, when they can successfully utilize the fundamentals involved in speaking and listening; secondly, when they can resolve conflicts through constructive methods, and thirdly, when they spend time on a daily basis in an intimate sharing of feelings. Brown (2003), further explained that family members involved in listening as a strategy in communication can employ this principle by not talking, for they cannot listen when they are talking. The listening partner should put the talker at ease by helping him or her feel that he or she is free to talk. The listener should remove all distractions, empathize with the talker, be patient, hold his or her temper, should not argue and ask questions. On this note, Omeonu (2007), supported Brown on listening skill by emphasizing that the listener must be sensitive and sees that he or she listens attentively. When a partner does not listen with rapt attention, he or she will both be sensitive enough to pick the motive or emotion behind the words spoken.

Today relationships are challenged in many ways. Busy schedules and a changing world can make good marriage relationship difficult to maintain. On this note therefore, Obisakin (1993), stated that, in the marriage relationship, husband and wife are supposed to model good relationship to the family, if only husbands and wives would have lived up to the good standard in their marriage relationship, there would not have been any marital problems. Divorce and separation would have been unnamed among the married people. Family members involved in relationships can make them work by showing that they care, empathize with others, cooperating, being accepting and keeping their sense of humor; they will have the qualities that are key to maintaining good relationships. This study is therefore aimed at evaluating the effects of communication strategies in Husband/wife relationship in a family subsystem.

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

This research was carried out using descriptive survey method. This method was adopted as it was best suited for collecting information from a large and small population that are located at different places of the area of study as was recommended by (Osuala, 2001).

Population for the Study

The target population comprised of all families in Nasarawa State. It consists a total population of seven hundred and fifty five thousand, nine hundred and twelve (755,912) according to the 2006 census.

Sample size and sampling procedure

Nasarawa state is divided into three senatorial districts. These senatorial districts are Nasarawa South, Nasarawa North and Nasarawa West senatorial districts. There are thirteen Local Government Areas spread across the three senatorial districts. For this study, two, one and two Local Government Areas were randomly selected from Nasarawa south, Nasarawa North and Nasarawa West Senatorial District respectively. To randomly select these Local Government Ares, all their names were recorded on pieces of papers. The hat and drawn method was then used to select the five Local Government Areas.

It would be cumbersome to work with a very large population as indicated in table 1 above. Krejcie and Morgan (1970), recommended that three hundred and eighty four (384) respondents are acceptable as sample size, and recommended a one percent (1%) of the selected population of the sample size according to these proportionate values. The sample size comprises of 384 men and women who were located both in urban and rural areas, those who had one(1) child up to eleven (11>) and above children. They had different qualifications ranging from non-formal education to professors.

Table 1: Distribution of the Population

Senatorial Districts	Local Government Areas	Population	
Nasarawa South senatorial district	Lafia	105,500	
	Awe	72,755	
	Obi	95,000	
	Keana	60,755	
	Doma	98,505	
Nasarawa North senatorial district	Akwanga	63,099	
	Wamba	60,000	
	Nassarawa-Eggon	60,000	
Nasarawa West senatorial district	Karu	28,000	
	Keffi	31,000	
	Kokona	19,000	
	Nasarawa	32,000	
	Toto	30,000	
Total	3	13	755,912

Source: National Population Commission, Nasarawa State Census (2006)

Table 2: Sample Size for the study

Senatorial districts	Selected local government areas	Population	Sample size	Percentage
1. Nasarawa South	Lafia	105,500	130	33.9
	Doma	98,505	122	31.7
2. Nasarawa	Nassarawa-Eggon	60,000	74	19.3
3. Nasarawa West	Kokona	19,000	23	6.1
	Karu	28,000	35	9.0
Total 3	5	311,303	384	100

Source: National Population Commission (2006) census, Lafia-Nasarawa State

Instrument for data Collection

The instruments that were used for data collection were questionnaire and interview. Those who cannot read nor write were interviewed using the same questions on the questionnaire. Responses received from the interview were recorded accordingly by the researcher and her assistants. The questionnaire was structured based on the objectives and reviewed work, and consisted of two section 'A' and 'B': section "A" contained personal information of the respondents. Items included were: Gender, Age, years of marriage, number of children, qualification attained and occupation of respondents. Section "B" considered the objectives of the study and reviewed work related to the

study at hand. It considered communication strategies used in the husband/wife, subsystem of the families in Nasarawa State and correlation of communication strategies on family relationship.

The data collected were statistically analyzed using statistical package for social sciences (SPSS). Frequencies and percentage were used to analyze the demographic variables, while frequencies, mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Pearson product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test the three null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance (2-tailed) test because of the correlation involved in the testing. This 0.05 level of significance was used in accordance with what Best and Kha (1989), and Ekeh (2003) suggested that it is a standard used to test whether a null hypothesis is accepted or rejected.

