

Levels of Communication Style and Marital Satisfaction among Husband and Wife in Terengganu

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Abstract

In reinforcing the concept of family well-being founded on justice, honesty, and love, the Malaysian Family Declaration (LPPKN 2019) underscores the importance of quality values and lifestyles in enhancing family spirit and welfare. According to records from the Majlis Keselamatan Negara (2023), there were 6,565 divorce cases among Muslim couples in Terengganu from 2020 to October 2021, with communication issues noted as one factor. This study focuses on examining the levels of marital satisfaction among husbands and wives in Terengganu. A quantitative survey was conducted with 191 national school teachers in Terengganu, using purposive sampling to collect responses from married individuals. To assess the levels of satisfaction, the Communication Questionnaire and Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale were applied, with data analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), incorporating both descriptive and inferential analysis. The study finds that the levels of communication and marital satisfaction among couples in Terengganu are high, which reflects a positive outcome. These findings could offer valuable insights for the community, the Terengganu Islamic Religious Affairs Department, and the Ministry, potentially suggesting the development of a family module focusing on effective communication and marital satisfaction in husband-wife relationships. Keywords: Communication, Marital Satisfaction, Terengganu, Malaysia.

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Introduction

According to the records from Majlis Keselamatan Negara (2023), 6,565 cases of divorce among Muslim couples were recorded in Terengganu from 2020 to October 2021. The district

with the highest number of cases was Kuala Terengganu, with 1,923 divorces, followed by Kemaman with 1,151 cases, Dungun with 1,003 cases, and an additional 2,488 cases from other districts across Terengganu. The age range of the affected couples spans from 21 to 65 years. Factors contributing to divorce in Terengganu include irresponsible behaviors, lack of religiosity, communication issues, third-party interference, moral and social issues, financial struggles, health, sexual compatibility, cultural differences, and work-related stress (MKN 2023). Addressing communication problems specifically, Suzana et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of communication in marital satisfaction, noting that excessive anxiety about communication can diminish satisfaction in marriages. This finding aligns with reports suggesting that communication issues are a common cause of misunderstandings leading to divorce (Nor Syaibah et al., 2016). Concerns over communication remain prevalent, particularly in the digital age, where people often spend more time on electronic devices, impacting communication styles and potentially reducing satisfaction in marriages (Huang, 2023). In response to the growing divorce rate, this study seeks to assess the communication styles and marital satisfaction levels among husbands and wives in Terengganu.

The Malaysian Family Declaration (LPPKN 2019) supports this initiative by promoting family well-being grounded in values of justice, honesty, and love, emphasizing the importance of quality values and lifestyles to enhance family spirit and welfare. Based on Majlis Keselamatan Negara's 2023 records, communication problems are noted as a significant factor contributing to the divorce rate. This study adopts a quantitative approach, using surveys with 191 national school teachers in Terengganu, with purposive sampling targeting married respondents. The study employs the Communication Questionnaire and Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale to assess marital satisfaction levels, and data is analyzed with the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) through both descriptive and inferential techniques. Findings indicate high levels of communication and marital satisfaction among couples in Terengganu, showing positive outcomes. Furthermore, results highlight that communication styles account for a 55.4% effect on marital satisfaction. This study underscores the role of open communication and conflict avoidance in fostering prosperous families, providing valuable insights for the community, Terengganu Islamic Religious Affairs Department, and relevant ministries. The findings may also inform the development of a family module that emphasizes effective communication styles and marital satisfaction for married couples.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to identify the influence of communication style on the marital satisfaction of husband and wife in Terengganu. Specifically, this article will focus on:

1. Examine the communication style between husbands and wives in Terengganu.
2. Identify the level of marital satisfaction among married couples in Terengganu.

Communication Style and Marital Satisfaction

Communication style refers to an individual's skill in effectively and symbolically conveying messages and meanings. High-quality communication enables couples to feel closer, fostering intimacy through shared thoughts and feelings, and can also help prevent misunderstandings during marital conflicts (Baghipour, 2010). Communication styles are often classified into two main strategies: open communication (such as sharing personal feelings with a partner) and positive communication (such as polite, cheerful interactions that avoid criticism), commonly

known as conflict-avoidance communication, which contrasts with negative communication (Canary, 1992). In this study, communication style specifically refers to open communication and conflict-avoidance behaviors among married individuals in Terengganu.

Marital satisfaction denotes the degree to which spouses perceive their relationship as a collaborative effort toward building a functional family. This satisfaction is typically composed of seven main elements that fall under two dimensions: personal factors (such as compatibility, intimacy, personality traits, and values within marriage) and family functionality factors (including effective communication, roles and responsibilities, and problem-solving skills). Al-Darmaki et al. (2014) identified these two dimensions as essential components for defining marital satisfaction. Therefore, in this study, marital satisfaction refers to the subjective feelings of happiness and contentment experienced by individuals in their marital relationships.

Levels of Communication Style and Marital Satisfaction among Married Couples

Psychologists emphasize that the level of marital satisfaction is a key measure in evaluating the happiness of married couples (Williamson et al., 2015). Ensuring high levels of satisfaction in marriage involves several core elements intrinsic to marital life, including communication style, which is seen as essential to a couple's emotional connection and overall satisfaction levels (Suzana et al., 2018; Yager, 2014).

