

# IMPACTS OF COMMUNICATION ON MARITAL DYSFUNCTION IN THE FAMILY

*Harrison Obi Ibude*

## **Abstract**

Communication is the life wire of any organization, institution or parastatal. It is the means whereby signals, symbols, gestures and cymbals are transmitted from the sender to the receiver. We communicate by hands, signs, symbols etc. there are many types of communication patterns viz the Rake, circle, the "Y" the "Z" the Network etc. communication in marriage or family promotes understanding among couples, it promotes learning, it facilitates decision-making, it encourages effective participation. This paper is of the view that effective communication in the family creates effective marriage and ineffective communication creates ineffective marriage.

## **Introduction**

### **Background of the Study**

Marriage forms the basis of the family which itself, is the foundation of any well ordered society. In most countries of the world, it is an approved relationship between one man and or more women.

In a few others however, the union could be between one woman or two or more men. Marriage involves a deep abiding commitment of two persons to each other to live together and bring up a family, to support, sustain and cherish each other.

Marriage generally fulfills a number of basis functions. Firstly, it provides an acceptable basis for stable rights such as heterosexual relationship between the martial partners. Secondly, it is the basis upon which families are formed. Finally, it gives legitimacy to children born into such a relationship.

Marriage therefore, provides a formal relationship and establishes property right and stable inheritance from generation to generation. This explains why marriage holds both in the cultural and religious circles to date.

One important feature of marriage is that it is intended to be a life-long commitment hence, the aversion to divorce. In line with the above, Akagbogun (1990) noted that "in ancient societies, divorce was hardly known because of the strong belief that marriage was sacred and too important to be subjected to the whims of the participating individuals."

Those were the days in which the family unit was regarded as an important institution which social norms and restrictions were imported and enforced by family members.

Today, however, the general situation has changed dramatically particularly in the urban areas. The marital institution in Nigeria today appears to be in serious crisis. In fact, there is a general tendency towards marital instability the world over and it is increasing with urbanization (Kroll, 1987: 12). Related to this is the growing and expressed fear in some quarters that formal education especially of women, has contributed significantly to troubled marital relationships. The claim is that the introduction of Western type of education has seriously and negatively affected the existing traditional system in our society.

All over the world, marriage is regarded as a sacred institution in which the couple is expected to be one, in Nigeria as well as in many parts of the world, marriage appears to be more in

crisis than ever before. Buttressing the above, Akagbogun (1990) stated that he had been so confronted with marital complaints that he wondered whether from the recent trends, marriage would not soon be found only in the archives. The point being made is that there is growing concern in present day Nigeria about the growing incidence of marital crisis.

Divorce tops the list of cases handled by our course these days. (Onwuchekwa, 1989), thus suggested that all is not well with many marital relationships. This trend in our country Akagbogun (1990) remarked is neither characteristically Christian nor strictly traditional. Even in some cases, dissolutions occur within the first few years of marriage. It must be noted that divorce does not occur suddenly, it is usually a last resort that is taken to bring an end to an unhappy marital relationship. At the same time, not all unhappy relationships end up in divorce. Some take to separation while some others for very important personal reason; decide to stay on their unhappy marital situation with all its attendant physical emotional and psychological torture.

As at today, the marriage institution is slowly crumbling with every passing day, more and more people are seeking an end to the misery and unhappiness they found themselves in their marriage while many young ones are saying "to hell with marriage". In a study conducted by Bogant (1972), it was estimated that over a million American households are of unmarried kind and in twenty years, the rate has fallen to only 4% in 1972 in Whealand (1975). Within the European Europe, an average of 655 of the women were rearing children without a partner, with Britain and Germany recording the highest average of 10.% and 7.7% respectively (Awake correspondent 1994).

Divorce is becoming increasingly common. In Spain, the divorce rate rose to one out of eight marriages by the beginning of the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a big jump from one out of hundred. Just twenty-five (25) years before Britain was reportedly having the highest divorce rate in Europe (C4 out of 100 marriages are expected to fail, this has been seen as a surge in the number of single parent families).

