

# Lack of Effective Communication among Couples in Ekiti State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT**— *The study investigated the effects of lack of effective communication among couples in Ekiti State. The sample consisted of 240 married persons (120 couples) from four (4) randomly selected local government areas of the 16 LGAs in the state. Simple random sample techniques were used to select the participants for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using t-test analysis. The two hypotheses generated were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The instrument for the study was titled “communication among couples” had a reliability coefficient of 0.69. The results showed that lack of effective communication affects relationship of couples. It was therefore recommended that appropriate communication patterns should be encouraged among couples so as to avoid problems in their marriages.*

**KEYWORDS:** Lack of effective communication, Couples and Ekiti State.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Communication is the exchange and flow of information and ideas from one person to another; it involves a sender transmitting an idea, information or feelings to receiver (Army, 1983). Effective communication occurs only if the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intends to transmit. Many of the problems that occur in marriage (according to Mistry, Jagers, Lodge, Alton, Mericle, Frush, Meliones; 2008) are (1). The direct results of couples failing to communicate and (2). Process that leads to confusion and can cause good plans to fail. On the other hand, “couples” according to Merriam-Webster “are two persons married, engaged or otherwise romantically paired” that can share their thoughts and ideas with each other. McGrath (2012) opined that communication often improves naturally when we align our desires and attitudes with principles of commitment, honesty, personal accountability and loving actions. Putting our heart right has to come before putting our communication right.

This study is however interested in making known to the public the effect of lack of communication among couples. One of the most important things within any relationship is effective communication. It is vital for relationship to stand the test of time because sometimes things can get complicated (Jeremy, 2012). Learning to communicate with each other does not mean married couples would not face conflicts, nor does it mean they will like everything their partners have to say. According to a communication guide prepared by the University of Florida (JFAs Extension), equally important is how your partner is speaking, for instance, is the tone angry, sarcastic or calm? Non verbal cues such as the arms folded across the chest or lack eyes contact are also important.

Communication is the way all information gets processed in a relationship. Although seemingly simple, it is a very complicated phenomenon. There are verbal and non-verbal messages as well as conscious and unconscious ones. It is no wonder that communication problems underline so many issues in marriage.

Good communication is a tool, and good tools can make a task much easier to accomplish. But good tools cannot make up for the person using them. In the hands of a skilled cabinet-maker who sets out to create a beautiful piece of furniture, a hammer can be an important tool. But in the hands of someone with unkind intentions, a hammer can quickly become a weapon (Nathan, 2010).

### Gender differences and similarities in couple’s communication

Much of the literature in popular culture leads one to believe that men and women are truly quite different in terms of their emotional experiences and their communication of those experiences. According to Gray (1992), who said, author of men are from Mars while that of women are from Venus. Men and women differ in their experience of

emotions and their communication of them. Gray (1992) works, however, are not an academic or based on empirical research. Empirical studies on sex and Gender differences indicate that men and women are more similar than they are different in terms of communication in their close, personal relationship (Danesy and Okediran 2006). Although some differences do exist, they are not substantial enough to declare that the sexes or gender are significantly different.

Research on communication in close, personal relationship suggests that men and women are more similar than they are different. Nevertheless, many of the differences surface within the contexts of conflict or household chores. For example, in their extensive examination of the sex and gender literature, Danesy and Okediran 2006 offered the following regarding sex and gender differences that women compared to men express a greater range of emotions, such as sadness, fear, love, happiness and anger. Women are also more inclined than men to disclose personal information, such as their personal opinion or details of their personal history. Furthermore, women are more likely to use touch to convey feelings of closeness; these feelings could be sexual in nature but not necessarily. Interestingly, women are more likely to engage in manipulative behaviours and to exercise negative and confrontational conflict behaviours. Finally, that women are more likely than men to enact self-disclosure behaviours, engage in loyalty towards their partner and relationship and also enact task sharing in an effort to maintain their relationship.

### **Communication Patterns and Couple (Dis) Satisfaction**

Gottman in his various works (Gottman 2004; Gottman & Levenson 2008), offered specific couple communication patterns that contribute to both satisfactory and dissatisfactory couple relationships, with a specific focus on the close, personal relationship of marriage. In fact, Gottman is able to predict divorce accurately 94 percent of the time. He found that the behaviours of criticism, defensiveness, contempt and withdrawal hold the most impact in influencing a close relationship negatively. Willard (2011), offered several observations regarding what delineated a satisfied relationship from a dissatisfied one.

