

# An Empirical Study on the Causes and Effects of Communication Breakdown in Marriages

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## Abstract

The focus of this study was to find out the causes and effects of communication breakdown in marriages. 100 randomly selected married couples in Babcock University constituted the sample. The percentage frequency was used to compare the causes and effects of communication breakdown. The findings showed that most of the respondents agree to the statement that lack of effective communication is the bane to breakdown in marriage. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended, that couples consider communication serious in their relationship starting with the courtship stage. Also, marriage counsellors and Clergies should ensure they stress the need for effective communication when counselling couples before and after marriage.

## 1. Introduction

Marriage like the day of worship was the first institution created by God. While the animals communicated with their spouses, Adam had no one to communicate with that could reason with him and no companion. God saw this and made the declaration that it is not good for man to be alone then he made a help meet for him (Gen 2:18, 22). This means that God knew no man can be an island even in their marriage else we would be hermaphrodites. When Eve was created, Adam experienced happiness because he had a mate to communicate with. According to Munroe, marriage is a religious duty and is consequently a moral safeguard as well as a social necessity.<sup>1</sup> It has been observed that marriage serves as a moral safeguard because it acts as an outlet for sexual needs and regulates man's sexual desire/expression so that man does not become a slave to it.

This applies today; communication can determine the success or failure of marriages because communication is the creation, exchange and interpretation of meaningful messages. Communication is not static; it is a dynamic process of sharing information. It can either be verbal or non-verbal. Verbal has to do with speech while non-verbal has to do with facial expressions, body language or gestures, and so on.

According to Esere, Yusuf and Omotosho, "marriage depends on many different things to be successful: trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty, sincerity and above all effective communication."<sup>2</sup> Van Pelt asserts that "the happiness of a couple depends largely on the effectiveness of their communication. How a couple communicates can make or mar their relationship. Communicating effectively will allow the couple to negotiate problem areas, fulfil needs, avoid misunderstandings, and develop intimacy over the years."<sup>3</sup>

Divorce has become the order of the day in our world, it is something prevalent with the Westerners, and Africans are also taking to divorce as the solution to whatever marital problems that may arise. Even in the Christian community, divorce is taking the centre stage. If analysed closely, it will be discovered that the starting point of some of these problems is ineffective communication. In a study by Kitson as cited by Amato and Previti lack of communication was ranked high in the reported causes of divorce. When there are little issues, they are left to bloom and become almost bigger than the couple can handle.<sup>4</sup>

In view of this, this research is aimed at investigating the causes and effects of communication breakdown in marriages with a view to finding solutions.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Communication breakdown has been identified as one of the chief causes of marital conflicts. Amos 3:3 puts it right "Can two walk together except they agree?" Communication is at the core of our being, where communication is not utilised properly, problems could arise and where there are problems and there is effective communication, such problems could be resolved easily. Poor communication in the family can also lead to

<sup>1</sup> Munroe, M. (2003). Understanding the woman's communication style: Promoting positive Muslim marital relations. *A Journal of Sound Islamic Thoughts*, 1(1), 46-51.

<sup>2</sup> Esere, M. O., Yusuf, J. and Omotosho, J. A. (2011). Influence of Spousal Communication on Marital Stability: Implication for Conducive Home Environment. *Edo Journal of Counselling*. Vol. 4, Nos. 1& 2, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Van Pelt, N. L. (1997). *Heart to Heart: The Art of Communication*. Madrid, Spain: Editorial Safeliz.

<sup>4</sup> Amato, P. R. and Previti, D. (2003). People's Reasons for Divorcing: Gender, Social Class, the Life Course, and Adjustment. *Journal of Family Issues*, Vol. 24 No. 5, 602-626. Sage Publications.

strains on the health of the couple and also the children (where applicable); it might also affect their interpersonal relationship with other people and might also affect the jobs of the couples as their level of productivity will be low. This underscores the importance of communication in the family as it permeates every sphere of the family. Communication breakdown if not handled appropriately can lead to divorce which could lead to other problems in the family. This paper constitutes communication between spouses (husband and wife) not in the family generally like with the children or in-laws.

