

Marital Communication: Its Roles in Conflict and Satisfaction Among Young Adults

Kavya Vijayan^{1*}

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of marital communication on marital satisfaction and conflict among young adults. The sample consists of 120 young adults (20 to 30 years), each with 5 to 10 years of marriage. Data were collected using the Interpersonal Communication Inventory by Bienvenu (1971), the Relationship Satisfaction Scale by D. Burns (1988), and the Conflict Tactics Scale 2S Short Form by Straus (2004). Statistical analyses, including correlation and regression, were performed using SPSS 25. Results indicated a significant positive relationship between marital communication and marital satisfaction and a significant negative relationship between marital communication and marital conflict. Regression analysis showed that marital communication impacts marital conflict, which in turn affects marital satisfaction. Overall, higher levels of marital communication correlate with lower conflict and greater satisfaction in marriage.

Keywords: *Marital communication, Marital satisfaction, Marital conflict, Young adults, Family, Marriage*

Marriage is a fundamental aspect of human relationships, providing a framework for family life and societal continuity. It fulfils deep human needs for companionship, love, and intimacy, leading to lasting emotional bonds (Santiago, 1998; Landis, 1954). A strong marriage involves emotional connection, sexual intimacy, and shared experiences, contributing to a couple's sense of purpose and continuity (Wallerstein & Blakeslee, 1995). In cultures like India, marriage is viewed as a lifelong commitment, with women often moving into their husband's family, reinforcing ties (Kaliappan, 1997). However, rising divorce rates pose risks to societal stability and emotional well-being (Santiago, 1998), and marital satisfaction is crucial for relationship viability, influenced by various factors (Tummala, 2008; Thoke, 2012). Effective communication—both verbal and nonverbal—is vital for marital satisfaction (Doohan, 2014). Constructive communication fosters connection and helps resolve conflicts, while destructive communication can lead to emotional harm (Alihosseini, 2014). Conflict is inevitable in marriages but can be managed effectively; couples often fear conflict, leading to avoidance that exacerbates issues (D'Souza, 2002). Strategies promoting win-win solutions strengthen relationships rather than create divisions (D'Souza, 2002). Chronic marital conflict can lead to mental health issues

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Center for Distance and Online Education (CDOE), Jain University (Deemed University), Bangalore, India

*Corresponding Author

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for partners and children, increasing risks of depression and substance abuse (IESS, 2022; D'Souza, 2002), and poorly managed conflict can impact children's emotional health and future relationships. Preventive measures, such as marriage education programs, improve communication skills and reduce negative behaviours, enhancing marital satisfaction (D'Souza, 2002). Ultimately, a fulfilling marriage addresses fundamental human needs and serves as a cornerstone for healthy families and communities, making the understanding of marital dynamics, particularly communication and conflict resolution, essential for fostering stability and well-being. This study is to find out whether the marital conflict is a result of the interpersonal communication and whether it leads to any significant changes in marital satisfaction. The implication of the study is therefore to make people understand the importance of effective communication and the consequences of disruptive communication and also make them rethink about the misinterpretations in their thought that may lead to conflict in life thereby enabling them to avoid such situations and live a life with increased satisfaction.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a study conducted by Carroll et.al.(2013) on couple communication, work family conflict and marital satisfaction, it was found out that work–family conflict was significantly and negatively related to marital satisfaction which became insignificant when constructive and destructive communication were added to the model. Results suggest that teaching communication skills may be a potent point of intervention for couples who experience high levels of work–family conflict (Sarah June Carroll, 2013). In another study on couple communication as a predictor of marital satisfaction by Lavner et.al (2016) among newlywed couples, it was seen that relatively satisfied couples engaged in more positive, less negative, and more effective communication and reliable communication to-satisfaction and satisfaction-to-communication associations were identified. The findings likely throws new queries towards the other factors that might strengthen or moderate the association between communication and satisfaction (Justin A. Lavner, 2016). In a study by Hou,et.al (2019) on “Marital commitment, communication and marital satisfaction: An analysis based on actor– partner interdependence model”, it was found out that communication mediates the relationship between marital commitment and marital satisfaction. Yelsma and Athappilly (2019) had conducted another study on Marital Satisfaction and Communication Practices: Comparisons among Indian and American Couples to understand the dynamics of cultural orientations to marriages which concluded that arranged married were significantly higher in marital satisfaction and there was no significant difference between love married and companionate married on marital satisfaction scores. Analyses of the data also indicated that significantly less verbal and nonverbal communication occurred in the arranged marriages than in the love marriages. The love couples reported using significantly less verbal communication when compared to companionate couples. It was concluded as effective communication appears to be more influential in producing high marital satisfaction, whereas in arranged marriages, cultural tradition and commitment to a relationship appear to be very influential factors in producing high marital satisfaction (Athappilly, 2019). In another study by Leggett et.al (2012) on “Cooperation, Conflict, and Marital Satisfaction: Bridging Theory, Research, and Practice” the results showed that Cooperative behaviours indicative of social interest, like visiting friends or working around the home together, were positively related to marital satisfaction, and conflict behaviours, like engaging in serious quarrels or frequent disagreements, were negatively related. Implications for both researchers and practitioners were explored (Leggett, 2012). The previous studies based on marital communication, satisfaction and conflict has been concluded as the patterns of destructive communication in interpersonal relationships tend to