Good communication is the foundation of a strong marriage. Many marriages could be saved if spouses improved the ways they communicate with each other. Krull (2011), said if you continue a pattern of being more generous and thoughtful toward your spouse, they will eventually say or do something as a response. They might hold their comments back at first because they do not know if this trend will stick. They may be waiting to see if this generosity is a gimmick or a set of new, positive habits. When they see that you are genuine and consistent with your efforts over time, your message will be clear. Let those selfish thoughts pass by and keep doing loving things for your spouse.

Dissatisfied couples more often appear to engage in destructive communication patterns than satisfied couples. Specifically, dissatisfied couples are more likely to engage in criticism, defensiveness, contempt and withdrawal. Many of these behaviours could also be conveyed non-verbally. For example, a partner stiffening up to convey defensiveness, rolling of his/her eyes to convey contempt. Gottman (2004) argued that the behaviours of contempt and defensiveness are the most corrosive and that the man's withdrawal from conflict is the strongest predictor of divorce. Husbands are more likely to withdraw from conflict in dissatisfied marriage and less likely to do so in satisfied marriages. That is, husbands are more likely to self-disclose their feelings to their wives in happy marriages. Ketty (2005), in his research also suggests that women have a greater repertoire of individuals to disclose than men do and are more inclined to disclose regardless of marital satisfaction, whereas some men only disclosed to their wife, for those men in unhappy marriages, their feelings are often revealed to no one.

Couples in high quality marriages act with more positive intentions toward their spouses than do couples in distressed marriages. In addition, with the happily married couples only, there appears to be a positive relationship between skill level and marital satisfaction, with higher skill levels associated with greater satisfaction levels.

Akinade (2010) found out that, the couples in distressed marriages were motivated by more negative intentions in their communication with their spouses. In addition, the distressed couples either did not use the skills they possessed or they used their skills to harm each other. The author summed up his findings with the statement that relationship distress has much more to do with "ill will" than it does with "poor skill."

In addition to certain communication behaviours and patterns, dissatisfaction or distressed couples are often distinguished from satisfied or non-distressed couples in terms of how their conflict behaviours collectively produce cycles. Specifically, dissatisfied couples often find themselves in what Gottman (2004) termed "negativity cycles". Such cycles involve one partner offering a complaint and that complaint is met with the partner's counter-complaint, which is met with another counter-complaint and so forth. Gottman found that satisfied and dissatisfied couples were distinguished, in part, by the couples' ability to remove themselves from the complaint/counter complaint pattern. Whereas a satisfied couple might take only a few passes at the destructive complaint/counter complaint cycle, dissatisfied couples kept hashing out the complaints, forcing themselves into a deeper and deeper negatively spiral. Attitudes and desires change for the better when couples shift their focus to connecting with each other and to re-building their friendship instead of hammering each other over hot topics. This is why it is so critical to build on positives before trying to overcome big relationship challenges (Nathan 2008).

According to Denton (2011), Changing your attitudes and desires and putting your relationship first are neither easy nor simple. It does not happen overnight and there will certainly be setbacks. But if you are committed to cultivating a caring attitude and heartfelt desire to connect with your spouse this will make it easier to work through difficult issues.

The frequency and intensity of your arguments will decrease. Best of all, you will find that your friendship, fondness and admiration for each other grows stronger over time. However, Danesy & Okediran (2006), in their research discovered that distressed couples are more inclined to form negative attributions toward the partner during conflict and attribute behaviour to internal factors, whereas non-distressed couples were more likely to attribute behaviour to external factors. Talmud, Brachot said and I quote, “All the world is on the tip of the tongue”. Poor communication is a leading factor in relationship disharmony; a very frequent reason people give is that they and their partners are not communicating well with each other. There are a number of reasons the communication process is constrained and the message does not get divorced.