Moreover, research by Marziah et al. (2019) on marriage quality in the first decade demonstrates that communication style plays a significant role in sustaining high levels of marital quality over time. The study identifies marital satisfaction, stability, conflict resolution, and happiness as critical factors in fostering quality marriages. These findings underscore the importance of communication style in shaping relationship patterns and supporting long-term satisfaction levels, thereby helping to prevent divorce (Suzana et al., 2018).

In their study, Huang (2023) affirm that despite challenges like frequent gadget use, a constructive communication style positively impacts the level of satisfaction within marriages. Effective communication ensures that messages are conveyed and received accurately, which enhances understanding and satisfaction levels (Suleyman, 2014). When communication is positive—whether through open expression or conflict-avoidance strategies—it strengthens marriages and reduces dissatisfaction (Ledermann et al., 2010).

Kielek-Rataj et al. (2020) found that openness in communication has a strong association with high levels of marital satisfaction. Other research aligns with this, showing that communication style significantly affects satisfaction levels, particularly among those who married at a younger age. This study explores how early-married couples' communication styles, including conflict resolution and openness, significantly influence their marital satisfaction levels, especially for those who married at a younger age (Sanford, 2024). These studies also supported by Lavner et al.(2016) and Suzana et al. (2020), who indicate that effective communication skills are key predictors of high satisfaction levels in marital relationships.

Methodology

This quantitative study utilizes a cross-sectional survey method, collecting data via a questionnaire distributed through Google Forms. This approach is suitable for identifying the levels of communication style and marital satisfaction among husbands and wives in Terengganu, as it streamlines data collection from respondents. The gathered data is then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 28.

Population and Sample Study

The study population comprises educators from selected districts in Terengganu, including Kuala Terengganu, Dungun, Kuala Nerus, and Hulu Terengganu. A purposive sampling technique was employed, resulting in the selection of 191 married respondents who still have a spouse to participate in the study. While findings derived from this sampling method may not represent the entire educator population, this technique is beneficial in providing an initial insight into marital satisfaction, particularly within the state of Terengganu.

Instruments

A structured questionnaire was administered to gather all essential information for this study. As a research tool, it is crucial to examine its reliability to ensure accurate measurement of the study's variables. A questionnaire is considered dependable if it consistently enables researchers to obtain the intended information and if respondents' feedback on its items remains stable over time (Cohen et al., 2018). The instruments selected to measure the study variables are standard tools developed and validated internationally. The questionnaire is organized into three sections:

Section A: A demographic questionnaire covering respondents' age, gender, length of marriage, and household income.

Section B: The Emirati Marital Satisfaction Scale (EMSS), developed by Al-Darmaki et al. (2014), adapted for assessing marital satisfaction among respondents in Terengganu. This scale includes 30 questions focused on a single dimension: marital satisfaction.

Section C: The Communication Inventory by Kerkstra (1985), adapted to gauge respondents' perceptions—both husbands and wives—of communication within their marriage. This inventory comprises 15 questions across two dimensions: open communication strategies and conflict-avoidance strategies.

Findings and Discussion

This study focuses on married individuals residing throughout Terengganu, with a sample of 191 participants selected randomly by zone. To ensure an adequate number of responses, a total of 250 questionnaires were distributed online. This method successfully mitigated issues related to incomplete or damaged responses. The demographic breakdown of the study participants is provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Ages		
20-25	2	1.0
26-30	19	9.9
31-35	27	14.1
36-40	47	24.6
41-45	33	17.3
46-50	31	16.2
51-55	20	10.5
56-60	10	5.2
61 years old and above	2	1.0
Total	191	100.0
Gender		
Male	35	18.3
Female	156	81.7
Total	191	100.0
Length of Marriage		
0-5 years	31	16.2
6-10 years	38	19.9
11-15 years	39	20.4
16-20 years	36	18.8
21-25 years	21	11.0
26-30 years	18	9.4
31 years and above	8	4.2
Total	191	100.0
Household Income		
RM2500 and below	38	19.9
RM2501-RM4850	28	14.7
RM4851-RM7100	46	24.1
RM7101-RM11000	48	25.1
RM11001-RM15000	26	13.6
RM15001 and above	5	2.6
Total	191	100.0

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of respondents who are married and currently living with a spouse in Terengganu. Examining the age distribution, the largest group of respondents is between 36–40 years, totaling 47 individuals (24.6%). This is followed by those aged 41–45 years, with 33 individuals (17.3%); 46–50 years, with 31 individuals (16.2%); 31–35 years, with 27 individuals (14.1%); 51–55 years, with 20 individuals (10.5%); and 26–30 years, with 19 individuals (9.9%). Respondents aged 56–60 years number 10 (5.2%), while the youngest (20–25 years) and oldest age group (61 years and above) each include 2 individuals (1.0%). In terms of gender distribution, female respondents predominate, totaling 156 (81.7%), whereas male respondents number only 35 (18.3%). Regarding the length of marriage, the majority of respondents have been married between 11 and 15 years, totaling 39 individuals (20.4%). This is followed by those married 6–10 years (38 individuals, 19.9%), 16–20 years (36 individuals, 18.8%), 0–5 years (31 individuals, 16.2%), 21–25 years (21 individuals, 11.0%), 26–30 years (18 individuals, 9.4%), and over 31 years (8 individuals, 4.2%).

