

# Age Differences on Communication Styles among Married Adults in Oyo State, Nigeria

**Ruth O. Adesokan<sup>1\*</sup>**,

*Central University of Technology Free State, South Africa*

*Corresponding Author: adesokanro@gmail.com*

**Alfred H. Makura<sup>2</sup>**,

*Central University of Technology Free State, South Africa*

**Mary O. Esere<sup>3</sup>**,

*University of Ilorin, Nigeria*

## **Abstract**

*The study examined the impact of age differences in married adults' communication styles in Oyo state, Nigeria. It adopted a quantitative approach and descriptive survey research design. Six hundred (N=600) married adults were randomly selected using the multi-stage sampling technique. The questionnaires were used for data collection in this study, and the respondents were required to use four points Likert rating scale. The instrument was validated by the experts in Counsellor Education Department, University of Ilorin. Mean, Standard Deviation, and Analysis of Variance were employed as a data analysis technique. The findings revealed that married adults mostly adopted the marital communication styles, which tended more towards the supportive style. The results further indicated that age has an insignificant impact on the communication styles of married adults. It is recommended that married adults adopt the supportive communication style in their marriages to promote understanding, openness, empathy, adaptability, and cooperation between them and their spouses.*

**Keywords:** Communication Style, Age, Married adults, Nigeria

## **1. Introduction**

Over the years, ineffective communication has been identified as one of the major causes of marital dissolution (Esere, et al., 2014). In marriage, couples consciously or unconsciously adopt different communication styles to express their feelings on issues (Oniye, et al., 2016). Arguably, conflicts arise, and communication falls apart quickly if these different styles are not recognized and accommodated. Tannen (2013) stated that communication style is a conservative way to share information with others through language. He further maintained that variables such as age, culture, gender, and many more influence individual's communication styles. Besides, Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2014) asserted that younger males aged 10-34 years had a higher marital dissolution rate than older men. These authors affirm further that marital dissolution was highest in the South-south and North-east regions of Nigeria. Similarly, Subranmia et al.'s (2015) study stated that age difference between couples significantly affects marital satisfaction. A successful marriage depends on various ingredients such as trust, love, time, friendship, understanding, honesty, loyalty, sincerity, and effective communication (Esere, et al., 2011). Any marriage was lacking one or more of the above elements, especially effective communication, is likely to fail.

Marriage fosters the growth of any given society. It is the foundation for family and society (Adesokan et al., 2019). Marriage and communication are inseparable. Marriage involves exchanging information, feelings, ideas, and beliefs between couples, which could either be effective or ineffective through verbal or non-verbal methods (Esere et al., 2011). Communication is an essential component in marriage, and the communication styles are the critical guide of connection between married adults (Lavner et al., 2016; Oniye et al., 2016). Communication is a life wire of any meaningful relationship, in which marriage is not exempted (Esere, 2006).

Nevertheless, it is essential to consider that various people have different communication styles (Oniye et al., 2016). The authors affirmed that the way an individual talk to other people depicts his or her communication

style. It is essential to understand how others understand one's communication styles to achieve effective communication (Idowu & Esere, 2007). Effective communication promotes healthy marriage, while Ineffective communication causes conflict in marriages and leads to separation or divorce (Esere et al., 2014). Furthermore, without effective communication, it will be challenging to resolve conflicts in marriages. Hence, effective communication among couples demands proper knowledge of the communication styles used by each partner. Communication style is a method of interacting verbally or non-verbally to indicate exactly how information should be interpreted or understood (Wylie & Baugh, 2013).

Researches have been globally and nationally carried out on the effect of communication in marriage. Harris & Kumar (2018) examined marital satisfaction and communication skills among married couples in India. Their findings showed that gender and other demographic factors influence marital satisfaction (Harris & Kumar, 2018). Similarly, Salifu (2001) examined the relationship between communication styles and marital adjustment of educated couples in Ankpá, Kogi State. Salifu's (2001) findings indicated that couples who established good and sound communication styles are likely to have pleasant relationships. Oniye et al. (2016) investigated how communication styles and sexual behaviours could predict marital satisfaction among married teachers at secondary schools in Kwara State, Nigeria. Their findings revealed that married teachers in Kwara State use assertive and passive communication styles for several romantic sexual behaviours, including hugging, romancing, pecking, kissing their spouses, and satisfied with their marriages (Oniye et al., 2016).