This study therefore seeks to find out the hindrances to effective communication, the effects and also solution to communication breakdown in marriages.

## 1.2 Research Questions

Having understood that communication is essential in marriage, the following research questions will help to address the effects and solutions to communication breakdown in marriage:

1. To what extent can effective communication improve marital relationship?
2. What are some of the effects of communication breakdown in marriage?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Communication and marriage

Undiyaundeye defines marriage as “the coming together of two persons in love with consent of parents, guardians and witnesses for the purpose of procreation and companionship.”<sup>1</sup>

Askari, Mohd Noah, Hassan and Baba assert that “marriage is a foundation in every society.”<sup>2</sup> Citing Olson and Olson, they added that it can be the most nourishing and enduring asset in human relationship.<sup>3</sup> Also citing Larson and Holman, they posit “that marriage provides the fundamental structure for establishing family relationships which are aimed at expanding the family by creating the next generation.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Van Pelt the happiness of a couple can be measured to a large degree by the effectiveness of their communication. Though couples top meeting their emotional needs as priority, communication however is the basic propeller to intimate relationships.<sup>5</sup>

Jent citing some authors define communication in parts: “Com means together with” and “munis connotes a gift of self, a strengthening or fortifying of the relationship, a binding of oneself with the other person.”<sup>6</sup> “This means communication requires a mutual sharing of oneself with one's spouse.” Matthews defines communication “as the process by which one person receives messages from another. It is the sharing of messages, ideas, attitudes, and feelings resulting in a degree of understanding between a sender and a receiver.”<sup>7</sup>

Jent citing Lederer and Jackson in *the mirages of marriage* gives a workable definition of marital communication as “a constant exchange of information—of messages—between the two spouses by speech, letter writing, talking on the telephone, the exhibition of bodily or facial expression, and other methods as well.”<sup>8</sup> This underscores that communication can be verbal and non-verbal.

Jent identifies some ways to communicate nonverbally: proxemics (distance), facial expression, paralanguage (manner of communication), eye contact, personal attire, hand gestures, body position, posture, and head movement. He states however that the most common are facial expression and hand gestures.<sup>9</sup>

Verbal communication is mainly with words. Non verbal communication may replace the verbal when there are no spoken words as in the case of facial expression and proxemics; it may reinforce verbal communication when in agreement with the verbal, or it may contradict the verbal.<sup>10</sup>

Spousal communication goes beyond just greeting in the morning, and making some remarks at the dinner table. Peterson elucidates that “meaningful conversation is telling your spouse where you are-

<sup>1</sup> Undiyaundeye, F. A. (2006). Effects of Marital Conflict Management Skills on Marital Stability among Literate Couples in Northern Cross River State. A Thesis in The Department of Arts And Social Science Education, Faculty of Education, University of Jos.

<sup>2</sup> Askari, M., Mohd Noah, S. B., Hassan, S. T. and Baba, M. B. (2012). Comparison the Effects of Communication and Conflict Resolution Skills Training on Marital Satisfaction. *International Journal of Psychological Studies*. Vol. 4 (1); doi:10.5539/ijps.v4n1p182 URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijps.v4n1p182>. www.ccsenet.org/ijps.

<sup>3</sup> Olson D. H., & Olson A. K. (2000). Prepare-Enrich Program: version. In: Berger R, Hannah M, editors. *Preventive approaches in couples therapy*. Lillington (NC): Edwards Brothers; 1999. p. 197–202.

<sup>4</sup> Larson, J. H., & Holman, T. B. (1994). Predictors of marital quality and stability. *Family Relations*, 43, 228-237.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 13

<sup>6</sup> Glenn A. Jent, Ed.D., is Professor of Christian Education at Torch Trinity cited the work of Victor Salz, *Between Husbands and Wives* (New York: Paulist Press, 1972), 55.

<sup>7</sup> Matthews, D. W. (n. d.). Family & Consumer Sciences. Marriage Enrichment: Communication in Marriage Published North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service.

