

Gender Differences in Handling Marital Communication Conflict and Choice of Individual Coping Strategies

Carrie Grace Jaymess, Fatahyah Yahya

Abstract: This study examined gender differences in handling marital communication conflict and choice of individual coping strategies in a sample of 130 (89 females and 41 males) married working individuals aged between 25 and 60 years old, who have been married for at least 6 months at the time of study. The Communication Pattern Questionnaires (CPQ) and Coping Resources Inventory (CRI) were used to collect the data. A Mann-Whitney U test was run to determine any differences in the scores of marital communication conflict and coping strategies between the males and the females. The median marital communication conflict score was statistically and significantly different between males and females, $U = 1218.5, z = -3.037, p = 0.002$. The median marital communication score for males was 164, which was higher than the female score of 142. The score for median coping strategies was also statistically significantly different between males and females, $U = 1370.5, z = -2.276, p = 0.023$. The score for median coping strategies for females was 165, which was higher than the scores of the males (159). The results indicate that the males attained significantly higher marital conflict communication scores than the females while females attained significantly higher coping strategy scores than the males.

Index Terms: Coping Strategies, Gender Differences, Marital Communication Conflict

I. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to ancient times, the role of women and men in today's household have become almost equal. Women, who were once synonymous with staying at home and cooking, have evolved to assume the role once dominated by men. If previously, men were the sole breadwinner, now, women have also stepped up to the plate. This situation has definitely changed the basic concept of maintaining the household and the division of roles between husband and wife. It may also expose couples to different challenges and problems. Many studies have proven the importance of effective communication in retaining a good relationship. Good communication between couples can reduce misunderstandings when conflicts occur. Conflict is inevitable in a marriage; this conflict will surely put pressure on the couple, so when faced with a stressful situation, couples should be wise at finding solutions or ways to

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Carrie Grace Jaymess, Faculty of Cognitive Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Kuching, Sarawak.

Fatahyah Yahya, Faculty of Cognitive Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Kota Samarahan, Kuching, Sarawak.

channel their stress. There are many studies that have shown that men and women communicate differently and have their own way of dealing with problems and stressful events. This study aims to assess whether or not there are gender differences in the way males and females handle marital communication conflict and individual coping strategies.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Result of Previous Studies

In many homes today, women serve as the bread winners, providing for the needs of the family members and also engaging in professional careers, various vocations, and/or full-time trading/farming (Nwatu, 2018). According to Christensen and Heavey (1990), marital conflict typically emerges when one partner behaves in a way that is unpleasant to the other. Peterson (1983) posited that once this initiating event has occurred, the couple makes a crucial decision to either engage in discussion or to avoid the discussion of the issue altogether. A study of the demand/withdraw behavioural patterns in the event of marital conflict by Christensen and Heavey (1990) indicated that both the husband and the wife were more likely to demand a discussion for change in their favour and were more likely to withdraw when discussing a change in their partner's favour. However, men were more withdrawn than women overall, but women were not more demanding than men overall. According to a study by Wanic and Kulik (2011), men's habit of withdrawing from conflict exacerbates the power differential during marital arguments and denies wives the conversation or movement towards a resolution they desire. The research indicated that marriage had beneficial health consequences for morbidity and mortality, but the benefits were stronger for men than for women. One plausible explanation for this difference arises from responses to marital conflict, where women are more negatively impacted both physiologically and psychologically. Lengua and Stormshak (2000) noted that both genders use coping strategies differently, as has also been reported in a number of studies. There are also individual differences in how people cope with distress (Nwatu, 2018), because a modern woman, unlike her counterpart four decades ago, is challenged by the current economic situation to pursue and have a career and also to help in achieving organizational goals as well as being a companion to the husband, and a caregiver to her children; she needs