Some research on age and marriage success and satisfaction asserted that age has a significant effect on marital satisfaction, which increases the divorce rate (Lehrer, 2008; Lampard, 2013; Subrammiam et al., 2015). Lehrer (2008) examined whether the effect that age at marriage has on the success of the marriage diminishes as one gets older with 6850 sample size and found that increased age at marriage has a strong effect on the marriage's success. Lampard (2013) focused on the relationship between the age at marriage and the risk of divorce for couples in England and Wales and found that age at marriage affects the divorce rate. Thus, there are a lot of studies on marital communication. However, little is known about the impact of age differences on styles of communication of married adults. This inspired the researchers to embark on this study. These motivated the researchers to investigate the impact of age differences on married adults' communication styles in Oyo state since Oyo state is part of Nigeria's South-west region.

## **2. Communication styles**

Communication is such an important issue that cannot be taken for granted in marriages (Adesokan et al., 2019). Thus, communication style is more important for a healthy married relationship (Oniye et al. 2016). Idowu & Esere (2007) argued that a good understanding of communication styles allows individuals to identify how to communicate properly to avoid misunderstanding. It is essential to understand the different communication styles in any marriage to prevent wreckage from marriage. (Oniye et al., 2016). Newton (2012) and Steven (2013) have identified different styles of communication among married couples. Newton (2012) suggested any one of the following five communication styles: assertive, aggressive, passive, passive-aggressive, and submissive styles. Newton (2012) argued further that manipulative styles are skilled at influencing or controlling their partner. Aggressive style is about often winning at someone else's expenses. Passive-aggressive is a style in which the individual or couple using it appears to be two-faced. Pleasant to people to their faces but poisonous behind their back while submissive style is about pleasing other people. She affirms that the assertive communication style is a style in which individuals or couples clearly state their opinions, feelings, and firmly fight for their rights without violating others' rights. It is how couples naturally express themselves when their self-esteem is intact. To her, the assertive style is the style most people used the least. She established that the assertive communication style is the most effective and healthiest because it allows for openness, honesty, self-respect, and direct communication, which eventually pave the way for marital stability.

According to Steven (2013), communication styles generally fall into four categories: emotive, supportive, directive, and reflective. He arguably stated that emotive communicators are interested in dominance and sociability; supportive communicators are more interested in sociability than dominance. People who use the directive style are exactly the opposite, more interested in dominance than sociability. Finally, reflective communicators are not interested in sociability or dominance. Communication styles determine how partners talk to each other. For example, an emotive person wants to be the centre of attention and spends most of his/her time talking.

On the other hand, a reflective person is quieter and spends his/her time in thought rather than conversation. Either could be immensely annoying to the other person. Conversely, they might consider themselves perfectly

matched because the emotive person can talk without interruption, and the reflective person can think his/her thoughts. At the same time, the talker does not care if he/she gets a response.

A study from India by Harris and Kumar (2018) titled marital satisfaction and communication among couples with a total sample of 100 respondents (50 wives and 50 husbands) was conducted. A questionnaire was used to obtain data from the respondents. The study revealed that interpersonal communication skills are necessary for making a good relationship bond between the partners. There was no statistically significant difference in gender, age, and years of marriage on couples' study variables. Another study from Kenya by Kinyua and Mberia (2016) examined the impact of gender differences in communication styles among teachers on conflict management in public secondary schools. Two hundred seventy-one teaching staff were the sample size, and data were collected through a questionnaire. The findings showed significant differences in communication styles used by male and female administrators, especially when handling conflict at their workplaces.