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decrease marital satisfaction and the presence of conflict and patterns of conflict resolution strategies tend to influence in marital satisfaction to a greater degree. The studies conducted on the variables are rare and there is only one study combining all the three variables which analyses conflict as work family conflict. Studies had not been conducted to find the influence of communication in building up conflict and there by its effect in marital satisfaction. Hence the present study is aimed at finding out the relation and effects of the variables.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to find out the relationship between marital communication, marital conflict and marital satisfaction and to find out if marital communication predicts marital conflict and marital satisfaction. Hence it explores the contributions or impact of marital communication on marital conflict and changes in marital satisfaction among young adults.

Research Problem

A study on the impact of marital communication on marital conflict and marital satisfaction among young adults.

Objectives

- To determine the relationship between marital communication and marital conflict among young adults.
- To determine the relationship between marital communication and marital satisfaction among young adults.
- To determine the relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction among young adults.
- To find out if marital communication and marital conflict predict marital satisfaction among young adults.

Hypothesis

- **Ho1.** There is no significant relationship between marital communication and marital conflict among young adults.
- **Ho2.** There is no significant relationship between marital communication and marital satisfaction among young adults.
- **Ho3.** There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction among young adults.
- **Ho4.** There is no impact of marital communication on marital conflict and marital satisfaction

Variables

- **Independent:** Marital Communication
- **Dependent:** Marital Conflict and Marital Satisfaction

Operational Definition of Variables

Marital Communication

Marital Communication is the willingness to disclose oneself to others truthfully and freely (Bienvenu, 1971). Marital communication is the communication occurring between the partners who are in a close intimate relationship. It can be both positive and negative, that means it can be in constructive or in destructive ways. The constructive type of

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communication style is an important indicator of the strength and the motivating factor to continue a healthy, intimate relationship. The destructive communication is an indicator of discontentment and distrust among the partners in a relationship.

Marital Conflict

Marital Conflict is the state of stress or tension between partners (Straus, 2004). Marital conflict is the decrease in a positive bond of partners which is resulting from the errors in communication, perception and other external and internal factors, which can be in physically and mentally be exhibited by the partners in their relationship which create an environment of dislike and distress in their relationship resulting in serious issues in between them.

Marital Satisfaction

Marital satisfaction is the interpersonal evaluation of the positivity of feelings for one's partner and attraction to the relationship evaluation of the person's role in a relationship (D.Burns, 1988). Marital satisfaction is the level of contentment in the relationship for the partners or the spouses which results in a positive bond in them and which promotes the wellbeing of the relation, the partners as individuals, their family and their surroundings and which make them continue the relation effectively and happily.