Finally, examining household income, most respondents have an income between RM7,101 and RM11,000, totaling 48 individuals (25.1%), followed by those earning RM4,851–RM7,100 (46 individuals, 24.1%), RM2,500 and below (38 individuals, 19.9%), RM2,501–RM4,850 (28 individuals, 14.7%), and RM11,001–RM15,000 (26 individuals, 13.6%). The smallest group, comprising 5 respondents (2.6%), earns RM15,001 and above.

Level of Communication and Marriage Satisfaction in Terengganu

In this study, descriptive analysis is used to present key values, including the percentage, mean, and standard deviation (SD) of the variables examined. These values help to summarize the data and provide an overall view of respondent trends. The statistical level of each variable is represented by mean scores on a scale from 1 to 5, following the guidelines set by Pallant (2014). These score levels, as detailed in Table 2, are essential in interpreting the average responses and variations within the dataset, offering insights into the general tendencies of the studied variables.

Table 2

Mean Score and Statistical Reading of Variables

Mean Score	Level
3.67 to 5.00	High
2.34 to 3.66	Medium
1.00 to 2.33	Low

Source: Pallant (2014)

The Level of Communication Between Husband and Wife in Terengganu

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis results for the communication style variable, which includes a total of 15 items. Respondents' communication levels were measured across two constructs: open communication (6 items) and conflict avoidance (9 items). The descriptive analysis results indicate that, overall, the mean score for the communication style variable is high ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.49$). Both constructs individually also show high mean scores, with open communication scoring ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 0.52$) and conflict avoidance scoring ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 0.60$).

Table 3

Overall Level of Communication of Husband and Wife

Dimension	of N	Item No.	Mean	SD	Level
Communication					
Conflict Avoidance	191	B1-B9	3.90	0.60	High
Open Communication	191	B10-B15	3.95	0.52	High
Total	191	B1-B15	3.92	0.49	High

Level of Marriage Satisfaction in Terengganu

Table 4 presents the descriptive analysis results for the marital satisfaction variable. The data indicate that the mean score for marital satisfaction is high ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 0.42$), suggesting that, overall, the level of satisfaction among husbands and wives in Terengganu is positive.

Table 4

Overall Level of Communication of Husband and Wife

Marital Satisfaction	N	Item No.	Mean	SD	Level
Total	191	C1-C30	4.27	0.42	High

Discussion

The study findings reveal that communication style and marital satisfaction levels among husbands and wives in Terengganu are notably high. Both dimensions of communication—open communication and conflict avoidance—are observed to be practiced at similarly high levels. Open communication, in particular, stands out as a stronger predictor of elevated marital satisfaction levels when compared to conflict avoidance. This observation aligns with prior studies, such as those by Siti Marziah et al. (2019), which suggest that individual skills in managing emotions contribute significantly to a fulfilling marital relationship. Key skills in this area include making rational decisions, viewing situations positively, taking proactive approaches to problem-solving (even in times of conflict), and showing appreciation for what one has. Additionally, these skills involve facing challenges with calmness, analyzing issues thoroughly to reach solutions, and maintaining an awareness of the partner's emotions, thereby fostering an environment of open communication (Kielek-Rataj et al., 2020).

In today's technology-driven era, where gadget use can sometimes impede face-to-face interaction, it becomes even more essential for couples to engage in positive, conflict-avoiding communication practices that bolster marital satisfaction (Huang, 2023). Regular communication enriched with affirmations, appreciation, love, and a demonstrated interest in one's partner has a profound effect on strengthening the marital bond, bringing couples closer and fostering a healthier, more resilient relationship. Effective communication that avoids conflict can help to alleviate the stressors of daily life, creating a more stable and supportive marriage environment. This form of communication plays a vital role in reinforcing the marriage by allowing partners to handle everyday challenges with patience and mutual respect, ultimately contributing to sustained marital satisfaction and well-being (Suzana et al., 2020).

Summary

The study reveals that, overall, the level of communication style among respondents in Terengganu is associated with high levels of marital satisfaction. These findings are in line with previous research conducted both locally and internationally, underscoring that positive communication practices correlate with greater marital satisfaction for both partners. By highlighting the levels of open communication and conflict avoidance in particular, this study brings attention to the role these factors play in fostering a supportive and harmonious family environment. The anticipated outcome of this study is to provide valuable insights for the community, the Terengganu Islamic Religious Affairs Department, and relevant ministries, reinforcing the need to cultivate high communication standards within marital relationships. Moreover, the study suggests the potential benefit of developing a family module that emphasizes effective communication styles as a means to sustain high levels of marital satisfaction among couples. Such a module would be an essential resource in promoting enduring satisfaction and well-being in husband-wife relationships across Terengganu.

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