

Relationship between Communication Pattern and Marital Happiness of Army Couples

¹Lalitha Ragul

²S. Thenmozhi

For the longevity of a marriage, happiness plays a vital role in contemporary India. Marital happiness, a dimension of marital quality, is determined by various marital factors such as self-esteem, communication, intimacy, and marital satisfaction in couples. Communication plays a major role in marriage, and it is one of the key predictors of marital satisfaction in couples (Lavner, Karney & Bradbury, 2016). Communication in marriage is more than just a flow of information from sender to receiver; it is also the ability of couples to share their thoughts and feelings with their spouses. This study aimed to have a focal point on the relationship between communication patterns and marital happiness in army couples. As army couples are a breed of their own, this study was conducted among 128 army couples (128 husbands and 128 wives) in the age group of 21 to 30 years of age and within their first five years of marriage. Using the Marital Happiness Scale (Azrin, Naster, & Jones, 1973), the marital happiness level and the Communication Patterns Questionnaire (CPQ; Christensen, 1988) were used to measure the communication pattern of army couples. After statistical analysis, results indicated that the relationship between each pattern of communication is different and significantly correlated with marital happiness in army couples.

Keywords: Marital Happiness, Communication, Army couples, Marriage

Introduction

Happiness, well-being, and positivity stemmed from humanistic movements and helped lay the groundwork for positive psychology in modern India. In the context of mental or emotional states, happiness is defined as a positive or pleasant emotion ranging from contentment to intense joy or emotions felt by a person when in a state of well-being (Wolfram, 2011). Though different definitions of happiness have been presented, Veenhoven's (1992) definition of happiness is found to be wholesome and states that "happiness is the degree to which a person judges the quality of his or her life as satisfying." The strength-based approach of positive psychology has flourished in recent decades in India, ensuing the need for more research studies based on happiness.

¹Research Scholar, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Madras, Chennai, India. ORCID ID-0000-0001-6534-7249, Email lalitharagul88@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

²Professor & Head, Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Madras, Chennai, India

The Indian Vedas define happiness as subjective and not the mere absence of unhappiness; they see happiness as a psychological state that helps maintain interconnections with others and is both free to choose and realizable (Banavathy and Choudry, 2014). Writings about happiness are found in various Upanishads and Indian historical literatures. Recently, the concepts have been picked up by various western psychologists through Seligman (2002, 2011).

People who achieve "self-actualization" or are "self-actualized," according to Maslow (1987), are happy. The peak experiences are referred to as the experience of happiness, i.e., when a person is steadier, has a grounded sense of well-being, and is satisfied with life. And it is said that happiness is not only gained from the social support provided to us; we may also increase our well-being by providing social support to others (Brown et al., 2003).

The family, being the most fundamental unit of a society, describes marriage as an essential form for constituting a family and the next generation. According to an online survey by IPSOS, 2019's state

of happiness in India is at 53%, indicating that a majority of Indian respondents considered their relationship with their spouse or partner as their greatest source of happiness.

In India, irrespective of a love marriage or an arranged marriage, couples' marital satisfaction and happiness in the marriage determine the longevity of a marriage. Marital happiness is a judgement made by a spouse that indicates the sense of well-being or satisfaction he or she experiences in the marital relationship (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987).

Marital health is an expansive spectrum that covers conflicts, commitment, happiness, support, communication, equality, empathy, compassion, affection, and various other marital factors. Marital happiness, otherwise known as marital harmony, is an ideal fusion of marital adjustment and marital satisfaction. Apart from demographic factors such as an individual's age, time of marriage, marital friction, education, self-esteem, and conflict resolution, communication is the most important factor that influences marital happiness (Kapur, 2000).

Communication practices augment positive emotions and relationships (Pitts & Socha, 2013; Socha & Beck, 2015). Communication plays a pivotal role in models of relationship strength as intimate bonds are determined among partners in a marriage by the extent to which couples respond with sensitivity to one another (Reis & Patrick, 1996). It is found that good communication is an essential factor in maintaining an intimate relationship (Olson, 1990).