Early (or young) adulthood

According to Erikson, the young adult stage involves the personal need for intimacy and sex. Failure to achieve this need results in isolation, which is avoided, and as a result the young adult strives for love and compassion. The young adult learns that love and compassion may get him or her what he or she wants. A young adult is a person between the ages of 20 and 39 (APA, 2021).

Population and Sample

The population was the young adults, both males and females, who are married and are under the age limit 20-30 residing in Kerala. The sampling was done by convenient sampling method. In the present study there was 120 young adult married individuals from Kannur district. All the participants were under the age group of 20-30 years those who had lead 5 to 10 years of married life.

Inclusion Criteria

- Married individuals of 20 to 30 years of age has been included in the study.
- Married individuals with 5 to 10 years of married life is included in the study.
- The married individuals who is residing in different areas of Kannur district has been included in the study.

Exclusion Criteria

- The adults who have less than 5 years of married life and more than 10 years of married life has been excluded from the study.
- The adults who are divorced and those who reside in other parts of Kerala and outside Kerala has been excluded from the study.

Research Design

The research design used for the study is descriptive correlation research design.

Tools

- **The Interpersonal Communication Inventory (ICI):** The scale comprised of 40 items which is 3 point Likert scale. The reliability of the scale is $\alpha = .86$ to $\alpha = .87$. The scale is face validity (Bienvenu, 1971). Scoring is done by corresponding scores given for each question in the manual. The total score is calculated and the high scores indicate good interpersonal communication and the low scores indicate bad interpersonal communication (Bienvenu, 1971).
- **Burns Relationship Satisfaction Scale:** The Relationship Satisfaction Scale (RSAT) evaluates how satisfied a person feel about their most intimate relationship. The seven items on the RSAT ask about communication and openness, resolving conflicts and arguments, and the degree of affection and caring. Internal consistency for the scale is high (coefficient alpha = .94) and is strongly correlated with other measures of relationship satisfaction, including the Locke-Wallace MAT ($r = .80$)²³ and both the Dyadic Adjustment Scale ($r = -.89$) and Norton's Quality of Marriage Index ($r = .91$)²⁴. Total scores range from 0 (lack of in intimacy, extreme conflict) to 42 (highest level of satisfaction) (D. Burns, 1988). The scores for each item on the scale, indicate how satisfied you have recently been feeling. Total scores are the sum of items and range from 0–42, with higher scores reflecting greater satisfaction.
- **The Conflict Tactics Scale 2s-Short Form (CTS2S):** It is the most widely used instrument for measuring intimate partner violence. It contains 20 items with an 8-point scale. The scale has internal consistency with good test-retest reliability. The test has concurrent ($>.60$) and construct validity (Straus, 2004). The scoring is done by considering the scores of how often the conflict happens in the relationship.

Procedure and Administration

A quantitative method with questionnaire of different scales was chosen to conduct the study with an aim to find out the effects and relationship of marital communication, marital conflict and marital satisfaction. The study comprised of 120 samples who were married. The researcher had given respected scales to the participants. The participants were aware of the aim of the study and they were informed that the participation is voluntary. Verbal agreements and informed consent were taken before data collection. The subjects were informed that the data collected will be anonymous and confidential and they have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any time. The filled questionnaires were collected and then used excel to arrange the data which was coded for further tests and analysis. The socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, education, occupation status, duration of marriage and number of children was also collected for analysis. The analysis and hypothesis testing was carried out using SPSS version 25. Tests such as correlation and regression analysis was used for obtaining the results for further interpretation and discussion.

Statistical Techniques Used

- This study was aimed to find out the relationship between marital communication, marital conflict and marital satisfaction. Hence to find out the relationship between variables the researcher used correlation technique.
- The study also aimed to determine the impact of marital communication on marital conflict and marital satisfaction and to find the effect of the independent variable upon the dependent variables, the researcher used regression analysis.

