

EFFECTIVENESS OF ATTENDING TO FEELINGS COUNSELLING IN IMPROVING INTERACTION OF MARRIED COUPLES FOR HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract

The focus of this paper is to find out the effectiveness of attending to feeling in reducing interaction problems of married couples. The population of the study consisted of Diploma II student of 2009/2010 academic session, Institute of Education, in ABU, Zaria totaling about 275. 30 subject each comprising of male and female married couples were randomly selected and assigned to experimental and control groups. An experimental design of post-test only control group was adopted where the experimental group was treated to attending to feelings counselling for seven weeks and the control group was not. An instrument titled "Couples communication skills questionnaire section on attending to feedings" was administered to both experimental (treated) and control (not treated) groups for data collection. A t-test technique of analysis was used to analyse the data. The result showed a significant difference between participants exposed to experiment and those in control groups. Based on this finding, attending to feelings counselling was recommended for counsellors.

Introduction

A priority of marriage is to keep it alive with new and interesting experiences full of spontaneity and tradition. To sustain it requires continual work of nurturing and infusing it with excitement and passion. The daily pressure experience often put relationship under tremendous strain by making great demand on spouses. Couples feel hurt and confused about why their relationship is deteriorating. They act in ways that make the relationship to drift apart the more instead of drawing themselves closer to each other (Kumuyi, 2010). Many spouses engage with one another without showing true emotions. Some, rather than look talking to a partner, others placate their partners to avoid expressing true feelings (Dagari, 2009) These attitudes create serious relationship problems that propel; cycles of negative experiences and emotional feelings.

In the midst of these turmoil of life, is the increasing rate of insensitivity to the feelings of each other. For example, husbands and wives no longer have the time to notice the inner yearnings of one another (Kumuyi, 2010). Many spouses engage with one another without showing true emotions. Some, rather than look talking to a partner, others placate their partners to avoid expressing true feelings (Dagari, 2009). These attitudes create serious relationship problems that propel cycles of negative experiences and emotional feelings.

Nowadays, the husband-wife relationship is not viewed as anything but bitterness, insults, and loneliness. It is a common behavior of couples not to pay attention to their partner's messages, as such, loose sight and meaning of what is conveyed. At other times, spouses occupy their minds with other thoughts which hinder them from understanding their partner's moods. Couples tend to talk to each other and refuse to respond to messages,

thereby maintaining silence and coldness toward their partners (Dagari, 2009). These attitudes inflict emotions of hurt, anger, not being cared for, or being ignored, which evokes feelings of frustration and misunderstanding.

This challenge on couples' relationship tends to destroy the fundamental binding string of marriage through creating difficulties in open sharing of feelings and emotions honestly to one another. The consequences of these negative emotional attitudes are many fold. Spouses experience feelings of disrespect, from their partners; engage in more anger arguments; doing less things together and misinterpret motives (young & Long, 1998). Thus, couples expectations and dreams elude them and cycles of negative emotional exchange of feelings sets in statement of the problems.

Statement of the Problems

Committed couples care about the quality of their relationships. Such couples make effort to sustain the relationship by interacting freely and purposefully with one another. Feelings of being loved, respected and accepted are experienced. This is possible because feelings are pointers to the emotional inclinations of an individual. They either strengthen the bonds of relationship or destroy it. Thus, Collingwood (2012) opined that even in strongest of relationships, there will be times when 'small irritations' can cause serious problems.

Observations from counselling and literature indicated that some couples complain about their partners speaking to them without censor and do not hold back their feelings. As a result, spouses experience intense emotional disturbance of feelings such as being insulted, humiliated, and belittled; and called all sorts of names such as stupid, foolish woman/man, talkative, ugly, useless etc. These verbal

abuses evoke various negative emotional feelings that include, anger, bitterness resentment and even hatred. The pains are deep and devastating on an individual. The consequence is destruction of the relationships as spouses no more engage each other in interacting. Braverman (2012) summarized it by reporting that if couples do not have a healthy way of expressing each other, then everything else will ultimately crumble.

