

Strategies for Strengthening Spousal Relationships in the Family in Enugu State

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Abstract

This study focused on spousal relationship. Specifically, the study determined indicators and challenges of spousal relationships, as well as strategies for strengthening such relationships among couples in the family in Enugu state. It was a survey. The population was made up of 33, 245 secondary school teachers in Enugu State.. A sample of 385 spouses was selected for the study. Instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Data were analyzed using mean. Findings reveal 15 indicators of spousal relationship such as communication; 15 challenges of spousal relationships including financial and communication problems; and 10 strategies for improving spousal relationship such as making sacrifices in relationship for the sake of the other person.

Keywords: Couples; Marriage; Nigeria; Spousal; Strategies

Introduction

Spousal relationship describes that kind of relationship that exists between a husband and wife. Farlex (2016) defines spousal relationship as the state of being a married couple, voluntarily joined for life (or until divorce). Furthermore, Thomas (2004) defines spousal relationship as any form of interaction that exist between husbands and wives, couples or two persons who live as such even though they are not. To this end Ryan-Froslic (2010) adds that spousal relationships are many and varied. According to the author, individuals in spousal relationships, whether they are married or otherwise, structure their relationships differently

as the basis of some relationships are expressed in the presence or lack of the following: finance, property(ies), sexual relations, companionship, demonstrative and public display of affection, team work at all times, procreation, and so forth. Ryan-Froslic (2010) therefore concludes that it is the variation in the way human beings structure their relationships that makes the determination of when a spousal relationship exists. However, for the purpose of this study, spousal relationship is conceptualised to mean the interaction between two married couples who in the eyes of the law are seen to be husbands and wives.

In understanding spousal relationships, there are certain characteristics or indicators that help define its nature and function. For example, the 2008 relationship indicators survey carried out by Credit Union Australia (CUA, 2008) highlighted the fact that the vast majority of couples in Australia have relationships of some kind which are marked by friendship, romance and being familial with each other. Other studies such as that of Terman and Buttenwieser (1988) have pointed at certain personality indicators such as interest maturity, masculinity-femininity, self sufficiency, introversion and dominance as typifying most type of spousal relationships. Other indicators assessed by Kelly, Berscheid, Christensen, Harvey, Huston, Levinger, McClintock, Peplau, and Peterson (1983) include: direct and indirect interdependence, among others. Campbell (2009) have identified the following variables as indicators of a normal, functional couple relationships: honesty and accountability, open communication, negotiation and fairness, economic and financial partnership, shared responsibility; shared power, respect, trust and support, non-threatening behaviour, intimacy, physical affection, and personal integrity. To a greater extent, these indicators help to measure "relationship temperature" among married couples.

There is need to maintain cordial spousal relationship because it is very essential for peaceful home. Studies have shown that spousal relationships

play significant roles on the health status and psychosocial well being, children's growth and upbringing, and decision making of couples on issues concerning the family and beyond (Gallo, Troxel, Kuller, Sutton-Tyrrell, Edmundowicz, & Mathews, 2003; Nyakato & Rwaubkwali, 2013; Robles & Kielcolt-Glaser, 2003; Saxbe & Repetti, 2009). The ways of maintaining spousal relationship include constant communication, good listening to each other, doing things in common, ability to endure each other an expression of sincerity (Saxbe & Repetti, 2009).

Relationships of every kind are filled with challenges which if not properly and carefully managed, may lead to the degeneration or expiration of such relationships. A number of studies have been done in this regard to highlight the problems couples face in their relationships. For example in the area of communication, O'leary and Smith (1991) observed that distressed couples show more negative statements and fewer positive statements and show greater reciprocation of negative behaviours during problem solving interaction. According to Weiss and Heyman (1997) one of the greatest challenges for couples locked into negative exchanges is to find an adaptive way of existing from such cycle. This is usually attempted through responses designed to repair the interaction (e.g., "You are not listening to me") that are typically delivered with negative emotion. Distressed couples therefore tend to respond to the negative affect by continuing the cycle. In all, one of fundamental challenge that

spouses experience in their relationships lies in the way they communicate with each other. The mismanagement of such communication gap could lead to a deteriorating relationship as time passes by. Additionally, the Psychotherapy Institute of Individual Family and Community Development (2008) identified the following problems in spousal relationships: disagreement resulting in unhappiness, criticism of each other, feeling of being treated unfairly, insecurity, feeling of being controlled by the other partner, feeling of being trapped in to marriage and thinking that one is sacrificing too much on marriage in the place of one's career.