Communication and relationship satisfaction in military couples were studied by Bakhurst, McGuire and Halford (2018), where 31 Australian military couples were observationally assessed during a communication task. The authors hypothesized that positive female communication was associated with high couple relationship satisfaction, whereas negative male communication was associated with high couple relationship satisfaction. The finding was unexpected, as there was no association between male negative communication and female relationship satisfaction, leading to spouses not getting affected by this behaviour. The study concluded that in the context of military couples, assisting both partners to engage in open discussion, even with some negativity, might help to enhance relationship satisfaction.

Vazhappilly, and Reyes (2016) investigated the relation between couples' communication and marital satisfaction and the possible predictive influence of communication on marital satisfaction among 82 married couples in the Philippines. The study results showed a significantly positive relationship between couples' communication and marital satisfaction.

Bayrami, and associates (2012) conducted a study on happiness and willingness to communicate in three attachment styles among college students. The authors used the Adult's Attachment Styles Scale (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), the Memorial University of Newfoundland Scale of Happiness (MUNSCH; Kozma & Stones, 2000), and the Willingness to Communicate Scale (WTC; Mc Croskey, 1992) to measure students' attachment style, happiness, and communication, respectively. After statistical analysis with one-way ANOVA, the study results indicated that, according to attachment styles, significant differences were found between scores of happiness and willingness to communicate. With a secure attachment style, students were found to have a higher happiness level, while with avoidant and ambivalent insecure attachment styles, there were lower happiness levels, proving Bowlby's theory that people with a secure attachment style interpret the world as a safe place and have more happiness.

With the main goal of identifying the factors influencing couples' adjustment, specifically the relationship between communication skills and marital adjustment, Ahmadi Gatand Khamen (2011) conducted the study using Snyder's Revised Marital Satisfaction Inventory (MSI-R) and Navran's Communication Skills Inventory. After analysis, the results proved that the spousal compatibility of the couples with strong communication skills in various aspects of their spousal relationship was higher than that of couples with weaker communication skills.

Using data from a larger study, Kamp Dush, Taylor, and Kroeger (2008) conducted a study on marital happiness and psychological well-being across the life span. The authors used a marital happiness scale with seven indicators of marital happiness, such as (a) extent of understanding received from spouse, (b) amount of love received, (c) sexual relationship, (d) spouse as someone to do things with, (e) spouse's faithfulness, (f) a global evaluation of the marriage, and (g) the strength of feelings of love the respondent has for

spouse. The study's first hypothesis, postulating that happy marriages can be distinguished from unhappy marriages, was accepted as 38% of respondents were found to be on a stable high marital happiness trajectory over time, while 41% were on a middle marital happiness trajectory, and only 21% were on a low marital happiness trajectory. The study also discovered that psychological well-being predicted marital happiness trajectories, and that respondents with high and middle marital happiness trajectories experienced fewer depressive symptoms over time.

Ruvolo (1998) studied the marital well-being and general happiness of newlywed couples over time, as well as the relationship of one partner's well-being to the subsequent marital well-being of the spouse, in two waves among 317 newlywed couples. Five indicators of marital well-being were used to assess the couples' marital well-being and general happiness by the University of Michigan Survey Research Center, and the National Opinion Research Center was used to measure the happiness levels of the couples. Structure equation modelling analyses revealed that couples with higher marital well-being in wave 1 had higher general happiness in wave 2. For men, who had higher general happiness in wave 1, they were found to have higher marital well-being in wave 2. So, the study results concluded that the higher the individual's marital well-being was in wave 1, the higher the marital well-being of their partner became.