Communication can be defined as a means by which we share thoughts, feelings, wishes or information by using sounds and symbols. If the persons you communicate with is close by and he can hear or see you distinctly, you can make sound, (talk) or make signs. If however, you wish to communicate over a long distance, you will require various devices. In the olden days, communication pattern was very archaic or primitive, fire, smoke, signals and mirrors were used, although some of these implements or devices are still used to day in some places.

Communication in marriage helps to promote understanding between couples, it helps to promote understanding between couples, it helps to influence the level of motivation at home and helps to influence the degree of learning (Odor, 1995).

Marital disharmony is used interchangeably with marital conflict as a struggle over value or claims to status, power and scarce resources in which the claims of the conflicting partners are not only to get the desired values but also to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

According to Nwoye (1991), there are certain conditions under which marriage and family conflicts arise. Some of these conditions are lack of value consensus in the contest of family decision-making and their application, pressure of an equitable distribution of one another in the family set-up, damaging of another person's self image and erosion of structural interdependence.

Talking in terms of communication patterns, we have the chain, the wheel, the Rake, the "Y" "Z" the circle and all channels.

- a. **Chain Pattern:** In the chain pattern of communication, the husband talks to the wife and the wife talks to the children.

### *Impacts of Communication on Marital Dysfunction in the Family*

---

- b. **Rake Pattern:** The husband talks to the wife and the wife talks to all the other parties in the house e.g. housemaid.
- c. **Wheel Pattern:** The husband talks to anybody in the house.
- d. **“Y” Pattern** The husband and wife come together and talk to other parties in the house.
- e. **Circle Pattern:** Everybody is interacting with other (Ukor 1997) or everybody in the house is communicating, it is the same thing with all channels.

There is one way to succeed in communication that is to succeed in building up a loving relationship. It is essential to listen with love and to speak with love. Secondly, there are right times and wrong times to say something. Thirdly, communication is not a monthly or weekly event; communication is the daily food of your marriage (McGrath, 1994).

### **Why Marriage Fails**

The author is of the view that most marriages are failing due to ineffective communication at homes. In most homes today, there are no symptoms of expressions, love, gestures, symbols, appearances, interaction, discussion etc. In most cases, the partners don't see face to face. There are certain variables affecting communication patterns among couples. In their study on "communication in the family as a function of stress during war and peace" Cohen and Dotan (1926) opined that during wartime, there is considerable more stress in the family and also more interpersonal communication and consumption of the mass media compared with peacetime. They cited example with the 1973 Middle East war and the second eight months war later. In wartime, no differences in stress and communication were found between the families, whose adult males were drafted and those that were not drafted.

However, even though almost no differences in stress existed between the two socio-economic groups, the middle class respondents were generally greater consumers of communication compared to lower class respondents. In her work on marital problems and satisfaction in high school marriage Inselberg (1962) outlined the various factors that create marital problems. These are financial difficulties, no emotional support from the females' husband separation, and high level of pre-marital pregnancy in the experimental group.

According to Pineo (1961) in his work on "Disenchantment in the later years of marriage" opined that there is a general drop in marital satisfaction and adjustment which we conceptualize as a process of disenchantment. Two, there is a loss of certain intimacy, confiding, kissing and reciprocal settlement of disagreements become less frequent, more individual report of loneliness. This loss of intimacy appears to be an aspect of disenchantment. These personal adjustment and reports of personality characteristics are relatively unaffected by the process of disenchantment or loss of intimacy.

Four certain forms of marital interactions are found to change namely intimacy, act of sleeping with each other confiding, act of keeping each other, secret are found to change as the frequency of sexual intercourse diminishes and the amount of sharing of activities without any major link to disenchantment. According to George Levinger (1965) in his work on "marital cohesiveness and Dissolution" marriage is considered as a special instance of social groups in general. Marital cohesiveness and divorce are viewed in terms of the properties of group cohesiveness it is suggested therefore that the strength of the marital relationship is a direct function of increase function of such influence from alternate relationships. He listed some factors affecting marital cohesiveness and these are attraction in marriage esteem for spouse, that is desire for companionship, sexual enjoyment,

husband's income, home's ownership, husbands amount of education, husband's occupation. Talking in terms of causes of marital disharmony, he listed the following: Obligations to dependent children (issues in marriage) obligation to the marital bond, primary group affiliations, (that is affiliation to a church or one firm or organization) is a barrier, immunity stigma that is community approval which is common in rural areas, legal and economic bars, legal and financial considerations like adultery, preferring other sex partners, disjunctive kin affiliation; loyalty towards one's kins or friends or in-laws e.g. conflicts opposing religious, affiliating wife opportunity, for independent income.