In Nigeria, Ntoimo and Akokuwebe (2014) investigated the prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution in Nigeria. Secondary data obtained from the 2006 Nigeria population census were used to depict prevalence and marital dissolution patterns, while age and sex were used as variables. The results showed that crude marital dissolution rate among the ever-married population in Nigeria was about 30 per 1000, but age-specific marital dissolution rates ranged from 24 to 132 per 1000 ever-married females and 15 to 24 males; the higher rates were among younger persons aged 10-24 years.

Similarly, Esere et al. (2014) conducted on obstacles and suggested solutions to effective communication in marriage as expressed by married adults in Kogi State. The questionnaire was used to obtain data from a sample size of 660 respondents. The study reported that obstacles to effective communication include getting home late regularly, harsh tone of voice during the conversation, and bringing up memories of the past. They suggested that effective communication obstacles could be contained by considering one's spouse's contribution, opinion, and trust while discussing issues.

Similarly, Esere et al. (2015) indicated that poor communication and faulty cognition were accountable for marital instability. There were significant differences in respondents' reports based on gender, age, religion, occupational status, and educational background. In another study in Nigeria, Oniye et al. (2016) indicated that married teachers adopted an assertive communication style (discussing the plan with partners, revealing sexual feelings to partners). It is important to note that previous researches on marital communication in Nigeria have been focused more on influences of effective communication (Idowu & Esere, 2007; Salifu, 2001; Esere et al., 2011; Esere et al., 2014; Esere et al., 2015; Oniye et al., 2016; Adesokan et al., 2019), while little is known about the impact of age differences on styles of communication of married adults. This inspired the researchers to embark on this study. These motivated the researchers to investigate the impact of age differences on married adults' communication styles in Oyo state since Oyo state is part of Nigeria's South-west region.

### **3. Goal of the Study**

The study aimed to determine the impact of age differences in communication styles among married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria. The null hypothesis was stated as follows:

There is no significant difference in the styles of communication of married adults based on age.

### **4. Methodology**

#### *4.1 Research Design*

This study adopted a quantitative approach to generalised the data gathered from the sample of the population. It aimed to determine the impact of age differences in married adults' communication styles in Oyo State. Therefore, a descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect and summarize numerical data (Oniye, 2004; Dada & Idowu, 2006). It also focused on the people, their beliefs, opinions, perceptions, motivations, attitudes, and behaviours (Adesokan et al., 2019). The descriptive approach was used in this research to obtain data from the situation as they exist. Hence, the descriptive survey design is believed appropriate for the study.

#### *4.2 Participants and setting*

This study comprises all married adults in Oyo State, while the study population consists of selected married adults in Oyo state. The selected married adults were sampled using the multi-stage sampling technique. Multi-stage sampling allows for the use of two or more probability sampling techniques. It is useful when the population's element is spread all over a wide geographical region (Alvi, 2016). Oyo state consists of three

senatorial districts: Oyo North, Oyo South, and Oyo Central, with numerous Local Governments under each district. Hence, multi-stage sampling techniques were considered appropriate.

At the first stage, proportional sampling on a 2:1 was used in selecting two Local Government Areas from each of the three senatorial districts in Oyo State.

At stage two, five occupational institutions were chosen through purposive sampling techniques from each local government area. These include two government establishments, two private establishments, and one self-employed establishment. All characteristics expected were found in the sample; therefore, thirty occupational establishments from the three senatorial districts were selected. At stage three, twenty married adults were selected from each of the five selected occupational institutions using a random sampling technique. Hence, 40 respondents from government establishments, 40 from private establishments, and 20 from self-employed establishments making a total of one hundred (100) married adults per Local Government selected at stage 1.

Consequently, two hundred married adults were selected from each of the three senatorial districts in Oyo State using stratified random sampling. These strata being age. Thus, a total sample size of six hundred (600) married adults were randomly selected for this study.