In Enugu State, it has been observed that spousal relationships may be characterised by both "pain and pleasure," In this regard Lauren, (2017) posits that marriages in the state are besieged by numerous constraints that lead to divorce, marital disharmony, hatred, rancour, uncertainty, hostility, lack of love, lack of respects and trust among other things. With the report of the Social Welfare Department, Nsukka Local Government Area putting the number of broken homes and unsuccessful spousal relationships in the under listed years at: 141 in 2008, 144 in 2009, 135 in 2010, 164 in 2011 and 139 in 2012 in Nsukka alone, the extent of the problem across the entire state can better be imagined.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of the study was to evolve ways for strengthening spousal

relationships in families in Enugu State. Specifically, this study determined

1. indicators of positive spousal relationships among married couples in Enugu State.
2. factors that militate against positive spousal relationships in the family.
3. ways of promoting positive spousal relationships in the family.

Research Questions

This study answered the following questions:

1. What are the indicators of positive spousal relationships among married couples in Enugu State?
2. What are the factors that militate against positive spousal relationships?
3. What are the ways for promoting positive spousal relationships in the family?

Methodology

Design of the Study: The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey research design. It was considered suitable for describing the characteristics of the subject under investigation.

Area of the Study: The study area was Enugu State. Enugu state has 17 local government areas (LGAs) with Enugu as its capital There are three educational zones in Enugu State. Family values, including marriage appear to be held highly in the state.

Population of the Study: The target population was married female and male teachers in secondary school in Enugu State. Most of the secondary school teachers from Enugu State

possess the National Certificate in Education, others have first degrees where few even have higher degrees. The total number of secondary school teachers in Enugu state is 33, 245 (Ministry of Education, 2017).

Sample for the Study: The sample for the study was made up of 385 (192 male and 193 female) who were married. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed. One educational zone, Nsukka as purposively selected. At the second Stage 15 secondary schools with high population were purposively selected from the zone. At the third stage, married teachers from the selected schools were purposively sampled.

Instrument for Data Collection: Questionnaire was used for data collection. It was developed based on literature review and the specific purposes of the study. It had a 4- point scale. It was validated by three Home Economic lecturers. To determine the reliability of the instrument questionnaire, it was trial tested on 20

respondents from Enugu State, which is outside the study area. Cronbach Alpha method was adopted to measure the consistency coefficient of the questionnaire. It yield reliability coefficient of .70 .84 and .74 for table 1, 2 and 3 respectively. The overall reliability of the instrument was .76. The results indicated that the various sections were reliable.

Method of Data Collection: Three hundred and eighty-five copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents in their various by hand. All the 385 copies of the questionnaire were properly responded to. There was 100 percent return.

Method of Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation Mean ratings from 2.5 and above were considered as agreed upon while mean ratings of 2.49 and below were considered as disagreed upon.

Findings of the Study

The Findings of this study are presented in tables 1-3

Table 1: Mean Response of the Indicators of Spousal Relationships among Married Couples in the Family

S/N	Indicators of Spousal Relationship Scale	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{X}_3	Rmks
1	Ability to freely express feelings to partner verbally	2.5	3.24	2.55	Agree
2	Freely express feelings and thought exactly as one wants	3.1	2.55	3.55	Agree
3	Not harsh to partner during discussions	2.7	3.55	2.57	Agree
4	Regularly using the word 'please' during discussion	2.3	2.57	2.48	Agree
5	Share experience with partner with positive statements	2.5	2.48	2.4	Disagree
6	Maintaining eye contact during discussion	2.7	2.96	2.97	Agree