Results and Discussion

A total of 384 questionnaire were administered out of which 370 were successfully filled and retrieved. These 370 respondents' Responses form the basis of the data analysis

Table 3: Distribution of respondents by sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	220	59.5.
Female	150	40.5
Total	370	100

The sex distribution of respondents according to table 3 above revealed that 220 of the respondents representing 59.5% were males, while the rest 150 representing 40.5% were females.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by age

Age in years	Frequency	Percentage
20-29	113	30.5
30-39	145	39.02
40-49	88	23.8
50-59	15	4.1
60-69	5	1.4
70 and above	4	1.0
Toal	370	100

The ages of the respondents as displayed on table 4 reveals that all ages from 20-70 and above were represented. Ages 20-29 had 133 respondents representing 30.5%, while 30-39 age group had 145 respondents (39.2%) as against 88 respondents (23.8%) that were between 40-49 years, while 5 respondents representing 4.1% were between 50-59 years. Ages 60-69 had 5 respondents representing 1.4%, while the rest 4 of the respondents representing 1.0% were 70 years and above.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by years of marriage

Years of marriage	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	19	5.1
6-10	90	24.3
11-20	180	48.7
21-30	50	13.5
31-40	20	5.4
31-40	20	5.4
41 years and above	11	3.0
Total	370	100

Table 5 above revealed that 180 (48.7%) of the respondents have been married for 11-20 years, 90(34.3%) have been married for 6-10 years, 50 (13%) have been married for 21 -23 years, 20 others representing 5.4% have been married for 31-40 years, as against 19 others representing 5.1% who have been married for between 1-5 years. The remaining 11 of them representing 3.0% have been married for over 41 years

Table 6. Distribution of Respondents by number of Children

Number of children	Frequency	Percentage
1-5	200	54.1
6-10	110	29.7
11 and above	60	16.2
Total	370	100

Result of table 6 above showed that 200 of the respondents representing 54.1% have between 1-5 number of children, as against 110 others representing 29.7% that have between 6-10 number of children and the rest 60 (16.2%) have over 11 children.

Communication strategies used in the husband/wife subsystem

Table 8 revealed that the most widely communication strategies used in the husband/wife subsystem are that spouses frown at each other when communicating which had the highest mean score of (3.39), followed by a mean score of (3.38), where spouses talk down on themselves because of the familiarity they have for one another. Next on the mean score was 3.13, where respondents agreed that they tap their fingers or foot when they are communicating. The next high mean score was 2.86 where respondents agreed that they do stand too far or sit too close to their partners when they are communicating which indicates their lack of interest in the communication.

This was followed by a mean score of 2.60, here respondents asserted that they speak out their ideas and feelings clearly in their conversation, followed by 2.44 and 2.08 where respondents indicated their disagreement of not maintaining consistent eye contact when they are conversing, not giving special treats on special occasions, and not using polite words in their communication. The least mean score was found to be 1.84, where respondents indicated that they hardly use appreciative words with their partners when they are communicating.

Table 9: Weighted mean scores of respondents opinions on correlation between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship

Correlation between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship	SA (4)	A (3)	D (2)	SD (1)	Total	Mean	SD	Decision
When I speak polite words during our discussion it strengthens our relationship	200	60	70	40	1160	3.14	0.56	Agreed
If I express my ideas and feelings clearly to my partner in our conversation, it promotes our relationship.	180	70	90	30	1020	2.76	53	Agreed
If I make right choice of words in our discussion it increases our discussion, it strengthens our relationship	270	20	50	30	1270	3.43	53	Agreed
When I use appreciative words in our communication it strengthens our relationship.	290	40	30	10	1350	3.65	39	Agreed
If I maintain consistent eye contact when we are communicating, it helps in strengthening our relationship.	190	50	80	50	1120	3.03	39	Agreed
When I give my partner the correct feedback in our relationship.	260	70	10	30	1300	3.51	44	Agreed
When I stand too far from or sit too close to my husband/wife when we are discussing, it scatters out relationship	300	30	25	15	1355	3.66	40	Agreed
When I tap my fingers or foot during our conversation, it hinders friendliness in our relationship	330	20	15	5	1415	3.82	29	Agreed
When I give special treats to my spouse on special occasions, it strengthens our relationship	280	40	30	20	1320	3.57	43	Agreed

Table 9 showed the correlation between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship. Respondents agreed that when they tap their fingers or foot during conversation, it hinders friendliness in their relationship with a mean score of 3.82, they agreed that when they stand too far or sit too close to their spouses when they are communicating, it scatters their relationship with a mean score of 3.65, when they give their spouses special treats on special occasions, it strengthens their relationship with a mean score of 3.57, when they give their partners the correct feedback in their relationship with a mean score of 3.51. The next mean score was 3.43 where respondents agreed that when they speak polite words with their partners, it strengthens their relationship with a mean score of 3.14. The next agreement of the respondents was that when they maintain consistent eye contact during communication, it helps in strengthening their relationship with a mean score of 3.03. The following agreements by the respondents were that when they make right choice of words in their communication, it increases intimacy in their relationship with a mean score of 3.00 and that if they express their ideas and the feelings clearly to their partners in their conversation, it promotes their relationship with a mean score of 2.76 respectively.