This paper therefore intends to find out the effectiveness of attending to feelings counselling in reducing interaction problems of married couples. It also hopes to stimulate awareness and encourage change in the use of words, thereby help couples learn new ways to attend to each other's feelings and improve meaningful interaction in their relationships with one another. Based on the above objectives, the following research question is set.

Does exposure to attending to feelings counselling improve interaction in relationship of married couples?

A hypothesis was set for the study as follows:

There is no significant difference in the level of improvement in interactional relationship between married couples expose to treatment on attending to feelings counselling and those in control group.

Methodology and Procedure

The Design of the Study

This study adopted an experimental approach that made uses of Post-test only control group design for the research. The design according to Kolo (2003) is diagrammatically represented as follows:

post- test

RE	X	O ₁
RC	-	O ₂

The Design is interpreted as follows:

- R = represents random assignment of subjects to groups.
- E = represents experimental group which receives treatment on Attending to feelings counselling
- C = represents control group which receives no treatment
- X = represents treatment which is given to Experimental group on attending to feelings counselling
- O₁ = represents administration of post-test given to Experimental group
- O₂ = represents administration of post-test given to control group

In this design, the data of experimental group is compare with that of control group which

serves as the pre-test. The two groups (E & C) were randomly assigned but none was given a pre-test. The design was chosen for a variety against the popular pre-test and posttest design. It also controls most of the threats to internal validity as such it is a powerful design. The design provides confidentiality of the subjects. It can also be use for a study that has more than one treatment.

Population of the Study

The population of the study comprises of all male and female students studying various courses in Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. The student populations consist of married and unmarried individuals, numbering about 275 who were in diploma II for the 2009/2010 academic session. The target participants for the study are married male and female students.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique.

Out of a population of 275 students, a sample size of 60 males and females in equal number of 30 each were selected to participate in the study. A random sampling technique was used to sample the participants who were assigned into experimental and control groups.

Instrumentation

The instrument for the study is titled couples' communication skills. Questionnaire (CCSQ) developed by the researcher. It consists of two sections. The first section is an biodata while the second section is on Attending to feelings with 14 items. The questionnaire was set to measure the level of interaction in relationship of married couples using Attending to feelings counselling. A four point linker scale for rating of responses was selected for the study as follows: Strongly agreed = 4; Agreed = 3; Disagreed = 2 and strongly disagreed = 1. The higher the scores, the better is level attaining in interactional relationship. The lower the scores, the poorer is the level of interactional relationship of married couples.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument of Study

A face and content validity of the instrument was conducted through pilot study after specializes in the field of study assessed the draft questionnaire and made corrections which were affected. The pilot study data was analysed and yielded a Cronbach alpha level of 0.882 for content reliability coefficient and internal consistent of the instrument.

Procedure for Data Collection

Data collection was conducted in two phases. The first phase was the experimental session which was conducted with married couples on

attending to feelings counselling. The sessions were for one hour each week and lasted for six weeks. The married couples were treated attending to feelings counselling brain steaming on the following with the researcher making clarification and explanation on the area of: concept of attending, feelings; types of feelings i.e feeling words; attitudes which arouse feelings - negatives and positives speaking rules and methods. Use of I-messages to report feelings and how to increase the use of positives in marriage relationship.

The second phase of the experiment took place in the seven week and was the administration of the instrument for data collection. That is the questionnaire was administered to both married couples who received treatment on attending to

feelings counselling and these who were not treated - the control group. A post-test was administered to all participants in the study.

