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Marital Satisfaction and Perception of Partner's Communication Style Among Polish Married Adults

Abstract

The aim of the study was to investigate the association between marital satisfaction and the perception of partner's communication style. It was hypothesized, on the basis of literature, that the perception of the partner's communication behaviours; such as supportive, engaged, and depreciated, is related to marital satisfaction. The study design comprised of a correlational study in which participants were asked to fill in the questionnaires. The results indicated a significant correlation between marital satisfaction and the perception of partner communication style as supportive, engaged, and depreciated. The higher level of marital satisfaction was found in the married adults who perceived their partner's communication style as highly supportive and engaged, but the least depreciated. The results confirmed the importance of communication between partners for their perceived satisfaction with the relationship.

Keywords: communication style, communication behaviors, marital satisfaction

Satysfakcja małżeńska i percepcja stylu komunikacji partnera wśród polskich dorosłych będących w związku małżeńskim

Streszczenie

Celem badań była analiza powiązań między satysfakcją małżeńską a percepcją stylu komunikacji partnera. Na podstawie literatury postawiona została hipoteza, że percepcja zachowań komunikacyjnych, takich jak wspierające, zaangażowane i dewaluujące jest związana z satysfakcją małżeńską. Badanie miało charakter korelacyjny. Osoby badane zostały poproszone o wypełnienie kwestionariusza. Wyniki ujawniły istotny związek między badanymi zmiennymi. Wyższy poziom satysfakcji małżeńskiej został ujawniony u osób, które postrzegały styl komunikacji partnera jako wysoce wspierający i zaangażowany i mało dewaluujący. Wyniki potwierdziły wagę komunikacji między partnerami dla postrzeganej satysfakcji z relacji.

Słowa kluczowe: styl komunikacji, zachowania komunikacyjne, satysfakcja małżeńska

Introduction

One of the important aspects of human relationships, including marital relationships, is communication. The communication style (e.g. Jourdain, 2004) defines the way of coding and interpreting information received from others and the way of forming messages that are displayed in multiple ways of passing the information through words and on a meta-level (Plopa, 2006). In marriage, communication serves not only as a way to exchange information between partners, but also significantly influences intimacy experienced by them. The quality of communication may enhance or inhibit intimacy (Plopa, 2006) and, as a result, marital satisfaction (Ryś, 1996; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005). For instance, Montgomery (1981) indicates that openness and confirmation are positively related to levels of marital satisfaction. Negative communication (e.g. criticizing a partner) between partners is a prediction of a divorce (Markman, Rhoades, Stanley, Ragan, & Witton, 2010). Such behaviours as giving support, showing engagement and the partner's depreciation belong to essential areas of marital communication (Plopa, 2006). Therefore, it is plausible to assume that the level of marital satisfaction may be associated with a partner's communication style. In addition, regarding gender differences in the area of communication (Peplau & Gordon, 1985) we also included gender in our analyses. The present study¹ investigated the association between marital satisfaction and perception of partner's communication behaviours as supportive, engaged, and depreciated.

Method

Participants and Procedure

The study was carried out in a Polish sample of 207 married adults (102 males and 105 females) aged 24–59 ($M = 40.34$, $SD = 9.43$). The mean duration of marriage was 15.28 years with the standard deviation of 10.31. The set of questionnaires was distributed among the students by the authors. Students in turn passed those questionnaires to their relatives and friends.

Materials

The questionnaire package presented to the study participants was comprised of the following instruments:

Demographic Questionnaire This questionnaire was designed to obtain general descriptive information about participants' background such as their age, gender, education, and current relationship status.

The Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS; Spanier, 1976, Polish adaptation – Cieślak, 1989). In the current study we used the 10-item Satisfaction sub-scale from the DAS as the measure of marital satisfaction. It includes items that measure frequency of

¹ This study is a part of a larger research project devoted to investigation of marital and life satisfaction, communication style and perceived social support among married adults in Poland.

quarrels, discussions of separation, and positive interactions. Coefficient alpha for the present sample was .83.