<sup>8</sup> Lederer, William J., and Don D. Jackson. *The Mirages of Marriage*. New York: W. W. Norton, 1968.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 103

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 104

intellectually, emotionally, and physically.” She adds that because two people live together, it does not mean they would know all about each other they still have to talk.<sup>1</sup>

Van Pelt states that communication in the marriage “sparks caring, giving, sharing and affirming and this depends on the proper utilization of the principles of listening and speaking.”<sup>2</sup>

Eseré, Yusuf and Omotosho posit that “communication is the key to a strong, healthy relationship. It allows partners to feel love and caring.”<sup>3</sup>

Malone-Colon further states that “communication is effective when interactions between spouses are open, honest and conscious and when what spouses express, both verbally and nonverbally, is in line with what they truly think and feel. It also requires that spouses truly listen to one another and feel that they are heard, understood, and respected by each other.”<sup>4</sup>

According to Peterson “communication is the instrument used to solve the problems. She adds that in order to communicate effectively there is need for some special skills.”<sup>5</sup>

Some of those skills are: <sup>6</sup>

1. **Be aware of your communication style.** Some people are naturally loquacious and can hardly make a point without raising their voice. In view of this it is important for the couple to understand how the other communicates. If one person sees raising the voice as a normal thing, the other person should endeavour to speak softly whether it is the man or the woman. As much as one should communicate his feelings at any time, they must avoid confrontational words for example words that are demeaning that could denigrate the other; they must avoid incessant complaints but look for better ways to lay their minds bare on an issue, Nancy Van Pelt says they can adopt the I-message instead of You-message, that is expressing how you feel like he is not listening, how you feel he is not giving you enough attention or not taking you out to dinner again etc. <sup>7</sup>
2. **Determine an appropriate time for discussion.** This is a really important point; the couple must know the appropriate time to discuss issues. Some prefer it at the dinner table but very sensitive issues can be left till after dinner especially where there are kids and they all eat together at the dinner table. When discussions are made at the dinner table, one or both of them might lose appetite even when they have not gone half way into the food. It is important to discuss in a relaxed atmosphere especially after a hard day’s work.
3. **Be alert to the non-verbal cues.** Communication scholars say humans do more non-verbal communication than verbal. Even when communicating verbally, the non-verbal cues could say more than the words expressed. We send messages by what we say and do not say. Non-verbal messages are communicated through gestures, postures, facial expressions or by other behaviours. To understand them you must learn to read the unspoken language of the eyes, the articulation of the body, and the message beneath the words. <sup>8</sup> Some people go home with piles of work and even make an office of the home and get too busy when they should pay attention to the home. For instance, the husband could be home from work and wants to discuss what happened at the office but the wife is either reading some magazine or newspaper or maybe watching a Tele Novella (Mexican soap opera); the husband is talking but only gets monosyllabic answers from the wife whose eyes are fixed on other things. That paints a picture of an insensitive or selective listener. The husband would sense that the wife regards what she is doing more than what he has to say. Paying attention both verbally and non-verbally reassures the other person and makes him or her feel accepted and loved.
4. **The importance of touch.** This expresses acceptance. It could be holding of hands while talking, sitting close enough to feel each other’s body, arms on the shoulder or arms on the waist to display ownership and romantic interest. <sup>9</sup> Touching each other could also help relieve stress and show support and protection. Van Pelt highlights some reasons why people cannot communicate: “first because the skills have never been taught or learned”,<sup>10</sup> Eseré et.al, corroborates this assertion that “effective communication requires practice of the skills of listening and expressing thoughts and feelings.”<sup>11</sup> Other reasons according to Van Pelt are:

*because they are afraid to share real thoughts and feelings with their mates to avoid rejection; also because some people feel it is easier to*

<sup>1</sup> Peterson, M. J. (n. d.). Chapter 15: Communication in marriage <http://msl1.mit.edu/ESD10/kidneys/HndbkPDF/Chap15.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 51

<sup>4</sup> Malone-Colon, L. What is a Healthy Marriage? National Center on African American Marriages and Parenting. [http://www.hamptonu.edu/ncaamp/docs/HU\\_NCAMP\\_Healthy\\_Marriage.pdf](http://www.hamptonu.edu/ncaamp/docs/HU_NCAMP_Healthy_Marriage.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 15-2

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15-3

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 15-4

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 16

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 52

*avoid and repress ideas and feelings than it is to learn how to process them properly; some people do not communicate also because they have never experienced success at it.*<sup>1</sup>

This could be as a result of childhood rejection, not having anyone to listen to you. Some people grew up in families where there was no one to listen and share their joys or pains with and because that intimate communication has never been there, when they get married it could become a challenge for them to communicate intimately with their spouse.