According to Adams (1947), "marital discord does not second like a bolt from the blue upon a family, because of uncontrollable external factors and circumstance, nor does it appear only at times of economic need and insecurity, instead, it comes out about within the family relationship as a cultural and sometimes inevitable outgrowth of need which each individual has brought to the marital situation. Chance circumstances may intensify or may serve as a principal factor in bringing to the surface discords which otherwise, would have remained relatively dormant or negligible.

In their work in 1977 titled "Marital instability, a study of its transmission between generation," Mueller and Pope opined that 1970 national sample of white married to female is used to explore the process of inter-generation of marital instability which is mediated by male selection outcome with the high risk circumstances of being the most important. The relevance of this male selection circumstances in the transmission process, is interpreted within the framework of social control and economic variables.

A review of the various models responsible for breakdown in marriages tagged "Theories of marriage counseling" have already been looked at in earlier work in this literature review. The cumulative effect of communication pattern is that it helps in building up a "loving relationship", secondly, it teaches the couples the right and wrong time to say something; thirdly, it shows that communication is continuous. It is not a monthly phenomenon or weekly phenomenon. Communication is the daily food in marriage (McGrath 1967).

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Theories of Marriage Counselling**

#### **The Role Theory Model**

The role theory model is the framework that purposes the essential factor in any situation of marital crisis or discontentment. The phenomenon of role conflict is said to arise where there is incompatible role expectation between the two parties in the marriage. This theory came about in 1957. (Mangna 1057: 200-209).

#### **The Psycho Dynamic Theory Model**

The psychodynamic theory is an offshoot of the classical psychoanalytic approach. It proposed that, to discover what has gone wrong in a given such marriage, the marriage counselor needs to probe into the deep-seated character traits of the two personalities involved (Nwoye 1991: 52).

#### **The Marital Communication Theory Model**

The marital communication theory model is a theory of family communications credited to Jackson, Haley Weakland (1956) of the Palo Alto mental research institute. It proposed that the essential factor in problem of marriage as is the case with troubled families is the problem of

inappropriate communication. The problem arises, according to the theory, due to lack of clarity or presence of confusion in the communication network exchange by the couple.

### **The Structural Theory Level**

The structural theory is a popular theory of marriage counseling developed by Salvador Minchin. The theory purposed that marital pathology is promoted:

1. Where one member in the dyad is swallowed up by the personality of the other (the problem of encroachment emerged).
2. Where one member's interest are in conflict with the general interests of the marriage.
3. Where the transactions between the interior and exterior expectations like in-laws.
4. Where the boundary between the interior members of the union (the husband and wife) is too impermeable.
5. Where one member of the marriage has the neurotic tendency to lay his or her wishes on the other.
6. Where the couple's approach to stress is frantic and immature) Nwoye 1999: 58.

### **The Social Learning Theory Model**

The social learning theory model is credited to Albert Bandura, who in line with Kurt Lewis has assumed that human behavior in general, is a function of the person plus the environment, and can be represented by the formula  $A=f(P\&E)$ .

By the term person here, Bandura essentially means cognitive factors, while by the term environment, he means the several models around as well as the circumstantial contingencies pressing upon the individual. According to Buddura indeed, the entire three element the person, the behavior and the environment situations are highly interrelated variables.

Applied to marriage, the theory assumed that when two individual's interests meet, they become part of each other's environment and the behavior of each party determines the behavior of the other.

This theory teaches us that when marriage fails, the rest casue of the failure may not be found within the marriage itself, but rather, may be found from outside the marriage such as from friends, the peers, neighbours colleagues in the same religion or in-laws of the couple.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

The concluding of dwells on the five major theories for marital pathology. The conclusion to be garnered from this work is that when marriage begins to fail, there are usually more than one or two factors to focus in search of the actual cause of the problem. It is the role of the counselor to address himself to these theories in counseling to avoid a sick marriage. This is timely and necessary in order to reduce the incessant wave of broken homes and divorces.