### **Reasons why Spouses fail to Communicate Effectively**

Reuben (2009), gave the following reasons for lack of communication among couples:

1. One of the partners does not have a personal need to:
  - (a) Discuss the relationship
  - (b) Share experiences or feelings or
  - (c) does not understand importance of verbally expressing to partner feelings or love, appreciation or praise. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy* (January 2005, Vol., 31, Number 1, p. 31).
2. Talks, but does not make sure that partner is listening: in this kind of situation, communication is not made interesting, therefore, it could be discontinued and fade-up gradually.
3. Faulty patterns: (a). speaker mumbles, (b). speaker is ambiguous or vague, (c). listener misinterprets and (d). Listener mind-reads.
4. Partners does not reveal self due to fear of attack
5. Partners' fear of starting a fight.
6. Lack of respect for partner's opinion or by default
7. Does not share decision-making because of a desire to control
8. Couples do not communicate because of incompatible schedules, heavy workload and lack of time together.

### **Effect of Lack of Effective Communication among Couples**

Lack of effective communication affects the whole personality of the human being: personal, professional and social life. If partners do not communicate effectively, they are subjected to loneliness and isolation which might make them withdraw from social activities (Baxter and Montgomery 2010). Lack of communication creates a chain of problems as observed by the Researchers. One thing leads to another which results in another problem.

- 1) Lack of Intimacy: lack of communication causes loss of romance. Men and women think and communicate differently when it comes to intimacy. Sex and romance are topics that many couples do not talk about openly, even today. This failure to communicate can build walls and barriers and ultimately destroy the relationship. If a woman does not communicate her needs, likes, and/or dislikes, she ends up feeling disrespected. A man who does not convey his desires will be unsatisfied because he ends up feeling that his partner does not want to satisfy his needs.
- 2) Depression: when romance flies out of a relationship, healthy intimacy will be missing too. Because the involved parties feel the strain, one or both of them may experience depression as a result of inability to talk to one another and depression is a root cause of other problems and ailments.
- 3) Loneliness: where there is almost no communication and when conversation goes nowhere, and when depression and lack of intimacy creeps in, partners feel disconnected from each other. Couples may go their own separate ways, even when living in the same house. They no longer talk about the kids or what happened at the office. They live separate lives and have different set of friends. This makes them feel even more isolated.
- 4) Arguments: lack of effective communication results in unsettled issues which further leads to tension and harsh words. They talk to one another but do not actually communicate. If ego creeps into this situation, then the couple usually ends up communicating through blame and shame, then they engage in names calling, mood swinging and accusations, hence their arguments either remain unresolved or will probably get worse.
- 5) Failing relationship: lack of effective communication can break existing as well as potential relationships. It creates a sense of dissatisfaction, confusion, restlessness and fear between partners. Failing to communicate on a regular basis can cause people in a relationship to feel less connected to one another.
- 6) Separation: one of the most important aspects of a successful relationship is effective communication between both parties. Lack of communication in a relationship can result in hasty decisions that can lead to divorce.
- 7) Inculcate bad habit in children: lack of effective communication can even affect children. It is not a good idea to get the children involved in all these whirlpool.

Communication shapes a relationship; however, many people have poor communication skills that ultimately destroy this bond. When communication breaks down, neither party feels heard, seen or acknowledged. Interruptions, judgments, criticisms and attack result, making the resolution of disagreements difficult.

Emuna (2012) said, it cannot be stated often enough if you do not have a healthy way of expressing your thoughts and emotions to each other, of speaking and being heard, and then everything else will ultimately crumble. In

order to have a successful marriage you have to make yourself an expert in communication. You have to try to understand what your partner is saying on a simple level as well as try to analyze the underlying message or desire.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The research design for the study is the descriptive survey. The sample consisted of 240 respondents (120 couples) from four of the 16 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state. Simple random sampling technique was used to select a total of 240 respondents from the four LGAs. The instrument for data collection was a self constructed questionnaire titled “communications among couples-(CACO)”. CACO is to measure the lack of communication among couples. The instrument consisted of two sections A and B. Section A was on the personal bio data while section B had [20] items to illicit information on the communication pattern of couples. The instrument was judged to have face and content validity by experts in test and measurements. The test re-test reliability co-efficient of the instrument was 0.69 obtained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis.