Couples must understand that “problems escalate when there is no communication, and many problems are resolved when there is effective communication”.<sup>2</sup>

Matthews states that “if love is the heartbeat of a marriage, communication is its lifeblood.” He further adds that “many research studies of family strengths found communication to be a common thread in keeping family relationships strong and viable. A marriage will be made or broken to the degree a couple learns and practices effective communication skills, a challenging task indeed”<sup>3</sup>

## 2.2 Communication breakdown

Communication skills have been identified by scholars as one of the ingredients to a healthy marriage. Malone-Colon posits that effective communication is “the CONNECTOR of the relationship” this means that “effective communication connects the individual and shared thoughts, feelings, experiences, dreams, and challenges of partners in relationship through verbal and nonverbal messages.”<sup>4</sup> She argues that communication can be for good and bad intentions. It can be for good intentions when “one intends to understand, connect, encourage, empower, or explain and bad intentions “when one intends to control, manipulate, win an argument, or insult.”<sup>5</sup> Matthews asserts that most conflict situations in marriage can be traced to communication breakdown.<sup>5</sup> Communication breakdown is simply when the couple hardly interacts and share information with each other. Their communication is mostly monosyllabic and has to do more with greetings (good morning, welcome, your food is ready etc); even when it is not monosyllabic, the couple hardly ever opens up to each other to share whatever joys or pains they feel maybe as a result of the union or other challenges. Also, when one of both spouses is hardly receptive to what the other is saying and also when they assume they know too much about the other without seeking to interact. Communication breakdown could also be when the couple hardly express their affection for each other, most times some couples assume that once they have good sex that is all there is to marriage forgetting that the other could bulge for sex so they do not go out looking for it. It is important for couples to learn to affirm their love, affection for each other; it gives them a sense of belonging.

Matthews further adds that “poor communication is the surest sign of unhappiness in marriage and the greatest predictor of marital trouble.”<sup>6</sup>

Jent citing Lederer and Jackson attributes communication breakdown to cultural differences. The difference could also be based on religion. He asserts that the differences could lead to hostility and because of fear; a spouse might not be willing to speak up to address the hostility.<sup>7</sup> Jent adds that “the spouse may be afraid for three reasons: a fear of upsetting the loved one, a fear of being rejected by the other, or a fear of being unable to bear the rejection because of a need for the other's love.”<sup>8</sup>

Some barriers to communication according to Jent are: divergent interests, inadequate time, hostile feelings, fear, pre-judgments, not listening, destructive criticism, fuzzy thinking, language (jargon), nagging, sulking, bypassing, gunny-sacking.<sup>9</sup> Charles Sell as cited by Jent adds some additional barriers: differences between men and women and how they think and how they perceive things, pride that makes them feel the other person is not worth understanding, being afraid to really understand because it will hurt them or because they may have to do something about it, and self-centeredness.<sup>10</sup>

Matthews identifies some areas of communication breakdown in the marriage and proffers solutions:<sup>11</sup>

- **Poor Quality Communication:** This is where the sensitivities and emotions of the couple get in the way. It could be that the timing is bad for a particular discussion, or emotions are so intense as to get in the way. One way to address this is by using “I” statements instead of “You” statements; ‘You’ statements

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 19

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 23

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 30

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 24

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 52

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 53

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 24

sometimes bring about name-calling. Emotions could becloud objectivity and a sense of reasoning, it is important to address it.

