

The Role of Communication in Relationship Failures: A Review

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ABSTRACT

Any relationship needs communication at its core because it affects intimacy, trust, and how conflicts are resolved. On the other hand, poor communication is frequently the root of relationship problems. This review examines how communication problems—both verbal and non-verbal—contribute to relationship dissatisfaction and failure. Insights from various studies on communication patterns, cultural influences, and technological impacts are synthesized. Interventions, such as couple's therapy and communication skills training, are discussed as methods to improve relational dynamics.

Keywords: *Communication, Relationship Failure, Sarcasm, Couples Therapy, Depression, Emotional Issues, Psychological Well-being*

Effective communication is largely dependant on relationship length, pleasure and longevity. Whether in romantic, familial, or professional relationships, the ability to express needs, feelings, and thoughts clearly is vital. Conversely, communication breakdowns can foster misunderstanding, frustration, and emotional disconnection, contributing to the eventual failure of the relationship. Research consistently points to poor communication as a primary reason for relationship dissolution (Markman & Rhoades, 2012).

This paper provides an in-depth review of the role communication plays in relationship failures, particularly focusing on findings from a six-month study conducted at the Mano Srijan Counselling Centre in Kanpur. The study highlights the detrimental effects of sarcasm and poor communication, which contributed to emotional and psychological distress among couples.

A six-month study was conducted at the Mano Srijan Counselling Centre in Kanpur, focusing on communication issues faced by couples seeking therapy. The study included **200 couples**, who came for counseling between January and June 2024. Analysis of the data revealed that **the majority of couples were struggling with communication issues**, with a significant number of them reporting that **sarcastic language** was a recurrent problem in their interactions.

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Notably, several participants in the study were particularly sensitive to sarcasm, which contributed to deeper emotional and psychological issues. Some couples indicated that sarcastic comments from their partner exacerbated feelings of inadequacy, leading to **depression, anxiety, and emotional withdrawal**. The findings of this study reinforce existing research that highlights the harmful effects of poor communication on emotional well-being (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Knapp & Daly, 2011).

Types of Communication Failures

Verbal Miscommunication

Verbal miscommunication, characterized by ambiguous or harmful language, was one of the main issues reported by couples in the Mano Srijan study. Many couples expressed frustration with their partner's inability to communicate feelings and needs directly. In some cases, partners resorted to **passive-aggressive communication**, further exacerbating relational strain.

Non-Verbal Miscommunication

Non-verbal cues like body language and tone of voice were often misinterpreted, leading to conflict. For example, one partner's silence might be perceived as indifference, when in fact it was a coping mechanism to avoid conflict (Burgoon et al., 1996).

Lack of Active Listening

Active listening was identified as a key communication problem. Many couples reported feeling **unheard or ignored** during conversations, which reduced their willingness to communicate openly. This aligns with Gordon's (2000) assertion that active listening is essential for effective communication and relationship satisfaction.

Sarcasm

Sarcasm, a form of communication often used to express frustration or contempt in a disguised manner, was a significant issue for many couples in the Mano Srijan study. Approximately **60% of couples** reported that sarcastic language was a frequent source of conflict. A notable finding was the **emotional sensitivity** to sarcasm, particularly in individuals who were already vulnerable to stress or emotional instability.

Sarcasm often eroded the trust and respect between partners, leading to further communication breakdowns. **Emotional and psychological consequences**, such as depression, were particularly prevalent in individuals who were more sensitive to sarcasm. For example, some individuals in the study reported feeling constantly ridiculed or demeaned by their partner's sarcastic remarks, which resulted in **emotional withdrawal** and increased relational distance.

Consequences of Poor Communication

The study conducted at Mano Srijan Counselling Centre revealed several adverse outcomes of poor communication:

- **Increased conflict:** Couples who struggled with communication, especially sarcastic language, reported frequent arguments and misunderstandings.
- **Emotional withdrawal:** Sarcastic comments, particularly those that targeted a partner's weaknesses, often led to emotional withdrawal, reducing intimacy and increasing the likelihood of separation.

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- **Psychological distress:** Several individuals in the study reported developing depression and anxiety due to the stress caused by poor communication.

These findings are consistent with previous research that highlights the emotional toll of poor communication on individuals and relationships (Gottman & Levenson, 1992; Siegel, 2010).

Patterns of Dysfunctional Communication

- **Criticism and Blame:** Couples who frequently engaged in criticism, often using sarcastic language, contributed to a hostile relational environment. This pattern was common in the study, with many couples reporting feelings of resentment and defensiveness.
- **Contempt and Sarcasm:** Sarcasm, as a form of contempt, undermines respect and affection. The study found that **contemptuous communication** through sarcasm was one of the strongest predictors of emotional disengagement and eventual relationship dissolution (Gottman & Silver, 1999).
- **Defensiveness:** Defensive communication patterns, including counter-attacks and justifications, were also identified as common issues in the study. This made resolving conflicts difficult and contributed to long-term relational dissatisfaction.
- **Stonewalling:** Stonewalling occurs when one partner disengages from a conversation, either emotionally or physically. This behavior signals withdrawal from the relationship, leading to increased frustration and alienation (Gottman & Silver, 1999).

Impact of Technology on Communication in Relationships

Digital communication, such as texting and social media, has altered the way partners interact. While technology facilitates constant connection, it can also lead to miscommunication. Text-based interactions often lack the emotional nuance of face-to-face communication, making misinterpretation more likely (Bowe, 2010). Furthermore, social media can introduce new challenges, such as jealousy or the temptation to avoid meaningful conversations.

Cultural and Gender Influences on Communication

Cultural and gender differences often influence communication styles, which can contribute to misunderstandings. Research indicates that men and women may approach communication differently, with women more likely to express emotions verbally, while men often use more reserved communication styles (Tannen, 1990). Cross-cultural relationships face additional challenges, as direct versus indirect communication norms vary widely (Gudykunst & Kim, 1997).

Interventions for Improving Communication

- **Couples Therapy:** Couples therapy emerged as an effective intervention in addressing communication issues. The Mano Srijan Counselling Centre used various therapeutic approaches to help couples develop **healthy communication strategies**, such as active listening and conflict resolution techniques. The therapy helped reduce sarcasm and promoted open dialogue between partners.
- **Communication Skills Training:** Communication skills training, focusing on the use of "I" statements and reducing sarcasm, was also effective in helping couples

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navigate their differences. Many couples reported significant improvements in their relationships after learning to communicate more respectfully.

- **Mindfulness and Emotional Regulation:** Mindfulness training helped couples manage emotional reactions during conversations, particularly when sarcasm or criticism was involved. These strategies helped couples remain present during difficult conversations and avoid defensive responses (Siegel, 2010).

CONCLUSION

Communication is a critical determinant of relationship success or failure. As this review has demonstrated, poor communication can lead to relationship dissatisfaction, conflict, and eventual dissolution. The six-month study at Mano Srijan Counselling Centre in Kanpur highlighted how communication failures, particularly sarcasm, contribute to emotional distress and relationship breakdowns. With the right therapeutic interventions, couples can improve their communication and foster healthier, more fulfilling relationships.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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