### **References**

- Alberson, P.P. Elliot A. (1968). *Theories of cognitive consistency: A source Book*, Chicago: Rand McNaly and Company.
- Afejuku D.N. (1980). Equal opportunity an infringement on the contractual right of the Nigerian woman, Report of conference on Integrated Rural Development Women in Development 11, 692-721.

- Akam, J.B. (1995). *Oracle of wisdom*, Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Akagbogu, G.C. (1990). *Indissolubility of marriage*. Molumba Journal of Knights of St. Molumba 4(1) May 15-16.
- Akiba, A. Copen (1976). Communication in the family as a function of stress during war and peace. *Journal of marriage and the family*.
- Akigoye, J.C. (1982). How to be happy in marriage psychology for everyday living. *Nigeria Journal of Applied Psychology*, (1).
- Akingba, J.B (1980). In Olusanya O.O. & Enjomaroh F.N. The relevance of female age at marriage an desired family size to the fertility and population growth on the American continent. *Aman* 4(1) (Dec.) 93.97
- Aldous, J. (1978). American families in the 1987s: Individual run Amok. *Journal of family issues*, 8: 422-388.
- Alpem, & Lyyon, Ruth, K. (1993). Pre school children at Krist chronicity and timing of marital expressive symptoms and child behavior problems. *Development and psychology*, 5 371- 388.
- Amaga, S & Amaga, L. (2001). *I didn't bargain for this, marriage is to be enjoyed and not to be endured*. Lagos: Faith Publishers.
- Amechi, E.F. (1980). Constraints on woman's about force, participation in the Nigerian society, Report of conference on integrated rural development and women in development 11 671-691.
- Barthrin, Adams (1947). Counseling against family breakdown marriage and family living: *Journal on the national conference on family relations* ix, Fed, 1947 (1).
- Bernard, J. (1978). The future of marriage, New York Benton Books Inc: Bird, C (1979) *The two pay check marriage*. How woman of work are chances life in America. New York: Rawson, Waddle Publishers.
- Blood, R.O. & Donals, M.W. (1960). *Husband and wives* New York: Free Press.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic internationalism perspective and method*: Englewood Cliffs No. 3 Prentice Hall.
- Blumstein P. & Schwartz P. (1983). *American couples* New York: William Norrow and Company.
- Britten B. & Britten, C. (1995). *Answers for your marriage*. Enlarged second dition. Swaziland: Joy Books.
- Built, E. (1975). *Family and social network* Great Britain: TANS Koek Publishers.

*Impacts of Communication on Marital Dysfunction in the Family*

---

- Burgess, E.W. & Wakkish P. (1952). *Engagement adjustment and marriage adjustment in reading in marriage and the family* (ed) Land is J.T. & Lais M.G. New York: Prentice Hall,
- Burges, E.W. & Locke H.J. (1945). *The family* New York: American Book Co.
- Burns, D.G. (1965). *African education: An introductory survey of education in common wealth countries*, London: Oxford University Press.
- Camegie, Dale (1948). *How to stop worrying and start living*. Great Britain: Richard Clay (The Chancer Press) Ltd. Bunqury Cusfolk.
- Cole, G.A. (1977). *Human behavior of work organization behavior*. New York: McGraw Hill Book.
- Drummond A. et al (1990). *Applied typing*. United Kingdom: McGraw Hill.
- Ekong, E.E. (2003). *An introduction to rural sociology*. Second edition. Uyo: Dove Publishers.
- Gauqrgeer, . (1988). *Information technology in the offices*, England: McGraw Hill, Book Company.
- Gartride, L. (1976). *Modern business correspondent*. London: The English language book, society and Macdonald and Evams Limited.
- Grifiths, D.E. (1972). *Towards theory of administration behavior*. New York: Applieti in Century Welt.
- Harris, B.N. (1979). *Personnel administration in education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon Inc.
- Herseberg, F.M. (1966). *Job review of research and opinion*, psychological services of Pitsbury
- Hind D. (1990). *Transferable personal skills for BTE*. Great Britain: Business education publisher Ltd. (1<sup>st</sup> Edition).