Procedure for Data Analysis

The data obtained was subjected to analysis. The test technique included frequency count, mean, standard deviation and t-test analysis of the scores of the participants. To determine the effectiveness or otherwise of attending to feelings counselling, the rated responses of the participants were compared. The scores married couples who were treated and post tested were compared with those who were not treated - control group. The result is presented as follows:

Status	N	x	sd	t	df	P
Experimental Group	30	2.2357	.33772	3.18	58	.002
Control Group	30	2.4881	.27318			

Critical t-value 2.00

From Table 1 above, the mean and standard deviation of experimental group is $m=2.2357$ and $sd = .33772$ while, the mean of control group is $m=2.4881$ and $sd = .27318$. The mean of treatment group (2.2357) is lower than the mean (2.4881) of control group. The observed t-calculated value of 3.18 is higher than critical t-value of 2.00 at 58 degree of freedom (df). The observed level of significance $P= .002$ is lower than 0.05 ($P<.05$). The result therefore showed that there is a significant difference between participants in the experimental group and those in control group. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the level of improvement in interactional relationship between married couples expose to attending to feelings counselling and those in control group is not accepted. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

The research question of the study states that: Does exposure to attending to feelings counselling improve interaction in relationship of married couples? The finding of the study revealed that participants in the experimental group who received counselling did improved in their level of interaction compare to those who received no treatment.

Discussion of Finding of the Study

The result of the tested hypothesis indicated a statistical significant difference in the level of improvement in interactional relationship of

participants in experimental group who were exposed to attending to feelings counselling over the control group. This finding implied that participants in treatment group improve in the way they attend to feelings of their spouses which might have also enhanced the interaction in their relationship. A possible explanation could be attributed to the treatment programme package which might have enable participants learn how to process their feelings properly.

Pelt (2005) affirmed that becoming more aware of the pattern of expressing feelings can help one avoid pitfalls that traps and also improve chances of learning to express at new and deeper levels thereby understand each other better. Gottman (1994) concurred that couples who received treatment can express feelings of hurt, anger, pains or disappoint etc without being critical and do not use extremely negative words of contempt. However Johnson and Greenberg (1994) disagreed with this finding by reporting that couples become involved in creating cycles of emotional interaction as one partner ends up feeling angry, the other becomes defensive. This attitude builds more difficulties for relationships.

It is evident from the finding of this study that counsellors can use this package programme and procedures on attending to feelings counselling to enhance marriage relationship of couples. This is because according to Pierce (1994) couples try to escape from the throes of negative emotions and want

to regain the initial good feelings that they had about their relationship and partners. Gottman and Krokoff (1989) also affirmed that couples not only want their partners to stop annoying habits, but also want to feel some of the old attractions, closeness, contact and intimacy they used to share. Branon (2008) also asserted that oftentimes, the desire is to feel true love where a husband or wife unashamedly cherish the other by enjoying those tender moments when he/she can unburden his/her heart without fear and also find ways to add fun to their relationship, is always strong among couples. Selwy (2010) summarized by saying that it is important to openly express any feelings that beset us, especially between partners, for it helps to strengthen the bonds of relationship.

Thus counselling offers couples the opportunity to find ways of expressing or venting deeply held emotions, reflecting of feelings and focusing on their emotional reactions. Frank and Frank (1991) concurred that the experience of emotional arousal the consequence of expressing feelings, form an important curative factor. Young and Young (1998) reiterated that during counselling, counsellors often encourage couples to express deeply held feelings, hoping that this unburdening will bring about new awareness and a sense of relief. When this happens, counselling is successful.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made.

1. Married couples should seek for counselling from time to time to learn more new ways of interaction that could enhance their relationship.
2. Counsellors are to use marriage enhancement packages of Programmes such as attending to feeling counselling to counsel and stimulate awareness on the need to attend to feelings of partners for healthy relationships.
3. Counselling services should be provided for or made available for the benefits of community members by federal, states, local government and even private sector.
4. Interactional skills should be taught to students as a course or Subjects to enable males and females who are either married or Would get married in the future to acquire and use such skills in their daily life
5. Married couples should support one another to

talk freely and openly about their feelings without fear. They are to create time and be with each other to attend properly to their relationship.

6. Married couples 'should be committed and consciously change their perception of issues, events, things and even their partners in the way they interact so as to attain a healthy relationship.

Conclusion

It is very crucial for married couples to nurture and sustain their relationship by properly attending to feelings of each other during interaction. This is possible when they cultivate healthy habits of talking and expression of feelings properly and directly. This will not only strengthen the marriage bond but also make the relationship healthy.

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