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Relationship between Communication and Marital Satisfaction among Christian Couples: A Case Study of Two Selected Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Relationship between Communication and Marital Satisfaction among Christian Couples: A Case Study of Two Selected Churches in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract

There exists high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, even among church couples. This study sought to examine the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction in Christian married couples in two selected churches in Nairobi County. The study adopted a quantitative research method and used a descriptive study research design. The findings indicated that there was a statistically significant strong positive correlation between marital satisfaction and communication. The study concluded that communication was critical to the quality of a marriage. This implies that the greater the qualities of communication in a marriage, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction. The research recommended that the church should create greater awareness of the importance and significance of constructive conflict resolution as a vehicle for enhancing marital satisfaction among Christian couples.

Keywords: *Communication, Marital Satisfaction, Christian Couples*

1.0 Introduction

Marriage as cited by Tummala (2008), has been described as the most important and fundamental human relationship because it provides the primary structure for establishing a family relationship and also the next generation. According to Estella (2017), marriage serves various needs such as the fulfillment of sexual, social, and psychological needs; reproduction, peace and comfort; personal and social development; and health and social security. A good marriage provides individuals with a sense of meaning and identity in their lives (Tummala, 2008); a good marriage should yield both physical, psychological health, and happiness to a married couple, a feeling referred to as marital satisfaction (Estella, 2017).

Despite marriage been a highly desirable relationship, statistics indicate that marital satisfaction is not usually achieved; and that having a satisfying marriage is increasingly becoming out of the ordinary (Tummala, 2008). Divorce and marital breakdown are on the rise. Some estimates as observed by Tashman (2007), indicate that fifty percent (50%) of people who get married end up in divorce court and the approximately fifty percent (50%) of marriages that do not end in divorce; one can speculate that a large percentage of them may opt for an informal divorce, or what can be called emotional divorce.

A study carried out by Njenga and Langat (2015) focused more on –marital conflict management among couples. The study found out that marital conflict is a part of everyday life and how couples handle conflict in their relationship affects the strength and type of relationship a couple may have. Therefore, any form of spousal conflict may have the power to destroy or build a marriage. Thus, the researcher was interested in investigating the relationship between spousal communication and marital satisfaction among Christian couples.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Kenya is a Christian dominated country; approximately 70% of Kenyans are Christians (42% Protestant, 28% Catholic); about 24% are adherents of indigenous religions; 6% are Muslim (East Africa Living Encyclopedia). Statistics on the state of marriages in Kenya are shocking and this trend is taking an upward trajectory. Omoro (2018) cited an earlier InfoTrak survey of 2010 which showed that only 40% of Kenyans are happily married. The report further reported that 29 % of marriages in Kenya are crumbling. A 2015 survey report published by Daystar University titled –*Redeeming Christian Marriage and Family in Kenya* brought to light more alarming statistics. The survey sampled 1200 Kenyans spread across different marital status (married, divorced, and separated), drawn from 46 out of the 47 counties. Key findings: 42% of divorced couples had divorced by their fifth anniversary; 77% had divorced by their 10th anniversary; and that only 23% divorced after the tenth anniversary. The study survey by Daystar University also established a 10% divorce rate across the nation (Daystar University Publication, 2015). As Onyango (2013) observes, there exists a high rate of marital dissatisfaction due to marital conflicts, not even the church has been spared. Although people have associated high levels of religiosity with high levels of marital satisfaction, little is known as to the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction among Christian couples. This study examined the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction in Christian married couples in two selected churches in Nairobi County.

2.0 Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the communication Model developed by Dan Jackson and Jay Haley- members of Bateson's schizophrenia perfect institution. In a bid to understand behavior, communication theorists suggest disregarding the past while they search for patterns with which to understand behavior in the present. Bertulaffy (1950) as cited by Okello (2005), stated that -communication theorists found several ideas useful in explaining how family functions. In this model, relationships between communicants can be described as either complementary or symmetrical.

Complementary relationships are those based on differences; differences that fit together. For instance, a relationship where one partner is assertive and the other submissive, with each reinforcing the other's position (Okello, 2005). Conversely, proportioned communication relationships depend on equality among the partners in a relationship where the behavior of one partner tends to reflect that of their partner. Patterns of interaction are indeed identical with communication and communication patterns change, as communication is linked to chains of stimulus and response. This model helps account the differences in communication behaviors across the distressed and non-distressed couples.