- **Faulty Communication:** this occurs when other things get in the way, such as distractions or preoccupations. Trying to discuss something important when your spouse is watching a favourite television programme or reading the newspaper results in incomplete, ineffective communication. It is important therefore to eliminate distractions; setting aside special times for communicating, and being sensitive to the needs of the other at that moment will go a long way in eliminating faulty communication.
- **Misunderstanding:** this is injecting your own meaning into the message passed across from the sender which is your spouse; it could pass for been judgmental. Humans no matter how long they have been together can interpret the same message in different ways and this could distort the actual meaning of the message. Thus the receiver of the message needs to listen attentively and like Van pelt says listen with your mouth. This is using verbal words such as ‘I see’, ‘Hmmm’, ‘No kidding’ and other casual or genuine responses to show your partner that you are actually listening.<sup>1</sup> “This is also where reflection, or paraphrasing, the message back to your partner can be extremely helpful. If you perceived or interpreted the wrong message, reflection will allow your partner to clarify the exact meaning”.<sup>2</sup>
- **Non-comprehension:** for example, if you ask how work went today, and your spouse answers in computer jargon, you will not understand all of what he/she is trying to tell you; this is non-comprehension. It could also occur because of different interests, different ways of looking at things, or different education or expertise in an area. Patience and extra care in expressing yourself clearly can clear the way for better understanding and comprehension.

Ninan, describes communication in marriage as the process of sharing together thoughts, ideas, feelings, problems, hurts and issues freely between husbands and wives.<sup>3</sup> Communication permeates every sphere of the union and a breakdown could lead to other problems in the home.

### 2.3 Causes of communication breakdown in marriage

This study seeks to find out some causes of communication breakdown in marriages; some of the reasons outlined are drawn from some literature. Fade lists some of the causes of breakdown in communication in the home:<sup>4</sup>

- Lack of sincere forgiveness by partner
- Impatience, leading to over-reactions
- Constant nagging
- Sexual denial
- The use of unkind words on your partner
- Different educational level (and understanding)
- Too busy with other things
- Long absence of a partner causing loss of intimacy
- Lack of courage/boldness
- Bottled emotions/anger/bitterness/frustration
- Constant intimidation
- Selfishness
- Use of past mistakes/failures
- Stubbornness/ Arrogance
- Taking marriage problems outside

Ninan explicates some causes of communication breakdown as follows:<sup>5</sup>

1. **Wrong postures.** There are several wrong assumptions people have at the back of their minds about life, marriage, dealing with others, etc., which can act as foundations for building up wrong communication practices. Some of these are: this is the way I am, my partner had better get used to me, what is the need to talk about this again? Time will heal, my way of looking at things is better etc.
2. **Gender biases.** Van Pelt explains that “between the years of five and fifteen, a child spends much time with peers of his or her own sex, learning to converse much the same way they do.”<sup>6</sup> Anthropologists Daniel Maltz and Ruth Borker as cited by Van Pelt said boys and girls socialize differently. Little girls

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 45

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>3</sup> Ninan, J. (n.d.) Communications breakdown in marriage. Comfort and counsel. <http://www.c-n.c.org/tips/combreak.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Fade, A. (n.d.). Causes of Marital Communication Breakdown and How to Deal with them. [http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Aphys\\_Fade](http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Aphys_Fade)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 15

prefer to play in pairs, and love sharing what they call private secrets, girls also prefer cooperative play.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, little boys play more in larger groups, and are not as verbal as girls; there is less talking and more doing when boys are together. When a new boy enters the group, he jockeys for position and status; this is done by joking and competitive talk about who is best, each seeks his place in life through the group. They grow up with these attitudes; a woman gets married and expects intimate and meaningful heart to heart talk but men don't do heart to heart talks but may miss doing things with male friends where activities play a major role. If couples do not understand how different their partners are from them just because they are of the opposite gender, a lot of communication can get fouled up. Some other differences between men and women according to Ninan are:<sup>2</sup>

- Men talk with the goal of exchanging information. Women talk just to connect with other people.
- When a wife shares a problem with her husband, the husband tends to offer a direct solution. But the wife is not necessarily looking for a solution as much as emotional support.
- Men can basically handle only one task at a time. Woman can handle several tasks at the same time.
- When men face problems they tend to withdraw till they can figure out how to proceed. Women respond to problems by sharing with as many people as possible.
- Men do not wish to appear vulnerable by asking for help. Women like to appear vulnerable because then they will have someone coming to help them.
- Men like to act independent and avoid intimacy. Women enjoy intimacy and dependence.
- Men like to talk in public because it makes them feel important, but hardly talk in private. Women talk much in private because it builds intimacy, but feel insecure in public.