Rationale of the Study

For studies concerning interpersonal aspects of marriage and happiness, it is essential to study both spouses of a couple. Due to its complexity, there are few studies available in India related to couples' marital happiness and other factors related to it, such as communication patterns. In the Indian army, couples often relocate to various places and spouses undergo annual duty-related separations, leading to the greatest source of dissatisfaction in military life and family life (Black, 1993). So often, army couples are exposed to vulnerable situations that test their marriage bond and marital happiness or harmony. Numerous research studies mediate a positive association between good couple communication and marital harmony, leading to marital satisfaction and the longevity of marriage. However, opening up and sharing thoughts and feelings in a satisfactory pattern of communication can be challenging for some couples. So, to address that gap in the research area, this study aims to make couples

appreciate and adapt that satisfactory pattern of communication to have perfect marital happiness or marital harmony, paving the way for marital satisfaction and a solid marriage.

Objective

The main objective of the present study is to explore the relationship between communication patterns and marital happiness of army couples.

Hypotheses

H₁ - There would be no significant relationship between mutual constructive communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples.

H₂ - There would be no significant relationship between demand - withdraw communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples.

H₃ - There would be no significant relationship between mutual avoidance / withholding communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples.

Sampling method

For the present study, a total of 128 couples (128 husbands and 128 wives) within first five years of their marriage were selected through purposive sampling technique. Their age group ranged from 21 to 30 years.

Tools used

For the present study, the following psychological measures were used.

The Marital Happiness Scale (Azrin, Naster, & Jones, 1973)- The marital happiness scale estimated current marital happiness. The questionnaire considers marital happiness in ten areas of marital interaction such as household responsibilities, rearing of children, social activities, money, communication, sex, academic or occupational progress, personal independence, spouse independence, and general happiness. The score of each item varies from 1 and 10 with '1' indicating complete unhappiness and '10' indicating complete happiness and with a total maximum score of 100 points. The validity of the tool is 0.90 by cronbach's alpha (Haring, Hewitt, and Flett, 2003) and 0.94 by retest (Isanezhad, Ahmadi & Etemadi, 2008).

Communication Patterns Questionnaire (Christensen, 1988)- To assess communication patterns that couples use when discussing a relationship problem communications patterns questionnaire is used. The questionnaire uses a 9 – point Likert scale (from 1 = very unlikely to 9 = very likely) to indicate the extent to which each item reflects what typically

occurs in their relationship. In this study the questionnaire has three subscales such as: (a) mutual constructive communication (seven items), (b) total demand-withdraw (three items from female demand / male withdraw scale and three items from male demand / female withdraw scale), and (c) mutual avoidance and withholding (three items). The reliability coefficients were as it follows: for the Constructive Communication subscale was 0.793, for the Woman demands/man withdraws subscale was 0.736 and the Man demands/woman withdraws subscale the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient was 0.631.

Statistical Analysis

Keeping in view the nature of research problem and to meet the objectives of the study the data collected was analysed by using Statistical package for social sciences (SPSS v-28). Statistical techniques used for analysing data were: Descriptive statistics, t test and Pearson’s correlation coefficient .The statistical significance value was set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

After SPSS 24 analysis, the present study showed the following results

Table 1
Frequency table of samples

		Frequency Percent	
		Samples (N =256)	
Gender	Male	128	50
	Female	128	50
Age (in years)	21-23	46	18
	24-26	82	32
	27-30	128	50
Years of marriage	≤ 1	67	26
	2 -3	102	40
	4-5	87	34

Initially, descriptive statistical analysis was done. The couple population’s frequency in which they were distributed according to gender, age in years and years of marriage were formulated in table 1. The couples aged ranged from 21 to 30 years with an average mean of 27.42 (SD = 1.75)

Table 2
Mean, Standard Deviation and t values for Communication Pattern and Marital Happiness of husbands and wives of army couples

	Wives		Husbands		t	Level of Significance
	M	SD	M	SD		
Communication patterns						
Mutual constructive	6.82	2.52	6.45	2.82	1.13	NS
Demand – Withdraw	5.61	4.17	5.52	4.13	0.10	NS
Mutual avoidance/ withholding	5.23	3.43	5.31	3.74	1.23	NS
Marital happiness	7.36	3.08	7.86	4.23	1.21	NS

Table 2 values show the mean values, standard deviation and t test values of communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples. The level of significance was set at 0.05 level. The obtained t value for all the three patterns of communication such as mutual constructive, demand/withdraw, and mutual avoidance/ withholding and the marital happiness values

were found to be insignificant. It means that there are no significant difference between husbands and wives pattern of communication and their marital happiness level. In other words, husbands and wives of army couples have similar marital happiness level and pattern of communication.