7	Observant to know when partner is not in good mood for long discussions.	1.09	2.2	1.09	Agree
8	Give time to each other's complaints	1.9	1.09	2.3	Disagree
9	Observe coded expression of partner in the form of gesture.	3.3	3.7	3.3	Agree
10	Understand non-verbal messages of spouse	2.5	3.3	2.6	Agree
11	Regular kissing of partner	2.5	2.5	2.8	Agree
12	Regular hugging	2.9	2.8	2.7	Agree
13	Patting partner when necessary	2.7	2.8	2.6	Agree
14	Engagement in sexual intercourse with partner	2.6	2.7	2.5	Agree
15	Creating time to do funny things together	2.9	2.56	2.6	Agree

Note: No of teachers 385; N_1 = No of male teachers 192; N_2 = number of teachers 193; \bar{X}_1 = mean responses of female teachers, \bar{X}_2 = mean responses of male teachers, \bar{X}_3 = mean responses of both female and male teachers.

Table 1 shows that items 5, 8 were disagreed upon with mean scores of 2.48, 2.33, respectively. While all other items were agreed upon as indicators of spousal relationships among married couples, the aforementioned mean scores show that respondents did not agree with the listed items. The result also showed that both male and female respondents disagree with items 5 and 8.

Table 2: Showing the Challenges of Spousal Relationships among Married in Enugu State

S/N	Challenges (Spousal Relationship Scale)	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{X}_3	Remarks
1	Hiding of debts or extravagant spending by husband or wife	2.6	2.6	2.51	Agree
2	Spending one partner's saving account without his/her consent	1.9	1.6	1.8	Disagree
3	Showing controlling behaviour in financial or money matters.	2.2	2.3	2.4	Disagree
4	Not enough income in to cover required spending	2.3	2.1	2.4	Disagree
5	Lack of financial security in the family	2.0	2.2	2.4	Disagree
6	Mental illness issues	2.3	2.3	2.3	Disagree
7	Infidelity problem	2.6	2.7	2.5	Agree
8	Sudden development of a terminal illness	1.0	1.1	1.9	Disagree
9	Work related	1.4	1.6	1.7	Disagree
10	Depression as a result of other factors like lack of finance	2.2	2.1	2.1	Disagree

11	Poor communication style with ones' partner	2.4	2.2	2.4	Disagree
12	Often criticising ones' partner	2.2	2.1	2.4	Disagree
13	Exposing one's partner's weakness to a third party	2.6	2.5	2.8	Agree
14	Responding harshly to one's in-law's criticisms or observations	2.5	2.6	2.7	Agree
15	Not being accommodating to one's in-laws	2.6	2.50	2.8	Agree

Note: No of teachers385; N₁=No of male teachers192; N₂= number of teachers193; \bar{X}_1 =mean responses of female teachers, \bar{X}_2 =mean responses of male teachers, \bar{X}_3 mean responses of both female and male teachers.

Table 2 shows that respondents agreed that the following challenges are common with couple's relationships in marriage: Poor communication style between couples (\bar{X} , 1.89) and financial issues (\bar{X} , 2.57). On the other hand, respondents disagreed having any of the other challenges as affecting their relationship with their spouse. The result showed no difference in the responses of male and female respondents.

Table 3: Mean Responses on Strategies on how to Combat Challenges of Spousal Relationships among Married Couples in Enugu State

S/N	Strategies for enhancing Spousal Relationship	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{X}_3	Rmrks
1	Spouse should have open discussions to identify the causes and solution to their problems	3.5	3.7	3.5	Agree
2	Improve their communication skills	3.4	3.6	3.8	Agree
3	Negotiation on what to give and take for issues to be resolved	2.8	2.9	3.1	Agree
4	Develop the skills to make compromises	3.2	3.0	3.2	Agree
5	Marriage counselors/therapist, religious leaders or respected members of the extended family should be allowed to resolve marital problems	3.1	3.2	3.3	Agree
6	Listening and evaluating each other's point of view	3.1	3.0	3.6	Agree
7	Develop the ability to endure each other's excesses	3.5	3.2	3.4	Agree
8	Doing things in common	3.1	3.5	3.5	Agree
9	Revive romantic relationships between couples	3.4	3.4	3.4	Agree

9	Have role models or mentors we should consult, listen to or aspire to be like	3.0	3.1	3.0	Agree
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Note: No of teachers385; N_1 =No of male teachers192; N_2 = number of teachers193; \bar{X}_1 =mean responses of female male teachers, \bar{X}_2 =mean responses of female teachers, \bar{X}_3 mean responses of both female and male teachers.