## 3. ADMINISTRATION OF THE INSTRUMENT

The research instrument was administered personally with the assistance of research assistants. The data collected were analyzed using t-test analysis. The hypotheses generated were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## 4. RESULTS/HYPOTHESES TESTING

- 1) There is no significant difference between women and men in terms of communication.

Table 1: t-test analysis showing communication pattern between women and men.

Group	N	X	S. D	df	t-cal	t-table
Women	120	78.71	12.55	238	0.052	1.960
Men	120	77.86	12.48			

From table 1, it could be seen that the number of women is 120, with a mean of 78.71 and standard deviation of 12.55. The number of men is 120 with a mean of 77.86 and standard deviation of 12.48. Their degree of freedom was 238. The t-cal was (0.052) while t-tab was (1.960), the hypothesis is accepted. Hence, there is no significant difference between women and men in terms of communication in Ekiti state.

- 2) There is no significant difference in communication pattern of satisfied couples and dissatisfied couples.

Table 2: t-test analysis showing communication pattern between satisfied and dissatisfied couples.

Group	N	X	S. D	df	t-cal	t-table
Satisfied	60	48.33	9.83	118	3.638	1.980
Dissatisfied	60	42	9.17			

From table 2, it could be seen that the number of satisfied couples are 60 with the mean of 48.33 and standard deviation of 9.83. The number of dissatisfied couples is 60 with a mean of 42 and standard deviation of 9.17. Their degree of freedom was 118. The t-cal (3.638) is greater than t-table (1.980). Since the t-cal (3.638) is greater than t-table (1.980), the hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there are significant differences between the communication pattern of satisfied couples and dissatisfied couples in Ekiti State.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The findings from the study revealed that both men and women are involved in communication in the home and that communication is very essential among couples because the lack of communication pose many threats to the relationship of couples. This agrees with McGrath (2012) opined that communication often improves naturally when we align our desires and attitudes with principles of commitment, honesty, personal accountability and loving actions. Putting our heart right has to come before putting our communication right.

Also that there was significant difference between men and women in term of communication. It was revealed that women are more inclined in conveying feelings, idea and personal information than men (Danesy and Okediran 2006). The findings is in agreement with them that women are more inclined than men to disclose personal information, such as sadness, fear, love, happiness and anger. It is also in agreement with J Gray (1992) that opined that men and women are quite different in terms of their emotional experiences and their communication of those experiences.

Also, that there is significant difference between communication patterns of satisfied couples and dissatisfied couples. This is probably because dissatisfied couples are mostly frustrated because of their inability to provide most of

their needs and therefore occupied with different work activities and lack the time to communicate as expected. This agrees with the findings of Willard (2011) and Gottman (2004) that dissatisfied couples more often engage in destructive communication patterns than satisfied couples and that the behaviours of contempt and defensiveness are the most corrosive and that the man's withdrawal from conflict is the strongest predictor of divorce. The findings is also in agreement with Danesy & Okediran (2006) that dissatisfied couples are more inclined to form negative attributions towards the partner during conflict and attribute behaviour to internal factors. Whereas, satisfied couples are more likely to attribute behaviour to external factors. The findings also agrees with Akinade (2010) that, the couples in distressed marriages, on the other hand, were motivated by more negative intentions in their communication with their spouses. Couples in high quality marriages act with more positive intentions toward their spouses than do couples in distressed marriages. In addition, with the happily married couples only, there appears to be a positive relationship between skill level and marital satisfaction, with higher skill levels associated with greater satisfaction levels.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

From the findings of the study, gender is one significant factor that affects communication among couples. The differences in women and men attitude are a determinant of their communication pattern, as women compared to men, express a greater range of emotions, such as sadness, fear, love, happiness and anger. Women are also more inclined than men to disclose personal information, such as their personal opinion or details of their personal history. Also the financial status (satisfied/dissatisfied) of couples contributes to their pattern of communication. It was therefore recommended that couples should endeavour to express their thoughts and feelings fully and encourage each other to do the same. Furthermore, couples are to resolve misunderstandings by asking questions and seeking clarifications rather than by getting angry. Finally, couples are to express themselves to their partners, talk about the problems in their life, share their deepest fears and secrets with each other and cherish the best moments of life together, this is to say that appropriate communication patterns agreeable by the couples be adopted.

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**APPENDIX**

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