Table 3
Correlation matrix of Marital Happiness and Communication Pattern of Army couples

	1	2	3	4
Marital Happiness	1			
Mutual Constructive	0.62**	1		
Demand – Withdraw	-0.48**	0.64**	1	
Mutual Avoidance/Withholding	-0.37**	0.63**	0.42**	1

[$P > 0.05$, $P^* < 0.05$, $P^{**} < 0.01$]

Discussion

The mutual constructive pattern of communication is found to have a significant positive relationship with marital happiness of army couples i.e., army couples who practice mutual constructive pattern of communication are found to have higher level of marital happiness when compared to other couples. The strategies of this pattern of communication holds on to active listening, engaging, mutual collaboration and support from both the spouses. During conflicts, the spouses practicing mutual constructive pattern of communication play an equal role in resolving the same. The ability of couples to actively and collectively solve problems and provide emotional support to one another strengthens the relationship by increasing marital satisfaction and eventually leading to high level of marital happiness. The results are supported by previous study done by Mitchell and Gamarel (2018), in which the authors found that constructive communication pattern has an important correlation within relationships and increases the trust of the spouses leading to marital satisfaction. Hence the hypothesis (H_1), “There would be no significant relationship between mutual constructive communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples” is rejected.

The mutual constructive pattern of communication is found to be positively correlated to enhance the marital happiness of army couples.

In this study, the demand – with draw pattern of communication values are found to be negatively correlated to marital happiness. It means that couples practicing demand – withdraw pattern of communication has lower level of marital happiness

than couples practicing mutual constructive pattern of communication. This demand withdraw pattern of communication is something in which only one spouse attempts to discuss a problem, while the other avoids the issue or ends the discussion (Christensen, 1988). As only one spouse gets to play the role, this pattern of communication can turn out to be more destructive for the relationship. The study’s result is supported by many studies which have found the relationship between demands – withdraw pattern of communication leading to relationship dysfunction (Christensen & Shenk, 1991; Eldridge, Sevier, Jones, Atkins, & Christensen, 2007). As the demand – withdraw pattern of communication is found to be negatively correlated to marital happiness of army couples, the hypothesis (H_2), “There would be no significant relationship between demand withdraw communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples” is also rejected.

The study also found that the mutual avoidance / withholding pattern of communication also holds on a negative significant relationship with marital happiness. In other words, couples practicing mutual avoidance / withholding pattern of communication will have lower level of marital happiness when compared to couples practicing other patterns of communication. The couples practicing mutual avoidance / withholding pattern of communication expect the conflicts to resolve on their own, as they try to avoid or refrain from discussing about the problem with each other. The results of the study coordinates with findings of Madahi, Samadzadeh and Javidi (2013) where, the authors found negative association between mutual avoidance / withholding pattern of communication and marital satisfaction.

Hence the hypothesis (H₃) “There would be no significant relationship between mutual avoidance / withholding communication pattern and marital happiness of army couples” is also rejected.

Conclusion

According to Gottman (1993), communication in marital life plays a major role and couples who have learnt to communicate with each other or at least who are willing to learn and do so, can avoid the misunderstandings that convolute the marriage. The effect of a happy marriage reflects in the development of their children and next generation. Perceiving marital happiness through the lens

of couple’s communication pattern has ramifications for new marital researches focusing on other marital factors such as intimacy, self-esteem, satisfaction, and marital adjustment. Findings of the study suggests that compared to couples who prefer mutual constructive pattern of communication, those prefer using demand – withdraw pattern of communication and mutual avoidance / withholding pattern of communication has lower level of marital happiness. To enhance marital happiness and marital satisfaction among couples, marital therapists, family counsellors can converge their attention and efforts on constructive communication patterns.

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