Pearson Correlation

- The Pearson coefficient represents the relationship between two variables that are measured on the same interval or ratio scale. The Pearson coefficient is a measure of the strength of the association between two continuous variables. It is a mathematical correlation coefficient representing the relationship between two variables, denoted as X and Y.
- Pearson coefficients range from +1 to -1, with +1 representing a positive correlation, -1 representing a negative correlation, and 0 representing no relationship.
- The Pearson coefficient shows correlation, not causation (Kenton, 2022).

Regression

It is a method to identify the variables that have an impact on another variable. It is primarily used in finance, investing, and other areas to determine the strength and character of the relationship between one dependent variable and a series of other variables. Linear regression is used to predict the value of a variable based on the value of another variable. That is predicting the dependent variable using the predictor or the independent variable (William, 2022).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Within this section, the researcher attempts to interpret findings and conclusions and relate these both to the purpose of the study and to publish results from the other studies examined in the literature review.

The present research analyses the sample data with SPSS version 25 and the tests such as correlation and regression analysis was done with the three variables namely marital communication, marital satisfaction and marital conflict. Data such as correlation analysis and regression analysis were carried out using SPSS version 25- Statistical Package for Social Science researches- to test the hypotheses and obtain the results. Results are presented as sections based on the order of hypothesis and the analysis carried out.

In section 1, preliminary analysis carried out to obtain the frequency, percentage and descriptive statistics of central tendency of socio demographic details and study variables is discussed. In section 2, correlation analysis is carried out and discussed in order to find the relationship between marital communication, marital conflict, and marital satisfaction. In section 3, regression is carried out to check the impact of independent variable (marital communication) on dependent variables (marital conflict and marital satisfaction) and is explained in discussion part.

SECTION 1: PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS (DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS)

This section deals with the socio-economic background of the respondents. Fundamental descriptive statistics is presented in terms of frequency, percent distribution, measure of central tendency (mean) and descriptive statistics (standard deviation) with table. The variables analyzed in this section include age, gender, education, occupation, duration of marriage and number of children.

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Table 4.1: Socio-Demographic data of the participants with frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation

VARIABLES	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE	MEAN±SD
Age	25 and below	44	36.7	1.63±0.484
	Above 25	76	63.3	
Gender	Female	83	69.2	1.31±0.464
	Male	37	30.8	
Education	UG	55	45.8	1.83±0.847
	PG	31	25.8	
	OTHER	34	28.4	
Occupation	Unemployed	42	35.0	1.65±0.479
	Employed	78	65.0	
Duration of Marriage	5-7	96	80.0	6.26±1.770
	8-10	24	20.0	
Number of Children	0	23	19.2	1.06±0.665
	1	67	55.8	
	2	30	25.0	

Table 1 shows that 36.7% of the samples, with a frequency of 44, belong to the age group of 20-25 and more than half of the samples (63.3%), with frequency 76, belong to the age group of 25-30 years with a mean of 1.63 and standard deviation of 0.484.

According to the above table, 69.2%, with frequency of 83, of the samples are females and 30.8%, with frequency 37, of the samples are males with a mean of 1.31 and standard deviation of 0.464. Also 45.8% of the samples, with frequency 55, are undergraduates and 25.8% of them, with frequency 31, are postgraduates. The remaining 28.4% of the samples, with frequency 34, are of other educational status (High school, Higher Secondary) with a mean of 1.83 and standard deviation of 0.847.

According to the table, 35% of the sample (frequency = 42) are unemployed and more than half (65% with a frequency of 78) are employed with a mean of 1.65 and standard deviation of 0.479.

Table 1 also indicates that 80% (frequency =96) of the sample has 5-7 years of married life and 20% (frequency = 24) of the samples has 8-10 years of married life.