#### *4.3 Research Instruments*

In this study, the researchers employed a questionnaire as the research instrument to collect the data. The questionnaire was split up into two segments. The first segment elicited information on biographical data of the respondents, such as age and gender. The second segment entailed question items to acquire information on communication styles. It consists of items to measure the kind of communication used by married adults. For example, in responding to these items on the questionnaire, the respondents were required to use four points Likert rating scale. Section 'B' (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree).

The content and face validity were assessed through experts in the Department of Counsellor Education, University of Ilorin, for modification and adjustment of the draft to align with the study's objectives and purpose. Their suggestions and corrections have consented to; it was adjudged to have content and face validity. Thus, suitable for use for the study.

The test re-test reliability approach was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The questionnaire forms were administered to twenty married adults in Ibadan Metropolis; after three weeks, the same respondents were given the same instrument to respond to. The two sets of scores derived were then correlated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, and the coefficient of 0.83 was derived. The instrument was, therefore, considered adequate and reliable.

#### *4.4 Procedure for data collection*

Ethical clearance was approved from the University of Ilorin, Ilorin Kwara State, to conduct the research. Permission from the Department of counsellor education was obtained. Respondents signed individual consent forms to participate in this study. The respondents were assured of their voluntary participation and the confidentiality of their responses. The questionnaire forms were personally administered to the respondents with the help of two trained research assistants who were trained on how to administer the instrument. The respondents were encouraged to respond accurately and promptly to the questionnaires, and the completed forms were retrieved from the respondents on the spot.

#### *4.5 Data analysis techniques*

The researchers used descriptive and inferential statistical methods to analyze the data via SPSS 25 that were collected for the study. The frequency and simple percentages were used for the demographic data, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) statistical tools were used to test the research hypotheses. Mouhamadou (2014) stated that the ANOVA procedure is an inferential statistic for comparing the means of more than two groups. The ANOVA was done through SPSS 25.

## **5. Results**

This section depicts the complete analysis of the data gathered from the respondents.

### 5.1 Descriptive data

The frequency count, percentages, means, and standard deviations are presented in Tables 1

#### 5.1.1 Communication styles of married adults in Oyo State

**Table 1:** Respondents' Communication Styles in married adults

Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std. Dev.
1. My spouse and I freely discuss all family matters	383(68.0)	136(24.2)	39(6.9)	5(0.9)	3.59	0.66
My spouse and I resolve 2—family problems without an external or third party.	148(26.3)	341(60.6)	68(12.1)	6(1.1)	3.12	0.64
3.I strive to be logical whenever I am communicating with my spouse	168(29.8)	283(50.3)	90(16.0)	22(3.9)	3.06	0.78
4.1 always shed artificial tears to manipulate my spouse.	159(28.2)	264(46.9)	95(16.9)	45(8.0)	2.95	0.88
5. My spouse and I resolve our disagreements without raising voice at each other.	216(38.4)	260(46.2)	70(12.4)	17(3.0)	3.09	0.77
6. I attempt to avoid provocative issues during a conversation with my spouse.	182(32.3)	265(47.1)	103(18.3)	13(2.3)	3.09	0.77
7. My spouse does not regard my opinion during the conversation.	145(27.51)	280(53.13)	99(18.79)	39(10.97)	2.89	0.91
8. My spouse and I do not communicate in the chorus.	110(20.87)	380(72.11)	58(11.01)	15(4.93)	3.02	0.83
9. My spouse and I discuss issues that affect the family in a relaxed mood.	200(20.87)	250(47.44)	75(14.23)	38(7.21)	3.11	0.82
10. I always turn any back at my spouse whenever I am angry	160(30.36)	265(50.28)	96(18.22)	44(11.81)	2.95	0.89
11. My spouse and I seldom talk in public places.	154(29.22)	280(58.68)	90(17.08)	39(7.40)	2.96	0.91
Weighted Mean = 3.13						

SA: Strongly Agree, A: Agree, D: Disagree, SD: Strongly Disagree

The results displayed in Table 1 the married adults' communication styles revealed that married adults freely discussed all family matter (item 1: mean 3.59), family problems are resolved by my spouse and I without an external or third party (item 2: mean 3.12), strive to be logical whenever I am communicating with my spouse (item 3: mean 3.06), always shed artificial tears to manipulate my spouse (item 4: mean 2.95), My spouse and I resolve our disagreements without raising voice at each other (item 5: 3.20), avoid provocative issues during a conversation with my spouse (item 6: mean 3.09). My spouse and I do not communicate in the chorus (item 8: mean 3.02). This seven-item yielded a mean score which is higher than 3.00 out of a maximum score of 4.00. All these tend toward the positive aspect of marital communication. While the remaining four yielded a lower score, which is less than 3.00.