**3. Bad role models or lack of them in childhood.** Experiences in childhood leave an almost indelible impression on our mind. Children who had no one to listen to them like absentee parents, unapproachable parents, busy parents or guardians, ever-quarrelling parents, bossy father, nagging mother etc. almost grow up to be like that. We tend to imitate our parents or other caregivers and authority figures in the way they communicated with others.

**4. Past experience of failure to resolve conflicts.** People give up thinking that it is no use trying again. Without understanding the differences between how husbands and wives communicate, couples who try to communicate seem to come up against a wall.

**5. Unwillingness to acknowledge mistakes and set things right.** This is an ego problem where no one is willing to back down or take the first step forward. It is easier to sit back and put the blame on the other partner than to try and find better ways to communicate. One should not always wait for the one who went wrong to speak first, you can take the first step whether you were the erring one or not.

**6. Unwillingness to acknowledge breakdown.** When communications do breakdown, many couples are not willing to face up to the seriousness of things and seek help, for fear of losing face. This is the ultimate problem of couples who have separated, and who would rather sit separately and suffer than make attempts for reconciliation.

## **2.4 Effects of communication breakdown in marriage**

The breakdown in communication can lead to different things chief of which is divorce. Van Pelt explains that "ineffective communication patterns can lead to unresolved problems, unfulfilled needs, misinterpretation of motives, and constant hostility."<sup>3</sup> She explicates further that "all these could lead to dissension and might be difficult to solve because of the resentment that has grown in one or both parties."

## **3. Methodology**

The descriptive survey method was adopted for this study. It tries to collect information from a representative group and based on such sample, inferences are drawn about the behaviour of the entire population. Copies of questionnaire adapted from the study of Esere, Yusuf and Omotosho (2011) was used to determine the opinion, preferences and perception of persons of interest to the research. For ease of comprehension and analysis, the data collected from information gathered was being analyzed and processed using simple statistical technique.

### **3.1 Procedure**

One hundred married couple consisting of 50 males and 50 females were randomly selected and given copies of the Questionnaire to fill and return to the researchers.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., 15

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 48

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 20

**RESULTS: Demographic information**

**Table 1: Gender of respondents**

S/N	Gender	Number	Percent
1	Male	44	47.8
2	Female	48	52.2
	Total	92	100.0

Result in table 1 revealed that majority or 48 (52.2 percent) of the respondents are female while male respondents accounted for 47.8 percent of the total population.

**Table 2: Years of Marriage**

S/N	Years of Marriage	Number	Percent
1	0-5 years	21	22.8
2	6-10 years	10	10.2
3	11-15 years	15	16.3
4	16-20 years	20	21.7
5	21 and Above	26	29
	Total	92	100.0

Result in table 2 revealed that 26 (29 percent) of the respondents has been married for more than 21 years, 22.8 percent has been in the marriage between 0 to 5 years, 10.2 are between 6 to 10 years, while 16.3 are between 11-15 years and 21.7 percent are between 16 to 20 years of marriage.

**3.2 Analysis of Research Questions**

**To what extent can effective communication improve marital relationship?**

Respondents were given some statements to find out the extent to which effective communication can improve marital relationship.