2.1 Empirical Review

Couples exhibit a wide variety of behaviors when they engage in conflict and which in most cases affect their marital satisfaction differently. According to Birditt and Fingerman (2005) these behaviors range from name-calling and arguing, to listening and discussing the problem, avoiding the situation and person, doing nothing, and letting the situation blow over. The way a couple communicates in conflict and non-conflict situations has a direct influence on marital satisfaction.

Distressed couples are more defensive than are non-distressed couples (Genshaft, 1980). Margolin and Wampold (1981) also observed less problem solving, and more verbal and non-verbal negative behaviors in distressed couples than in non-distressed couples. Birchler, Weiss, and Vincent (1975) obtained data that portrayed that distressed couples tend to engage in fewer positive interactions and more negative behavioral interactions during casual conversation and problem-solving than non-distressed couples. The more the couples become distressed the more they will find themselves engaged in even more conflict and there is a tendency that they will be able to participate in fewer recreational activities together as a couple.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research method and used a descriptive study research design. The target population of the study was 450 married church members, in which the researcher used Yaro Yamane formulae to derive a sample of 212 married church members. A structured questionnaire was used to undertake the survey; Marital Satisfaction Scale and Conflict Resolution Style Inventory were the main tools for data collection. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science for both descriptive and inferential statistics. Data was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative techniques, and more specifically Pearson's and Spearman correlation technique was used to establish the relationship between the study variables. Qualitative data was analyzed through thematic techniques.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Marital Satisfaction

This study sought to establish the levels of marital satisfaction among Christian couples in the two selected churches in Nairobi County. To measure and score marital satisfaction the study used the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS) questionnaire. The RDAS questionnaire is made up of three subscales namely; *dyadic consensus*- degree to which one is in agreement with the spouse; *dyadic satisfaction*- degree that spouse feels satisfied with the partner; and *dyadic cohesion*- degree to which a spouse participates in activities with the partner. The scale has 14 items that rate aspects of marital satisfaction on a 6 or 5 Likert scale. Scores range from 0 to 69 whereby higher scores are an indication of greater relationship satisfaction while lower scores indicate greater relationship distress. The cut-off score for the RDAS is 48 such that scores of 48 and above indicate marital non-distress and scores of 47 and below indicate marital/relationship distress (Crane et al, 2000). Table 1 presents the frequency of distress marriages and non-distress marital relationships among respondents in the two selected churches in Nairobi County; Distress marriages (RDAS sum score < than 48); Non-distress (RDAS sum score > than 48).

Table 1: Marital distress case summary

Satisfaction category		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Distress marriage	113	53.3
	Non-distress marriage	99	46.7
	Total	212	100.0

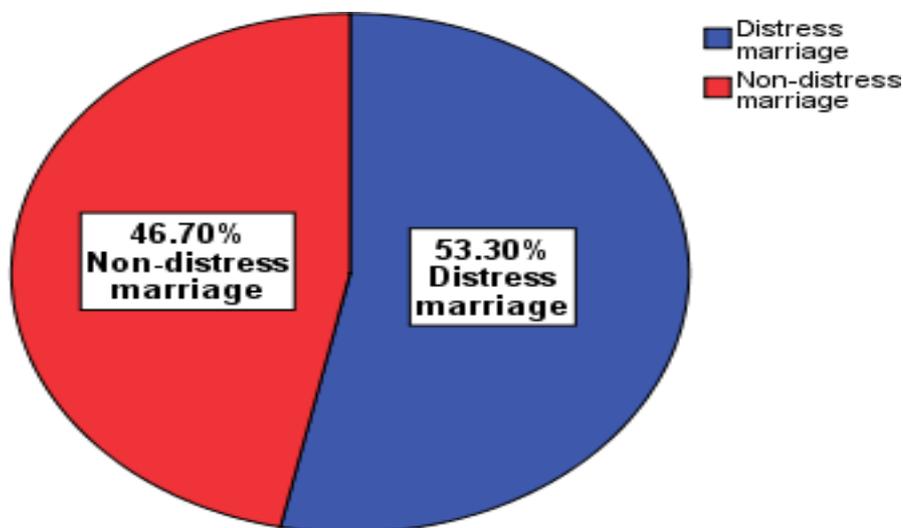


Figure 1: Distribution of distress and non-distress marriages

4.1.1 Relationship between Communication and Marital Satisfaction

The study sought to determine the relationship between communication and marital satisfaction. Table 2 presents a summary of Spearman correlation coefficients results for the relationship factors.