#### 5.1.2 Age as a predictor to styles of communication of married adults

**Table 2:** ANOVA results: Age as a predictor to styles of communication of married adults based on age

Age	N	mean	Std. Dev.	Calculated f-value	Sig.
18-25	101	2.71	1.01		
26-33	142	2.96	1.32	2.512	0.112
34 +	284	3.21	1.28		

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

The results displayed in Table 2 show that the married adults 34 years and above had the highest mean score 3.21 followed by those 26-30 years of age ( $x = 2.96$ ), while those between 18-25 had the lowest means score ( $x = 2.71$ ). To this end, the older married adults had better styles of communication than the younger ones. However, the difference is not significant ( $F = 2.512$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ) hypothesis is not rejected.

## 6. Discussion

This research aimed to determine the impact of age differences in communication styles among married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria. This study found that the married adults who adopted the marital communication styles tended more towards the supportive style. In this study, the married adults recognized the need for dialogue; they engaged in a free discussion on family issues and are rational in such discussions. This corroborates with the classification by Steven (2013). He listed the supportive style as one of the four communication styles and described the supportive style as interested in sociability rather than dominance. An analysis of the findings on style adopted by the married adults also reflects the four levels of interaction proposed by Steven (2013) as dialogue, discussion, debate, and argument. Despite all these in the marital communication of the married adults, as found in this study, they were still able to prevent conversations from deteriorating into a serious argument, stress but focused on survival through calm logic. Indeed, the individuals in this study tend effective marriage communication.

Furthermore, age has no significant impact on the communication styles of married adults. Although, the study found that older married adults demonstrated more effective communication styles than their younger peers. The above finding contradicts previous studies (Lehrer, 2008; Lampard, 2013 & Subranmiam et al., 2015). Lampard (2013) examined the relationship between marriage age and the risk of divorce for couples in England and Wales, the study found that age at marriage affects the divorce rate. Subranmiam et al. (2015) found that age difference between couples significantly affects marital satisfaction. It is important to note that married adults who are having communication challenges in their marriages should endeavour to adopt a supportive communication style to overcome the challenges in their marriages.

## 7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study revealed that married adults who are 34 years and above had the highest mean score, followed by those in the 26-33 years age bracket while those who are between 18-25 years had the lowest mean score. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that age has no significant impact on the communication styles of married adults. This study's findings led to the following recommendations that married adults should adopt the supportive style of communication in their marriages to promote understanding, openness, empathy, adaptability, and cooperation between them and their spouses. Marriage counsellors should emphasize a supportive communication style.

This study has successfully investigated the impact of age differences in married adults' communication in Oyo State, Nigeria. Therefore, further studies need to focus on replicating this study in other parts of the country to determine its generalizability in Nigeria. Replication of this study can be conducted in any part of the world since family is the building block of any given society. Novel therapies for improving communication styles and marital stability should be developed and experimented with to determine their efficacies.

It must be noted that the respondents in this study consisted of married adults in Oyo state who voluntarily participated in this study. The results of the current study should only be generalised to a similarly motivated population. Thus, generalising this result outside the assigned sample would be incorrect.