The number of children was also included in the socio-demographics and thus table 1 indicates that 23 samples (19.2%) had no children, 67 samples (55.8%) had single child and 30 of them (25%) had two children.

Table 4.2: Descriptive statistics of the study variables

Variable	Mean	SD
Marital Communication	1.81	0.833
Marital Conflict	1.30	0.588
Marital Satisfaction	1.73	0.670

Table 4.2 shows the mean and standard deviation of marital communication, marital conflict and marital satisfaction. The mean of marital communication is 1.81 with a standard

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deviation of 0.833. The mean of marital conflict is 1.30 with a standard deviation of 0.588. The mean of marital satisfaction is 1.73 with a standard deviation of 0.670.

SECTION 2: CORRELATION

In the present study, the direction as well as the strength of the relationship of independent variable with dependent variables is analysed through the method of correlation

- H01: There is no significant relationship between marital communication and marital conflict.
- H02: There is no significant relationship between marital communication and marital satisfaction.
- H03: There is no significant relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction.

Table 4.3: Analysis exploring the relationship of marital communication, marital conflict and marital satisfaction among young adults.

	ICI	RSS	CTS
ICI	1		
RSS	.588**	1	
CTS	-.637**	-.620**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson product correlation of marital communication and marital conflict was found to be moderately negative and statistically significant ($r = .637 < .001$). Hence, H01 rejected. This shows that an increase in constructive communication lead to decrease in marital conflict.

Pearson product correlation of marital communication and marital satisfaction was found to be moderately positive and statistically significant ($r = .588 < .001$). Hence, H02 rejected. This shows that an increase in constructive communication lead to increase in marital satisfaction. Pearson product correlation of marital conflict and marital satisfaction was found to be moderately negative and statistically significant ($r = .620 < .001$). Hence, H03 rejected. This shows that a decrease in marital conflict lead to increase in marital satisfaction.

The result reveals that there is a significant relationship (correlation coefficients are -0.637, 0.588, -0.620) between communication, marital conflict and marital satisfaction among young adults.

Marital communication is the verbal and nonverbal communication between spouses. A good communication can create an environment of harmony in their lives. Marital conflict is the disharmony that stems from many factors including internal and external which has a significant role in predicting the satisfaction that an individual has in his or her life, especially relationship. Marital satisfaction is an overall inclination about the married life or relationship and how satisfied or happy and contented they are with their spouses and how the relationship is going on. According to the result, there is a significant relationship between marital communication and marital conflict which is in a negative direction indicating the increase in effective communication leads to a decrease in marital conflict.

The table 4.3 also reveals that there is a significant relationship between marital communication and marital satisfaction which is in a positive direction indicating good

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communication results in increased marital satisfaction. This means that marital communication is an important factor which determines marital satisfaction. The study conducted by Lavner et.al (2016) reaches a similar conclusion that relatively satisfied couples engaged in more positive and effective communication. Another study conducted by Yelsma and Athappilly (2019) suggests that effective communication appears to be more influential in producing high marital satisfaction. Hence the present study supports the result of the past research. The table shows that there is a significant relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction which indicates that marital conflict is a significant factor in determining marital satisfaction. This finding supports the previous study conducted by Leggett et.al (2012) that conflict behaviours, like engaging in serious quarrels or frequent disagreements, were negatively related marital satisfaction.

Ho4: There is no impact of marital communication on marital conflict and marital satisfaction.

Table 4.4: Analysis exploring the impact of marital communication on marital conflict and marital satisfaction.