**Table 3: Respondents perception on the importance of marriage**

	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
1	Communication is basic in marriage	70	15	5	1	1
2	Effective communication promotes intimacy among couples.	58	10	5	6	9
3	Maintaining an open line of communication between couples reduces marital instability.	60	10	5	10	7
4	Marital conflicts are easily resolved through the use of frank and open discussion	25	27	12	15	13
5	Effective communication promotes love and understanding among couples	35	13	14	25	5
6	Communication problem is a barrier to marital stability	56	8	11	7	6

From Table 3, majority of respondents agree that Communication is basic in marriage. The next statement explains that effective communication promotes intimacy among couples, majority of respondents also agree that this is true. Respondents also agreed highly that marital instability can be reduced when there is an open line of communication between couples. Statement 4 states that marital conflicts can be easily resolved through the use of frank and open discussion, this was also accepted by respondents though a large number also disagreed with this statement. Statement 5 explains that effective communication promotes love and understanding among couples, majority also accepted this but a large number is also at variance with this statement. The final statement states that communication problem is a barrier to marital stability; majority accepted this view that marriages can be more stable when there is proper communication between the couple.

**What are some of the effects of communication breakdown in marriage?**

Respondents were asked to identify some of the effects of communication breakdown in marriage. Some effects of communication breakdown drawn from the question are:

The couple sorting after undue privacy, Unnecessary silence, Unresolved issues, Unnecessary distance, Unfaithfulness (if issues are not resolved on time), Misunderstanding, Lack of trust, Selfishness, Self-righteousness, Fights and quarrels, Separation and divorce.

This could be the reason Van Pelt said that the happiness of a couple depends largely on the effectiveness of their communication. This means that how a couple communicates can make or mar their relationship. Communicating effectively will allow the couple to negotiate problem areas, fulfil needs, avoid misunderstandings, and develop intimacy over the years.

**4. Recommendations**

Marital conflict is often a complex problem that defies a simple solution. The Bible has much to say about the kind of attitude that ought to be expressed in a relationship of love. Paul is very definitive in his discussion of

what genuine love is to be like in First Corinthians 13:4-8: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs. . . . It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. Love never fails” (NIV).

John C. Howell indicates that there are Ten Commandments for effective communication that if followed can improve communication:

1. Be willing to recognize the need for improvement.
2. Plan for time together.
3. Respect the self-esteem of the mate.
4. Learn to listen intensively.
5. Dare to risk openness.
6. Be sure that the message heard is the message sent.
7. Try to clarify nonverbal signals.
8. Deal with issues at hand when in conflict.
9. Use communication aids.
10. Avoid typical communication errors. p.295

However, this study proposes that most will be resolved through understanding of spouse, admission of fault and prayer.

**Understand and love your spouse.** You cannot change your spouse until you know and accept him/her. Know his/her nature/character: what irritates, angers him/her, the temperament (sanguine, choleric, melancholy, and phlegmatic), is he/she an introvert, does he/she reason inductively or deductively, emotionally/sentimentally or logically?

**Most conflicts, however serious, can be resolved if spouses will learn to admit their faults and say sorry.** When you have wronged your mate and he/she is hurting no explanation will satisfy. Such explanations are often: good reasons for bad actions, excuses for doing wrong. It should be noted that only admission and confession of the wrong will keep the relationship going. Unfortunately, as simple and helpful as it is to say sorry this is sometimes a difficult lesson to teach and learn. When your spouse apologizes, you should accept the apology, forgive the offence and forget it (That is: Don't refer to it again). Let me offer an appropriate biblical insight. True forgiveness is never cheap. It includes repentance. Even God will not forgive a person who refuses to repent, admit, and confess his sins. Why did God destroy and not forgive Sodom and Gomorrah? Why will God not forgive but cast people into hell at the end of the age?

Along with other methods of conflict resolution **pray for divine intervention.** Pray for yourself, that God will help you to make efforts to be at peace with your spouse (Heb. 12:14). Pray that God will speak to, touch and transform your spouse. Pray that God will visit and transform your marriage and family. When marital conflicts are creatively resolved there will be peace in the hearts, love among spouses, and joy in the home.

The Bible further explains that we must be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to anger. This is in accordance with what different authors have said when one speaks, the other should listen and speak when it is necessary and they must both learn not to get angry easily and this can only happen when the couple understands each other. This understanding can only be enhanced by effective communication.

The study also recommends that marriage counsellors and clergies stress the need for communication in marriage when counselling intending couples before and after marriage.

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