## References

- Adesokan, R. O. Esere, M. O. & Makura, A.H. (2019). Styles of communication and Marital stability of married adults in Oyo State, Nigeria. *Afro Asian Journal of Social sciences*, 10 (3), 1-13.
- Alvi, M.H. (2016). A manual for selecting sampling techniques in research. Retrieved, 27th September 2017 <https://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/70218/>
- Dada, M. F. & Idowu, A. I. (2006). Factors enhancing marital stability as perceived by educated spouses in Ilorin metropolis, Nigeria. *The Counsellor*, 22(1), 127-137.
- Esere, M. O. (2006). Communication management skills training as marriage enrichment programme in the improvement of marital adjustment. *The Counsellor*, 23(1), 69-77.
- Esere, M.O. Ake-Yeyeodu, & Oladun, C., (2014). Obstacles and suggested solutions to effective communication in marriage as expressed by married adults in Kogi State, Nigeria. *Procedia - Social and Behavioural Sciences*, (114), 584 – 592.
- Esere, M.O. Iruloh, B.R., Ojiah, P.O., Bukoye, R.O. & Chieke D.N. (2015). Poor communication and faculty cognition on marital stability of married adults in Nigeria. *The Journal of Social Sciences Research*, 1(5), 58-65
- Esere, M.O. Yusuff, J. & Omotosho J. A. (2011). Influence of spousal communication on marital stability: Implication for conducive home environment. *Edo Journal of Counselling*, 4, 1- 2.
- Harris, F. & Kumar A. P. (2018) Marital satisfaction and communication skills among married couples. *Indian Journal of Social Research*, 59(1), 35-44 <http://www.clairnewton.co.za/my-articles/the-five-communication-styles.html>.
- Idowu, A.I. & Esere, M. O. (2007). Communication in counselling a multidimensional perspective. Ilorin: TIM-SAL publication Nigeria enterprises.
- Kinyua, C. K. & Mberia, H. (2016). The impact of gender differences in communication styles among teachers on management of conflict in public secondary schools in mathira east sub-county Kenya. *International Journal of Scientific Research*, 1(1), 74-139
- Lampard, R. (2013). Age at marriage and the risk of divorce in England and Wales. *Demographic Research*, 29, 167-202. doi:10.4054/DemRes.2013.29.7
- Lavner, J. A., Karney, B. R., & Bradbury, T. N. (2016). Does couples' communication predict marital satisfaction, or does marital satisfaction predict communication? *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78, 680-694.
- Lehrer, E. L. (2008). Age at marriage and marital instability: Revisiting the Becker–Landes–Michael hypothesis. *Journal of Population Economics*, 21(2), 463-484. <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.stthomas.edu/stable/40344789>
- Mouhamadou, T. S. (2014). Using ANOVA to examine the relationship between safety and security and human development. *Journal of International Business and Economics*, 2(4), 101-106.
- Newton, C. (2012). The five communication styles. <http://www.clairnewton.co.za/my-articles/the-five-communication-styles.html>
- Ntoimo F.C. & Akokuwebe, M. E. (2014). Prevalence and patterns of marital dissolution in Nigeria". *The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 12(2), 1-15.
- Oniye, A. O. (2004). Marital and family counseling. In A.I. Idowu (Ed). *Guidance and Counseling in Education*. Ilorin: Indemic publishers (Nig). Ltd.
- Oniye, A. O., Yahaya, L. A., Odebode, A. A. & Alade, E. E. (2016). Communication styles and sexual behaviours as predictors of marital satisfaction among secondary school teachers in Kwara State, Nigeria. *African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 9, 13-24.
- Salifu, A. A. (2001). *Style of communication and marital adjustment of educated couples in Ankpa, Kogi State*. Unpublished undergraduate research work, Counsellor Education Department, University of Ilorin.
- Steven, M. C. (2013). *Marriage Counselling and Relationship Advice*. Counselling and Communication, Portland, Oregon.
- Subranmiam, M., Mutyara, K. & Syam, H.H. (2015). Students' perception of ideal age for marriage childbearing. *Althea Medical Journal*, 2(4), 591-596.
- Tannen, D. (2013). Communication styles of men and women. <http://homestar.org>bryannan>tannen>.

Wylie, V. & Baugh, A. (2013). Alleviate stress by becoming more assertive. <http://www.openexchange.com>.