Hypothesis	Regression Weights	Beta Coefficient	R2	F	P-Value	Hypothesis supported
Ho 4	CTS →	-0.637	0.406	80.599	0.00	No
	ICI					
	RSS →	0.588	0.346	62.357	0.00	
	ICI					

The hypothesis test if marital communication has a significant impact on marital conflict and marital satisfaction. The dependent variable marital conflict (CTS) was regressed on predictor variable marital communication (ICI) to test the hypothesis Ho4. ICI significantly predicted CTS, $F(1,118) = 80.599$, $P < 0.001$, which indicates that ICI can play a significant role in CTS ($b = -0.637$, $p < 0.001$). These results clearly direct the negative affect of the ICI. Moreover, the $R^2 = 0.406$ depicts that the model explains 40.6% of the variance in marital conflict. Hence Ho4 is rejected.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In the present study, 120 married individuals, both males and females, of age ranging from 20 to 30 and had lead 5 to 10 years of married life from Kannur district was included. The population was the young adults married individuals residing in Kerala in which the sample was taken from Kannur district. The demographic variables like age, place, duration of marriage, number of children, educational qualification and job status were included in the study. The study is conducted using descriptive research design. The data was statistically analysed using correlation analysis and regression analysis. Correlational analysis was conducted to find the relationship between marital communication, marital satisfaction and marital conflict. Regression method was used to analyse the impact of marital communication upon marital conflict and marital satisfaction. The present study research findings suggest that there is positive correlation between marital communication and marital satisfaction and there is a negative correlation between marital communication and marital conflict. There is a negative correlation between marital satisfaction and marital conflict. The research findings also reveal that marital communication has an impact on marital conflict and marital satisfaction.

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Major Findings

- There is a significant relationship between marital communication and marital conflict among young adults.
- There is a significant relationship between marital communication and marital satisfaction among young adults.
- There is a significant relationship between marital conflict and marital satisfaction among young adults.
- There is impact of marital communication on marital conflict and marital satisfaction.

Implications

Today, divorce has become a very common part of life, as conflict is an inevitable part of marriage. As humans, people will have disagreements that must be resolved and have many differences in communication styles it is likely that ineffective communication plays a crucial role in the failure of many marriages. Communication may lead to the success of a marriage or to its detriment, depending on its level of effectiveness. The process of sending information and receiving and interpreting it varies from person to person and these differences are the cause of conflict situations within marriage. Effectiveness of communication lies in the correct interpretation of the receiver of what has been intended by the sender. The effectiveness of communication is likely connected to the overall satisfaction of married couples and is worthy to be studied in order to increase marital satisfaction. Satisfaction with one's marital relationship is one of the most important variables associated with the quality of one's life, contributing more to global happiness for most adults than satisfaction with work, finances, friendships, other family relationships, and health. The implication of the study is therefore to make people understand the importance of effective communication and the consequences of disruptive communication and also make them rethink about the misinterpretations in their thought that may lead to conflict in life thereby enabling them to avoid such situations and live a life with increased satisfaction.

Limitations

The population chosen was the married individuals from Kannur district and hence the data was only collected from the respected district of Kerala. The sample size was limited to 120 in which only individuals of 20 to 30 years of age with 5 to 10 years of married life were included. The adults who have less than 5 years of married life and more than 10 years of married life and the adults who are divorced has not been included in the study.

Strengths

This study has addressed the research gap of one of the previous research by Lavner in which the factor contributing to the strength of marital communication and satisfaction was not found out. So the present research study findings suggest that one of the factors that can strengthen or moderate marital communication and marital satisfaction has been identified as marital conflict. The research was conducted with less time, in low economic expenditure. The age limit was appropriate with relevant period of married life according to theoretical basis as early adulthood is the period in which an individual is concerned with developing the ability to share intimacy and choices regarding marriage and family are often made. The study tends to be relevant according to the recent trends in the hike of divorce rates to analyse the possible contributors which can lead to detriment of relationship and take necessary precautions. Correlation and regression analysis along with descriptive analysis of data was used to confirm the results of the research findings.

Recommendations for further study

The married individuals or couples and individuals in living relationships can be considered for further study. The married individuals who are residing in other parts of Kerala and outside Kerala can be included in further study. The sample size can be increased. The adults who have less than 5 years of married life and more than 10 years of married life can be used. The adults who are divorced can also be considered for further research.

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Conflict of Interest

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