Table 2: Spearman Correlation between communication and marital satisfaction

		Communication	Marital satisfaction
Marital satisfaction	Correlation	.806**	1
	Coefficient		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	.
	N	212	212
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 1 shows there was a statistically significant strong positive correlation between marital satisfaction and communication ($r=.806$, $p<.05$). This implies that communication among couples has a great influence on marital satisfaction. This in turn implies that the greater the quality of communication, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction. This agrees with research that the evidence of a healthy marital relationship is pegged on the communication patterns that occur in a marital relationship (Okhakhume, et al., 2016).

4.2 Communication

Communication was an analysis of respondents' responses to questionnaire items: RDAS 12 (How often do you and your mate have a stimulating exchange of ideas) and RDAS 14 (How often do you and your mate calmly discuss something). Findings revealed that respondents in non-distress marriages had stimulating exchange of ideas with spouses more frequently than respondents in distress marriages. Non-distress marriages recorded 0 —Never occurrence; 2 % for —Once a day; and 29.3% for —More often. Distress marriage recorded 9.7 % —Never; and 0 —Once a day and—More often occurrence. Figure 2 presents distribution of occurrences across distress and non-distress marriages.

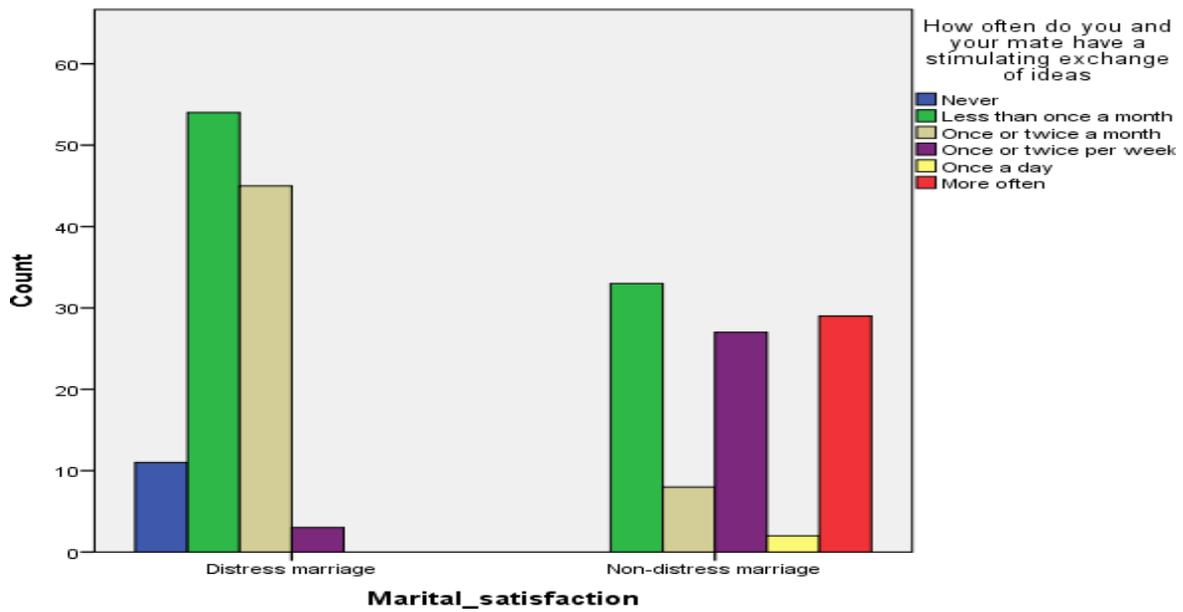


Figure 2: Stimulating Exchange of ideas distress vs. non-distress marriages

Findings indicated that respondents in non-distress marriages calmly discuss issues more often than respondents in distress marriage. A comparison on frequency of occurrence showed that 5.3 % of respondents in distress marriages reported having calm discussions —Once a day —and 0.9% —More often. Non-distress marriage on the other hand recorded 4 % —Once a day occurrence and 58.6 % -More often. Figure 3 summarizes frequency of occurrences across the two marital satisfaction groups.