Testing of Null Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1: This null hypothesis states that there is no significant correlation between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship

Table 10: Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Variables	N	Mean	S.D	Correlation index r	Critical index r	df	Sig (P)
Communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem	370	27.7811	8.42909	.909*	.195	368	0.000
Correlation between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship	370	33.8919	8.58493				

*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Outcome of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) statistics in Table 10 above showed that significant correlation exists between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship. This is because the calculated sig (p) level of 0.000 is less than the 0.05 level of significance at a correlation level of .909.

Hence the null hypothesis which states that, there is no significant correlation between communication strategies used in husband/wife subsystem and husband/wife relationship is hereby rejected.

Discussion

Based on the findings of the study, it was revealed that majority of the respondents frown at their spouses when they are conversing with a mean score of 3.39 indicating their lack of interest or displeasure in the discussion. This supports Weber (1990), who stated that when a person frowns when communication is going on, it indicates disappointment and displeasure. The study also revealed that husbands and wives talk down on themselves because of the familiarity they have to each other and this had a mean score of 3.38. This finding is in line with Pelt (2002), where she stated that often familiarity leads to neglect and disregard and that spouses think they can say and do anything they like to each other. On this note therefore, Pelt stressed that spouses must say speeches that will show that they care for each other. Other communication strategies used in the husband/wife subsystem as revealed in the findings include standing too far or sitting too close to the partner speaking with a mean score of 2.86, feeling too proud to apologies for an offence committed with a mean score of 2.78, speaking out their ideas and feelings clearly to themselves when they are conversing with a mean score of 2.60, lack of maintaining consistent eye contact when they are communicating with a mean score of 2.44, inability of couples, to give themselves special treats on special occasions with a mean score of 2.08. This was followed by mean score of 2.02 and 1.84 where respondents do not use polite words in their communication, and do not use appreciative words when they are communicating respectively. These negative communication strategies are contrary to the options of Hilderband (1997) and Adejumo (2000). They highlighted positive words couples can use to include 'I appreciate all the things you have done for me all these years', 'I'm so proud to be married to you' and that couples should remember special days like birthdays and anniversaries and give special treats by taking their wives for special outings.

Tapping of fingers or foot by a partner during a conversation hinders friendliness in husband/wife relationship, with a mean score of 3.82. this is in line with what Weber (1990), stated that tapping fingers or foot during a conversation by the listener indicates boredom or impatient with what is going on around him or her. On this note therefore Weber (1990), urged family members to use those body positions that will promote friendliness and receptiveness in husband/wife relationship. This was followed by mean score of 3.66 where respondents strongly agreed and agreed that standing too far or

sitting too close to a partner speaking makes him/her feel uncomfortable in their conversation, and that his action destroys husband/wife relationship. This is also in line with Weber (1990), where he stated that sitting too close to a person speaking and invading that space or standing too far may make the second person feel uncomfortable which can destroy intimate husband/wife relationship. The next highest mean score was 3.65, where respondents strongly agreed and agreed that appreciative words such as “I appreciate all the things you have done for me all these years”, and “I don’t feel complete without you” they use in their communication promotes husband/wife relationship. These opinions are in line with what Hildebrand (1997), highlighted on what spouses should say to each other in order to promote husband/wife relationship. These include: “I appreciate all the things you have done for me all these years”, “you are the best friend I have”, “I was wrong”, “If I had to do it again, I would still marry you”, and the likes. Unfortunately, couples in Nasarawa state rarely use these appreciative words in their communication.

It is also on this note that Adejumo (2000) and Pelt (2000), highlighted some strategies the husband and wife could do so as to promote husband/wife relationship. These include leaving special notes by writing a love note and dropping where the wife can find, making special trips to a particular room where a partner is and give him or her a peck or a kiss, and tell that partner “I Love you”, adapting your husband by programming your life to fit properly into his, and the rest, so as to strengthen husband/wife relationship.

Major findings in the study revealed that majority of spouses in Nasarawa State frown at each other as they communicate as this had the highest mean score of 3.39 and this was followed by a mean score of 3.38, where respondents asserted that they talk down on their spouses because of the familiarity they have for each other.

The outcome of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) (2-tailed) revealed a significant correlation between communication strategies used in all the subsystems as the calculated sig (P) was found to be $p < 0.001$ which was less than the critical 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was thereby rejected.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Considering the findings in this study, it can be concluded that families in Nasarawa State face some challenges in their relationships. These challenges are further compounded by the use of ineffective communication strategies by family members. This can explain the reason for rapid increase in breaking of marriages and high rates in divorce. It can be concluded that strong intimate family relationship depends on family

members employing positive communication strategies such as the wife using good word while communicating with her husband and husband showing care and support to the wife.

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study

1. Husbands and wives should use polite and appreciative words in their conversation
2. Husband and wife should give special treats to each other, like giving gifts on special occasions and going for special outings

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