Marital Communication Questionnaire (MCQ; Plopa, 2006). This questionnaire measures the individual’s own and partner’s communication style. It includes three sub-scales: (1) The Support sub-scale, that includes communication behaviours associated with showing respect to a partner, interest in his/her problems and needs, as well as joint problem solving; (2) Engagement sub-scale includes competences to create an atmosphere of mutual understanding and closeness in a relationship, and it includes communication behaviours such as the showing of feelings, emphasizing partner’s uniqueness and significance, and prevention of conflicts in a relationship; (3) Depreciation sub-scale includes behaviours related to such areas as showing aggression towards a partner, disrespect for a partner’s dignity, the will to predominate over a partner and control him or her. Cronbach’s alpha in the present study were .93 for the Support, .87 for Engagement, and .89 for Depreciation scales.

Results

To address the aims of the study, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted for marital satisfaction as a dependent variable (see Table 1). In the first step, gender was controlled. In the second step, partner’s communication behaviours as supportive, engaged, and depreciated were investigated. In the third, they were examined. Before examining the interaction between gender and the partner’s communication behaviours, the variables were centered.

Table 1. Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Marital Satisfaction from Communication Behaviors

Predictor	Marital satisfaction	
	B	ΔR^2
Step 1		.01
Gender	.11	
Step 2		.41
Supportive communication behaviours	.32***	
Engaged communication behaviours	.21**	
Depreciated communication behaviours	-.28***	
Step 3		.02
Supportive communication behaviours * gender	-.09	
Engaged communication behaviours * gender	-.05	
Depreciated communication behaviours * gender	.01	

** p < .01; *** p < .001.

As Table 1 displays, in Step 1 gender did not significantly add to the prediction of the marital satisfaction. In Step 2, the main effects explained an additional significant portion of the variance in the outcome. The perception of partner’s

communication style as supportive and engaged was positively related to marital satisfaction, whereas perception of partner's communication as depreciated was negatively related to marital satisfaction. In Step 3, the interaction effects did not significantly add to the prediction of marital satisfaction.

Discussion

In the present study, as expected, a high level of marital satisfaction was related to a high perception of the partner's communication style as supportive and engaged, and as low depreciated. This pattern of results is consistent with prior studies, (e.g., Ryś, 1996; Litzinger & Gordon, 2005; Montgomery, 1981; Markman et al., 2010) but in this study, communication is considered from the perspective of partner communication style, in the opinion of the other spouse, and not as an evaluation of various dimensions of marital communication. The obtained results confirmed the role of positive communication behaviours in marital relationships. The supportive and engaged communication behaviours, for example pro-social behaviours such as assuring the partner of one's involvement in the relationship and demonstrating romantic feelings (Guerrero & Bachman, 2006), contribute to maintaining relationships and increase of the sense of certainty and security in a relationship.

The findings of this study are congruent with prior research revealing that communication in marriage has a significant impact on the quality of the relationship (Plopa, 2006). Although the body of prior research showed that the way in which partners communicate is not a sufficient condition for the success of marriage (Cieślak, 1988), it undeniably plays a vital role in the assessment of satisfaction with marriage. It is worth noting that the relationship between quality of marriage and the communication should be recognized, taking into account the circular understanding of causality (Ryś, 1996). Good communication enhances satisfaction of relationships, which in turn improves the quality of mutual communication between spouses.

This key role of communication in marriage is confirmed by the fact that the most common goal in couples therapy is the improvement of spouse communication (Fowers, 2001). In light of this study, it will be essential for partners to pay attention to how they perceive the meaning of partner communication, not how these behaviours are interpreted by the environment. In this respect, there is a need for further research.

In conclusion, although the present study focused on the correlational nature, the current study expands the generalizability of results obtained in other cultures and provides support for prior research, showing that negative and positive communication behaviours are related to marital satisfaction within different cultural groups (Rehman & Holtzworth-Munroe, 2007).

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