Table 3 shows the strategies on how to combat challenges of spousal relationships among married couples in the family. Result revealed that respondents agreed with all the possible strategies that can be adopted in tackling the problems associated with spousal relationships. There was no difference in the responses between male and female respondents.

Discussion of Finding

The findings show that variables such as: trust, sense of humor, empathy, ability to resolve conflicts, effective communication among others are indicators of spousal relationships. There was no difference in the responses of both male and female respondents. This result is found to be consistent studies of Campbell, 2009; Credit Union Australia, 2008; United States National Survey of Marital Strength, 2013). For example, Campbell, (2009) in a study reported humour as an essential indicator of spousal relationship. Credit Union Australia, (2008) reported that the ability of resolve conflict as a critical indicator of spousal relationship. The United States National Survey of Marital Strength, (2013) found that effective communication is a fundamental indicator of spousal relationship. The result of this study is equally consistent to that of Jason and

Kristi (2017) who found that communication is essential in spousal relationship.

Findings on the challenges that are associated with spousal relationships among married couples in the family, respondents only agreed that two fundamental variables are the perceived challenges they face in their relationships with their spouses. This is shown in Table 2. Respondents agreed that the following challenges are common with couple's relationships in marriage: Poor communication style between couples and financial issues (X , 2.57). On the other hand, respondents disagreed having any of the other challenges as affecting their relationship with their spouse. These core problems have been highlighted by studies in this regard. Some of these studies like that of Dew and Stewart (2012) have found out that economic pressure, communication issues and financial issues contribute to the problems of spousal relationships among married couples. When the result of the study was examined based on the responses of both male and female respondents, it was found that they did not differ in their responses. Overall, the result of this study is consistent with that of Katherine and Markie (2018) and Lauren (2017).

Findings on possible strategies that could reduce the challenges that stare

couples in the face in their bid to enjoying their relationships. In response to this request, respondents agreed that sacrificing in relationship for the sake of the other person, making compromises, visit to Marriage counselors/therapist, religious leaders or respected members of the extended family, listening and evaluation of each other's views, endurance, re-igniting romantic relationships, having role models or mentors to consult or listen to, among others are effective strategies that must be employed in order to alleviate the challenges of spousal relationships as well as its effects on married couples. There was no difference in the responses of both male and female respondents. The result of this study was found to be consistent with that of Ameron, Barros-Gomes, Smith-Marek, Bryan and Stith (2017) who found that spousal relationship could be better enhanced through romance and other emotional related strategies. Saxbe, and Repetti, (2009) reported that one of the ways of promoting spousal relationship is through humour while Nyakato, and Rwabukwali. (2013) found that effective communication and quick resolution of conflicts could help promote spousal relationship. Lauren (2017) found that couples wishing to promote positive relationship must develop conflict resolution mechanisms. Jason and Kristi (2017) found that communication among couples based on mutual respect could best promote positive spousal relationship.

Conclusion

The finding that communication, skill to resolve conflict, handling differences, and trust among other qualities are central to ideal spousal relationships. Challenges of spousal relationships among married couples are inherent in financial and communication problems. The result of this study has implications on family wellness, marriage counselling and theory development. Regarding family wellness, the result could prove beneficial to those who may be interested in promoting the wellness of families through improvements in spousal relationship. Such persons could have empirical evidence that could guide them. With regard to marriage counselling, the result could be helpful to marriage counsellors in their task of promoting good relationship among couples. Finally, those who may be interested in advancing theory relating to healthy spousal relationship could also find the result of this study useful. Therefore, the basic contribution of this study is that it has shown evidence regarding how to improve spousal relationship among couples.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- ❖ Marriage counselors/therapist, religious leaders or respected members of the extended family must also be involved in the sensitization programme. People involved in marital challenges must know where to go for help and

understand what to do to strengthen and if need be salvage their relationship.

- ❖ Couples should share feelings, personal information and provide emotional support if need be to salvage their relationship.
- ❖ Couples should maintain constant communication and promote humour in their families as doing so could enhance positive relationship among them.

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