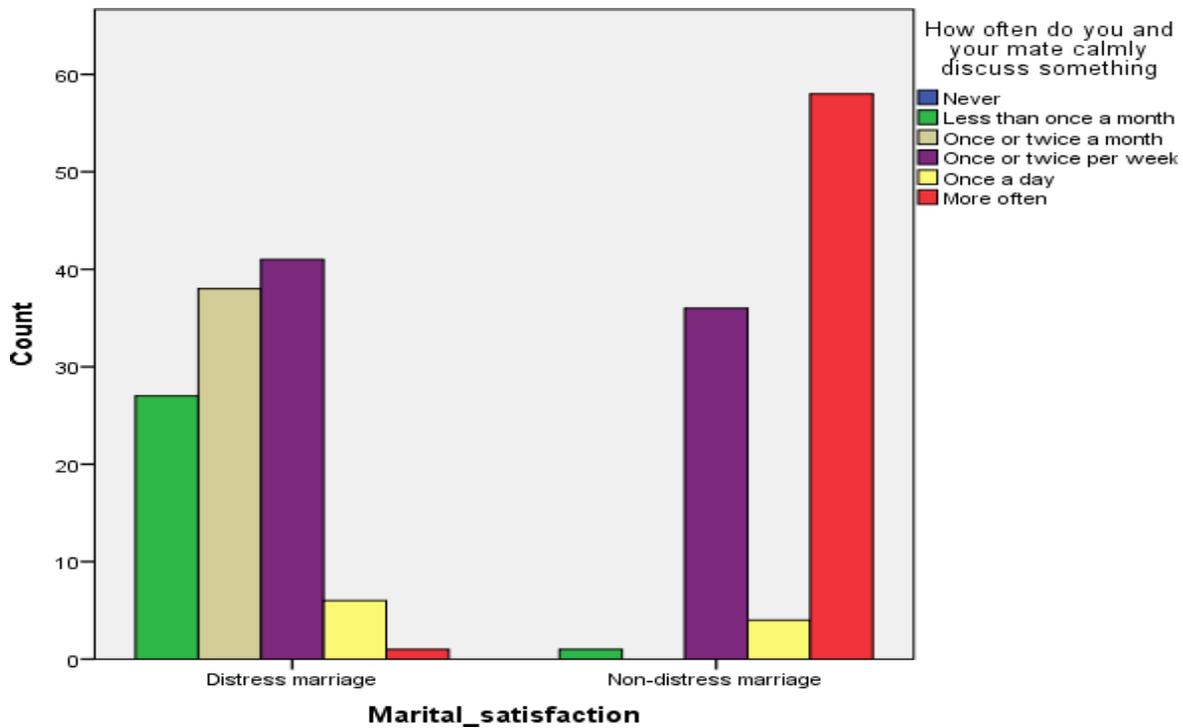


Figure 3: Calm discussions distress vs. non-distress marriages

5.0 Conclusion

Research findings have underscored the importance of communication to the quality of a marriage. Findings have proved that there exists a strong positive correlation between communication and marital satisfaction; this implies that the greater the qualities of communication in a marriage, the greater the quality of marital satisfaction in that marriage. This then calls for Christian couples to find ways to build on the quality of their communication as this enhances the satisfaction of their individual marriages.

6.0 Recommendations

The church should create greater awareness of the importance and significance of constructive conflict resolution as a vehicle for enhancing marital satisfaction among Christian couples. The church should undertake initiatives for marriage seminars/program; these should be undertaken more regularly and facilitated by role models with experience and high integrity and Christian ethics. Church leaders and members whose marriages set a great example for others should be identified, recognized and called upon to mentor couples and share the experiences and strategies they use to preserve/enhance marital satisfaction in their marriages.

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